

# **The spatial formation of a Dutch denim fashion cluster**

*Denim: the urban fabric of Amsterdam*



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## ABSTRACT

Spurred by the economic benefits that clusters in the creative industries may bring to urban and regional economies, the concept of clustering has become a widely studied topic by among others cultural economists and economic geographers. Clustering of industries has traditionally been explained by the notion of agglomeration economies; later explanations included urban amenities and spinoff dynamics. These interwoven theories are discussed and tested in this theoretical and empirical study on the locational behavior of creative entrepreneurs. In addition, this study explores whether the symbolic power of cities could attract creative entrepreneurs and impact cluster development in the creative industries. This line of research is underexplored in academic literature, even though the creative industries heavily depend on symbolic knowledge as a source of product value. A qualitative approach has been chosen to study the case of the Amsterdam denim fashion cluster. The empirical part presents the results of 9 interviews with representative cluster participants. The study focuses in particular on Amsterdam-based creative entrepreneurs who have started their denim fashion related firms over the last decade. In addition, the perspective of the House of Denim on the past and future of the denim cluster and Amsterdam's identity as a global denim fashion city is sought to enrich the results. Based on qualitative analysis of data, I conclude that spinoff dynamics explain to a large extent the emergence of new firms in the denim fashion industry in Amsterdam over the last ten years. The results also suggest that urban amenities strongly support this development, while the social and professional networking opportunities which arise from agglomeration bring additional benefits to the cluster participants. Place-based symbolic associations made by entrepreneurs may strengthen the distinctiveness and identity of Amsterdam as a fashion city in the international order.

## Keywords

clustering | creative field | symbolism of place | denim fashion industry | fashion cities | Amsterdam

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## INTRODUCTION

### 1. Introduction

#### 1.1 Research background

##### 1.1.1 Introduction

Amsterdam hosts a wide variety of co-located local, international and global denim fashion brands and offers a supportive local infrastructure of industry-related organizations, schools and events, cultural institutions and the broader creative industries. While Amsterdam is home to the symbolic production of denim fashion, the wider value chain stretches across the world with manufacturing and consumption taking place on a global scale. Together with the casual lifestyle of the Dutch and the national appetite for jeans, this makes up for the growing reputation of Amsterdam as one of the prominent 'denim capitals' in the world. This symbolic recognition of the city has been strengthened by urban authorities, who saw opportunities for growth in identifying Amsterdam as denim city and supported the development of a denim fashion cluster. The growing awareness of the economic and cultural significance of the fashion design industry initially led to the adoption of the denim segment into urban development strategies and place branding activities. By positioning Amsterdam as a key player in the international order of denim fashion cities through the communication of place-based images and identities, the urban authorities aimed at attracting (international) creative talents, firms and visitors. This is interesting as Amsterdam does not have a historical background in the production of denim and jeans. Today, with a growing focus on denim fashion through among others a position in the creative industries agenda, there is more room for promoting local creativity and entrepreneurship. Over the last decade, the denim cluster has seen the entrance, and in some cases exit, of several entrepreneurs starting their own firms in the industry. Amsterdam offers entrepreneurs an infrastructure for social interaction and knowledge production, as well as the opportunity to take advantage of the symbolic power of the city which is to be found in place-based associations, narratives and images among others. My interest lies in how these entrepreneurs may benefit from place as a value driver for their work and how this will ultimately support the distinctiveness of Amsterdam as a global fashion city.

### **1.1.2 Research problem**

Place and its broad-ranging role in spatial clustering of the creative industries have been widely investigated by cultural economists and economic geographers. The traditional strand of research on industry clustering focused on the attractiveness of places for firms. The benefits for firms that locate near to each other, or the economies of agglomeration, have often explained clustering of the creative industries (Hauge, Malmberg, & Power, 2009; Lorenzen & Frederiksen, 2008; Wenting, Atzema, & Frenken, 2011). A newer strand of research considers the idea that people do not follow firms, but firms follow people. The attractiveness of place for workers takes a central position in this research. With his theory on the creative class and their requirements related to the places where they would live and work, Florida (2002) challenged the traditional role of agglomeration economies. According to Florida (2002; 2005), an attractive people's climate explains the clustering of the creative industries in particular cities. A different approach to studying this type of clustering was taken by Wenting (2008), who found that clustering should be better understood as the outcome of spin-off dynamics and entrepreneurship. Other researchers also highlighted the contribution of entrepreneurship to cluster development (Boschma, 2015; Feldman, Francis, & Bercovitz, 2005; Storper & Scott, 2009).

In brief, the main body of literature on clustering in the creative industries emphasizes a range of business motives for firms and personal motives for workers. The relevance of these different roles of place is acknowledged. However, there is little research regarding place-based business motives for workers who started and/or manage creative enterprises. Especially in the creative industries where symbolic knowledge is key to product value, place may be a source of symbolic power which can be turned into competitive advantage and economic benefits. The possibility to attribute place associations to the product may therefore enhance the agglomeration of firms. This approach to industry clustering has not received much attention yet in the literature, but related studies have been carried out. For example, Drake (2003) investigated locality as a source of stimuli and ideas for creative entrepreneurs in Great Britain, Hauge, Malmberg and Power (2009) explored place and the production of immaterial value for the Swedish fashion industry, and Gilbert and Casadei (2018) studied the symbolic production of fashion in first and second-tier fashion cities around the world.

### **1.1.3 Research aim, objectives and question**

The proposition of this study is that in the growing body of literature concerned with clustering in the creative industries the emphasis on agglomeration economies, the creative

class and urban amenities and spin-off dynamics is relevant, but that it has tended to neglect the relationship between the symbolic power of place and the agglomeration of creative industries and entrepreneurs. The aim of this study is therefore to contribute to the literature by investigating how the locational behavior of creative entrepreneurs is affected by their engagement with place as a way to increase their competitive advantage. Besides exploring traditional business and personal motives behind the choice of location, a third type of motive based on the symbolic power of place will be explored. A case study on the Amsterdam denim fashion cluster is chosen to reveal the unique features of this cluster, in which a distinctive place ('Amsterdam') and product ('denim fashion') are associated. Amsterdam is endowed with its own idiosyncratic symbolic power, and together with the presence of unique local institutions and infrastructures and a deliberate choice by public and private parties to support the denim fashion cluster, this particular case indeed makes for an object of study in its own right. An idiographic approach (Bryman, 2016) through a case study is therefore deemed relevant to investigate this particular situation.

Three objectives are leading this study into the Amsterdam denim fashion cluster:

- 1) the study intends to investigate which place-based symbolic power denim fashion entrepreneurs assign to the city of Amsterdam;
- 2) it examines whether the notion of 'Amsterdam' is part of the brand communication or marketing strategies of these creative entrepreneurs; and
- 3) it explores which factors affect the decision of denim fashion entrepreneurs to establish in or relocate their firm to Amsterdam.

By means of a qualitative case study on the Amsterdam denim fashion cluster, this study sets out to answer the main research question: *Why do denim fashion entrepreneurs locate in Amsterdam and to what extent can their locational behavior be explained by the symbolic power of place?* Answering this question adds to the theoretical and practical understanding of the role of place in the development of competitive advantages for both the individual cluster participants and the city.

## **1.2 Relevance**

The relevance of this research is threefold. To begin with, a better understanding of the relation between place and its symbolic power and the development of clusters in the creative

industries could give an original perspective on the already existing knowledge on industry clustering. This study hints at this rather unexplored avenue of research. Moreover, taking the specific case of the denim fashion cluster in Amsterdam responds on a micro-level to policy developments taking place on macro-level, including those related to cluster management, the creative industries agenda, and city-marketing. The strategic role of fashion in Amsterdam has changed over the last decade, resulting in a more structural role for fashion in the creative industries agenda and in urban development strategies to lure talent and businesses (Pandolfi, 2015). This study intends to pay attention to the creative entrepreneur and ‘what’s in it for them’. It aims at exploring how creative entrepreneurs respond or relate to place, resulting in a broadened view upon the dynamics of creative clusters. The results may be useful for stakeholders who need to advocate for support for entrepreneurship and the development of a distinct yet feasible fashion identity of Amsterdam. Finally, the results of this study may give insights in how the city of Amsterdam can develop from a so-called ‘denim capital’ into a recognized fashion city in the global fashion industry. As Jansson and Power (2010) suggested in their research on how global fashion cities develop, firms can strengthen the global-city status by incorporating city images and myths in their branding and differentiation strategies.

### **1.3 Structure**

A theoretical, methodological and empirical part together form this thesis. The theoretical framework, consisting of three chapters on clusters, the spatial formation of the fashion design industry and on the symbolic power of cities, prepares the groundwork for the methodology which has been chosen to perform the qualitative analysis of the denim fashion cluster in Amsterdam. The empirical part presents and discusses its results.

The theoretical framework critically reviews relevant streams of theoretical and empirical research and starts in Chapter 2. This chapter discusses some of the literature on the concept of clustering of the creative industries by highlighting the phenomena of localization and urbanization economies, the creative class and urban amenities, and spin-off dynamics. Chapter 3 first deals with the characteristics of global and ‘not-so-global’ fashion cities, before moving on to Chapter 4 in which the idea of symbolic power of cities as a driver of clustering in the creative industries is further explored. After a theory wrap up and a presentation of the analytical blueprint in Chapter 5, the methodological part follows to establish the operationalization of the research question by describing the research design and

applied methods in Chapters 6 and 7. Chapter 8 discusses the main findings from the interviews with creative entrepreneurs in the Amsterdam denim fashion scene, structured along the main theoretical themes which also informed the interview guides. Finally, a conclusion summarizes the highlights of this thesis, addresses implications and limitations and suggests avenues for future research.

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**In brief: development of the Amsterdam denim cluster**

Before the 1990s, the Dutch denim fashion industry was almost non-existent. Between 1982 and 1992, the first denim and fashion retailers Cars Jeans, Scotch & Soda and G-Star were founded in Amsterdam, as were Chasin' and the multi-brand firm Just Brands. In 1995, Amsterdam became home to Pepe Jeans Europe's headquarter, and a few years later, the global brand Tommy Hilfiger established its head office in Amsterdam. In the following years, other international players in the denim or broader fashion industry followed suit and located their (European) headquarters or design or sales departments in Amsterdam. Among them were Levi's, Diesel and Calvin Klein. Moreover, ambitious local brands such as Blue Blood, Kings of Indigo and Benzak Denim Developers saw the light, and were often set up by entrepreneurs who had previously worked at the bigger fashion firms that had been established earlier in the Amsterdam Metropolitan Region. Also, crucial brand stores such as Tenue de Nîmes were founded. In 2009, the House of Denim platform was established, with the deliberate intention to start building an ecosystem for innovation, entrepreneurship, sustainability and craftsmanship ([www.houseofdenim.org](http://www.houseofdenim.org)). Moreover, the first school for denim developers, the Jean School, was opened in 2012, the Amsterdam Fashion Institute started with a minor in Denim in 2013, and in 2014, the first big promotional events (Amsterdam Denim Days and the Kingpins trade show) were organized. In 2013, the Amsterdam Economic Board had also, together with the House of Denim, crafted a joint strategic Denim Roadmap, intended to further lead the development of Amsterdam as a denim fashion cluster (Van Oosteren & Fedorova, 2013). In 2015, Denim City opened in Amsterdam, operating as a campus for denim craftsmanship, enterprise and sustainable innovation. Denim City hosts a craftsman workshop, a denim archive, a clean laundry expertise lab and an embassy for the international denim community (<https://denimcity.org>). This all adds up to an intra-urban network of specialized and complementary denim fashion industry participants, connected in urban space through the labor market and social networks. Over the last decade, denim has indeed become a significant "industrial-promotional reality" (Pandolfi, 2015, p.113), occupying an increasingly structural position in the city-marketing activities and creative industries agenda of Amsterdam. Appendix I holds an overview of a number of cluster developments.

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## THEORETICAL PART

### 2. Clusters and the creative field

In order to better understand the impact of place in the locational behavior of creative entrepreneurs, the first part of this chapter introduces how and why creativity has taken its place in today's economic system and how the concept of place can be understood in terms of economic and social relations within that system. The spatial formation of industries can be approached from different angles. Based on earlier empirical studies on the locational behavior of creatives in the Dutch fashion industry (Wenting et al., 2011) and the spatial formation of the global fashion industry (Wenting, 2008; Wenting & Frenken, 2011), three approaches are highlighted in the second part. First, the benefits of co-location for firms are explored by a review of what has been said about localization and urbanization economies. The attractiveness of place for creative workers is seen as a possible explanation of the diverse, skilled labor pool. Florida's work (2002, 2005) on this will therefore be discussed as part of the theory on urbanization economies. Finally, the spin-off dynamics approach is discussed, as it is deemed relevant for the spatial formation of the Dutch fashion industry too.

#### 2.1 Creativity and place

##### 2.1.1 A new economy

Spurred by globalization, digitalization and developments in technology, the industrial landscape in capitalist societies has seen major transformations in consumer demand, production and competition over the last forty years. At the end of the 1970s, the economy had grown but markets were homogeneous and saturated due to low-cost, high-volume and standardized mass production (Scott, 2006). In the 1970s and 1980s, the economic system underwent a transformation and a new model of economic organization developed. This new model was created on a more specialized and flexible system based on networks of small- to medium sized firms. In these post-Fordist times, where consumer interests and tastes had become more individual and distinct, firms' technology or manufacturing capacities only were not sufficient any longer to stay competitive (Jansson & Power, 2010). Human creativity had become a key production factor, as it imbued final products with symbolic content (Scott, 2001). Florida (2005, p.1) stated that creativity has now even become "*the* principal driving

force in the growth and development of cities, regions and nations”. The creative industries, the industries that depend on human creativity to generate economic value, developed in cities around the world where systems of economic and cultural production had become the basis of this new economy (Scott, 2006). This certainly applies to the global fashion industry: in addition to long established global fashion cities with a strong reputation, particularly Paris, London, Milan and New York, new fashion agglomerations are still emerging in cities around the world, changing the geography of fashion (Gilbert & Casadei, 2018).

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### **Denim in the new economy**

Looking at denim jeans, we see the transformation from ‘clothing’ to ‘fashion’ reflected. Once designed as utilitarian, sturdy work clothes in the United States, they transformed into the single most common form of everyday clothing and a means of cultural expression in many countries all over the world. Denim jeans are worn far and wide, by people of all walks of life. It is a heritage-rich product for the masses that still expresses uniformity, but at the same time it is a personal garment reflecting individuality. Indeed, it is remarkable how jeans have the power to express personal interests and taste and even have become status symbols with the rise of designer brands (Gordon, 1991). Illustrative for the changes in consumers and their demand in post-Fordist times, jeans carry symbolic value and have the ability to create, strengthen and communicate an individual’s self-concept (Su & Tong, 2016). In a continuously changing society, changes in design, styling and marketing function as a subtle barometer of trends in popular culture (Gordon, 1991). Not the material production of the denim products itself, but the production of ideas through design, branding and marketing, and competitive logistics and distribution channels create value and profitability in this highly knowledge-intensive industry.

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#### **2.1.2 The phenomenon of place**

While today’s globally connected world may suggest that place has become less relevant in business, the opposite is true. Traditional roles of location may have been reduced by the many changes in technology and competition (Porter, 2000). The advancements in information technology for example made it possible for the creative industries to connect design processes and production over long distances. Still, because of the tendency of firms to cluster together, place remains a locus of economic and social activity. It motivated Porter (1998) to develop his momentous theory on the relevance of geographically concentrated

networks of firms, or *clusters*, in urban and regional economic development. Cluster research has become a field of study which views upon the concept of place in many ways.

Place tends to be very relevant for firms and people within the creative industries (Clare, 2012), but it is a concept not easily described. One approach to conceptualize place is to consider it “articulated moments in networks of social relations” (Massey, 1991, p.28). In his theory on the benefits of agglomeration, Marshall already referred to the importance of social relations for the development of early British industrial districts (Marshall, 1920). Polanyi (1944) argued in his theory on embeddedness that economic activities are always embedded in social activities. And since social activities are constantly being negotiated and made in and through practice (Massey, 1991), economic activities happen in places that are dynamic and subject to continuous change. These places offer a vibrant environment where “cultural creativity, productive efficiency, and competitive advantage” can be realized (Scott, 2001, p.12). Accordingly, Scott describes the dynamics of variety, change, and unpredicted events or experiences as the result of the “intricate networks of human relationships and interchange” that exist in cities (Scott, 2001, p.12). Moreover, in the context of this study, where the use of and response to place of creative entrepreneurs is explored, it is also important to see places as both “subjective, imagined and emotional phenomena” and “objective and ‘real’ entities” (Drake, 2003, p.513).

### **2.1.3 The economic importance of clusters**

Human relationships and interchange provide benefits to the cluster as a whole (Feldman et al., 2005) as they may lead to increased productivity, innovation and new business (Porter 1998). It is said that clusters are able to attract and embed foreign direct investment into the local environment (Enright, 2000) and are a driving force in export growth (Porter, 2000). This suggests that much of the competitive advantage of a particular firm or industry is dependent on its location, which always has a unique structure of social relations and understanding (Porter, 1998). Indeed, innovation, entrepreneurship and economic growth are frequently linked to agglomeration through the concept of clusters (Potts & Keane, 2011). Clusters and agglomeration economies have therefore emerged as key topics in research and policymaking (Porter, 2000). While governments have long focused on national-level policies to stimulate the overall economy, the economic importance of clusters now suggests new rationales for policy intervention at the national, regional and local levels (Porter, 2000). Some clusters are supported by specific cluster programs or initiatives to increase productivity and generate growth (Potter, 2009). The intervention is usually focused on facilitating firms

and the labor force to derive benefit from the input-output linkages and knowledge spillovers (Potter, 2009). Public-private partnerships, for example in the field of education and training, are initiated to prepare people for skilled and specialized employment and to promote local entrepreneurship and innovation (Potter, 2009). Public and semi-public agencies also frequently contribute to the formation of local social capital by supporting trade fairs, exhibitions and festivals (Scott, 2006). These developments in “the ‘symbolic economy’ of publications, promotional activities and events” (Gilbert & Casadei, 2018, p.80) also impacted the geography of the global fashion industry.

#### **2.1.4 The city as creative field**

Creative industries, including the global fashion design industry, typically show high levels of spatial clustering (Wenting et al., 2011). Around the world, large cities act as “powerful fountainheads of creativity” (Scott, 2010, p.115) and offer the creative industries rich infrastructures of skilled workers and specialized services (Merlo & Polese, 2006). Porter introduced a widely used definition of clusters: clusters are “geographic concentrations of interconnected firms, specialized suppliers, service providers, firms in related industries and associated institutions in particular fields that compete but also cooperate” (Porter, 1998, p.3). Scott (2006) also attributed the clustering of the creative industries to the major advantages that creative firms experience from co-locating. He developed the notion of the cluster further and introduced the idea of the creative field, referring to the place and space where industrial activities and social phenomena are interrelated (Scott, 2001). According to Scott, the creative field not only stimulates innovation and entrepreneurship, but also enables the “symbolic elaboration and re-elaboration of cultural products” (Scott, 2006, p.1). In this study, the concept of the creative field is deemed relevant for the study of the development of the denim fashion cluster in Amsterdam. Not only is denim full of symbolic and aesthetic values (Gordon, 1991), the denim fashion industry in its pursuit for novelty is also subject to the forces at work regarding design archetypes, i.e. “basic frames of references within which elements of symbolic content and style can be endlessly combined and recombined” (Scott, 2006, p.12). With an upcoming focus on sustainability in the fashion industry and possible structural changes in demand and production, these archetypes may be subject to more radical innovation. Amsterdam hosts a collection of workers, firms, institutions, infrastructures and communication channels relevant for the denim fashion industry, but also “traditions, memories and images” that can function as input in the creative and change processes and lead to innovation (Scott, 2006).

## 2.2 Clustering of the Creative Industries

### 2.2.1 Localization economies from specialization

The local clustering of economic activities has become an increasingly popular topic in research. Frequently inspired by the seminal work of Marshall (1920), economists have traditionally attributed cluster formation to three different forms of Marshallian or localization economies: labor market pooling, specialized institutions and suppliers intermediating supply and demand linkages, and local knowledge spillovers that accrue when firms active in the same industry co-locate (Lazzeretti, Sedita, & Caloffi, 2014). These externalities are especially evident in clusters in smaller cities or less urban areas, where relatively lower costs of inputs and more lenient regulations led to rapid specialization of the industry and labor market (Lorenzen & Frederiksen, 2008).

In the new economy, many highly skilled, knowledge-intensive and non-routine jobs are located in larger urban areas, while capital-intensive and routine jobs are increasingly being moved to low-wage countries and smaller cities. For younger industries, such as the creative industries, local inter-industry externalities are crucial. For industries with mature and standardized products and firms that compete on price however, intra-industry externalities are relevant, as they reduce costs. The availability of specialized skills and knowledge is key for these firms dependent on innovation in processes (Boschma, 2015). In local clusters, highly skilled workers move between firms, enabling the flow and (re)production of ideas, knowledge, and practices on the local labor market (Rantisi, 2002; Vinodrai, 2006). This mobility results in deepened relevant skills, which support firms reaching higher levels of product and process quality (Lorenzen & Frederiksen, 2008). Firms relying on skilled workers with deep knowledge, being located in clusters where specialized labor can be found, reduce their search costs and improve the match between local supply and their demand (Wenting et al., 2011).

As a place endowed with rich infrastructures of not only skilled workers but also specialized suppliers, clusters offer firms externalities in terms of lower transport, transaction and time costs (Wenting et al., 2011). Formal institutions related to the industry, for example specialized vocational educational institutes or public or semi-public industry services, are able to efficiently service these industries. They support deepening the necessary skills within a specialized industry (Lorenzen & Frederiksen, 2008). The agglomeration of firms and consumers is also essential when it comes to the gathering, creation, and transfer of industry-relevant knowledge (Jansson & Power, 2010). Informal institutions such as languages,

conventions and norms as well as social networks are also relevant to enable the exchange of knowledge between firms in the industry (Lorenzen & Frederiksen, 2008). Marshall already described this in terms of that local social networks offer the industrial district a certain ‘air’, which leads to rapid adoption of good ideas (1920, p.271).

While innovation is related to local forms of economic specialization (Storper & Scott, 2009), radical innovations are more likely to result in urban clusters with externalities from diversity (Lorenzen & Frederiksen, 2008). A study by Boschma and Wenting (2007) also revealed that localization economies can negatively affect the rates of survival of firms in a cluster, as radical innovation may be hampered by too much specialization. Lorenzen and Frederiksen (2008) therefore state that mature industries, which rely more on incremental innovation, can benefit from localization economies, but industries that rely on novelty and more radical innovations, such as the creative industries, may need both localization and urbanization economies.

### **2.2.2 Urbanization economies from diversity**

The creative industries are highly clustered in urban areas. Building upon the theory of agglomeration economies, Lorenzen and Frederiksen (2008) distinguished two categories of externalities that make these industries cluster: those resulting from specialization, or localization economies, and those resulting from diversity, or urbanization economies. They argued that opposite to localization economies, where co-location of firms is more important than place, urbanization economies depend on space-specific and unique urban factors (Lorenzen & Frederiksen, 2008). For industries that rely on creativity and innovation, externalities from diversity are especially relevant.

In the fashion design industry, innovation can result from collaboration and knowledge exchanges between related domains of activity (Storper & Scott, 2009). The fashion industry benefits from the agglomeration of a wide range of creative activities, such as the arts, media, advertising and photography, and from the rich variety of cultural and educational institutions and infrastructures (Gilbert & Casadei, 2018). Lorenzen and Frederiksen (2008) support this perspective on innovation, as they also relate novelty to the concurrent presence of different creative industries in the same urban space. This related variety ensures inter-sectoral knowledge spillovers, which in turn promotes creativity, innovation and cross-fertilization.

In order to enable knowledge spillovers and increase their efficiency without financial compensation, co-located firms need social networks to exchange that knowledge (Wenting et al., 2011). In his work on the cultural economy and the urban creative field, Scott (2010) also

mentioned the importance of trust, as it facilitates networking, interaction, and collaboration. Valuable knowledge for the creative industries often comes in the form of tacit or symbolic knowledge. This type of knowledge is set in a person, a firm, a network, or in the local context, and needs face-to-face communication and buzz to flow (Asheim, Coenen, & Vang, 2007). Buzz is important in for example the search for relevant, available and interested talents, and since buzzing often happens at large gatherings such as fashion trade shows or festivals, the role of face-to-face communication is also crucial (Bathelt, Malmberg, & Maskell, 2004). Indeed, Wenting, Atzema and Frenken (2011) found that Amsterdam-based fashion designers do not profit from agglomeration economies as such, but rather from excellent networking opportunities with other creative workers from within and outside the fashion cluster (Wenting et al., 2011).

Cities possess a substantial variety of formal and informal institutions and infrastructures, which lead to the diversity of ideas and skills in urban clusters. Besides being locally connected through buzz and face-to-face communication in social networks, creative industries also need to be globally linked to other relevant circuits of knowledge and ideas (Bathelt et al., 2004). Branches of multinationals or international airports for example serve as global pipelines to these circuits. Moreover, city-based universities and specialized higher-level educational and research institutions are also globally connected. New skills, knowledge and ideas enter the local industry and local labor market through these institutions as well (Lorenzen & Frederiksen, 2008). Increased entrepreneurial activities in the region can also encourage universities to offer new programs, while at the same time they can tap into industry funds for research and intensify their relations with industry (Feldman et al., 2005). These institutions can shape the context in which practices are formed, also in the creative industries such as design, as Vinodrai (2006) found. In her study on Toronto's design ecology, she found that local practitioners are often engaged in the programs on offer at the local design schools and reinforce the local set of norms, conventions, attitudes, and practices. These institutions also provide the basis from which graduates can start building their social and professional networks and maintain them (Vinodrai, 2006). Besides the mentioned institutions and infrastructures, industry-relevant public and semi-public institutions can also be found in cities, as can informal infrastructures such as those related to urban amenities.

The diversity of labor is another externality from co-location in an urban cluster which is drawing firms to places. Especially in cities, where the variety of clusters, dynamic labor markets, and the opportunities for education and training ensures the availability of a wealth of skills, knowledge and ideas, a fertile environment for innovation and entrepreneurship

exists. These skills, knowledge and ideas not only flow with labor between firms and industries (Storper & Venables, 2004; Vinodrai, 2006) but they are also exchanged through urban social life. An attractive urban environment for workers is key in Florida's work. His typical diversity-driven theory on the agglomeration of creative industries finds its base in the appeal of cities for the creative class (Florida, 2002). This is a more recent but influential approach to explain industry clustering, which takes the labor population instead of the firm population as starting point (Wenting et al., 2011). In his theory on the creative class, Florida (2002) argues that only cities that can be characterized as tolerant, open and diverse are able to mobilize and attract global technology and creative talents. These places should also have sufficient diverse and high-quality urban amenities, such as housing, cultural and recreational offers that match with the values, aesthetics, lifestyles and consumption patterns of the creative class (Florida, 2002). Florida argued that "every human being is creative" (Florida, 2005, p.3) but that people can only unleash their creativity and validate their identities as creative people in those places that offer this type of environment (Florida, 2002). After the residential location choice of workers, firms would follow. Florida argues therefore that the existence of an attractive people climate is key to the success of cultural industries in particular cities (Florida, 2005).

While this theory has been influential in many cities, there has also been critique. Pratt (2008) argued for example that the idea of the creative class is far from new. He declared it as a "revival of hi-tech boosterism and place marketing" (Pratt, 2008, p.107), through which cities are adapting to the wishes of the creative class, but ultimately do this to attract firms and industries. In a similar vein, Storper and Scott (2009) argued that the focus on improving living conditions to fit the needs of the creative workers is merely used for policy reasons, to attract creative talent rather than firms, but that the effectiveness is not proven. Wenting, Atzema and Frenken (2011) also suggested that there is no proof that it stimulates economic growth. However, in their study on the Dutch fashion design industry they presumed that the people climate argument is applicable, as fashion designers indeed show locational preferences driven by personal motives rather than business motives (Wenting et al., 2011). Both explanations of spatial clustering, localization and urbanization economies, including the theory of urban amenities, are different but do not exclude one another. A different but also relevant explanation for clustering lies in a form of entrepreneurship, specifically in the creation of spin-offs.

### 2.2.3 Spin-off dynamics

Clustering can also be explained by spin-off dynamics. Through spin-offs, knowledge spills over from the parent firm to the new firm. This spillover effect is different than as explained by the Marshallian thesis, as for spin-offs, valuable knowledge comes from inheritance and not necessarily from other local firms in the cluster (Klepper, 2007). The argument that the possibility of knowledge spillovers in the cluster attracts new firms into the cluster and therefore induces economic growth, has been defied in several studies (e.g. Boschma, 2015; Klepper, 2007; Wenting, 2008). One of the main arguments in these studies is indeed that new firms often spin off from incumbent firms, gaining from knowledge spillovers from that particular parent instead of from the cluster (Wenting et al., 2011). Entrepreneurs also tend to locate their firms close to their parent firms due to existing access to already established business networks or other resources (Feldman et al., 2005). Moreover, the availability of potential local customers and the presence of already successful firms in the same industry reduces the perceived risk for new firms to start in the same location (Porter, 2000). As these entrepreneurs often have their families close to where they work, also the proximity of their families plays a part in the decision to locate close to the parent firm (Feldman et al., 2005). Organizational reproduction and inheritance through spin-off dynamics are therefore seen as factors that contribute to the agglomeration of firms and industries (Boschma, 2015). Because of lower entry barriers and the efficiency gains as offered by the cluster, entrepreneurs based outside the cluster will however also tend to relocate to a cluster location (Porter, 2000). Wenting (2008) found support for this spin-off argument in a study into the global fashion design industry. He found that spin-offs were indeed more successful than other new firms and that they had inherited the success of their parent firms (Wenting, 2008). Moreover, the specific location of these clusters could be explained by favorable local demand for the goods in question (Wenting, 2008). Hence, the global fashion industry shows a high degree of clustering in only a few cities worldwide (Wenting, 2008).

### **3. Spatial formation of the fashion design industry**

The previous chapter laid the basis for understanding which dynamics in the economy make for the agglomeration of firms and workers. This chapter zooms in on the spatial formation of the fashion industry. It first considers the evolution and characteristics of established global fashion cities, but then also looks at the rise of new fashion centers around the world, including Amsterdam. This chapter also introduces the role of associations between place and product, or industry in a broader sense, as a status and reputation enhancer of global fashion cities.

#### **3.1 Characteristics of global fashion cities**

Today, the global fashion design industry is still strongly agglomerated in a few first-tier cities with a solid reputation: Paris, London, Milan and New York (Wenting & Frenken, 2011). While the manufacturing chain is highly globalized, the knowledge-intensive parts of the process such as design and brand development are concentrated in these cities. Several industry studies have been undertaken to explain the evolution of global fashion cities and the agglomeration of the industry. Rantisi (2004) for example studied the reinvention of New York as a global fashion capital by using the concept of path dependence, Merlo and Polese (2006) looked at the emergence of Milan on the global fashion stage by taking the urban context and simultaneous international developments as a starting point, and Wenting and Frenken (2011) studied the development of Paris as a fashion design center in the post-war period by applying an organizational ecology model. They found support for the strong agglomeration of the global fashion industry in the role played by local legitimation processes. Through local interaction, designers are encouraged to set up their own businesses while competing for customers on a global scale (Wenting & Frenken, 2011). In an earlier study on the spatial formation of the fashion design industry, Wenting (2008) found that spin-offs from parent fashion firms outperform other firms and that the success of the parent-firm often transfers to these new firms. Hence, local legitimation processes and the local replication of routines therefore not only drive the high degree of clustering but also the persistence of the cluster over time (Wenting, 2008; Wenting & Franken, 2011). Scott (2002) argued that not only fashion and design traditions and strong place-specific features are essential for cities to develop into global fashion cities, but also the presence of major training

and research institutes, a diversity of local promotional vehicles, including fashion media and major fashion shows, and many formal and informal relations between the fashion industry and other cultural and creative industries. Here, he emphasized the importance of knowledge, design and brand development in the industry. Furthermore, Jansson and Power (2010) argued that besides the presence of the cluster, a range of positive and influential fashion-related associations would contribute to that global fashion city status.

### **3.2 The emergence of ‘not-so-global’ cities of fashion**

The increased awareness of the economic and cultural significance of the creative industries, and in particular the fashion design industry, has led to the development of new fashion centers and industries around the world in high-cost locations places as Antwerp (Martínez, 2007), Stockholm (Hauge et al., 2009), Auckland (Larner, Molloy, & Goodrum, 2007) and Amsterdam (Wenting et al., 2011). Often, fashion design has been adopted within public policy with the aim of local economic regeneration, city branding with the city as creative place, and cultural capital development (Rantisi, 2011). As seen with other individual regions and cities that chose a particular locally significant creative industry for promotion and urban development (Foord, 2009), Amsterdam has done so too. Not fashion in general, but denim fashion is Amsterdam’s specialty which should support both the fashion and the bigger creative industries agenda (Pandolfi, 2015).

The Dutch fashion design industry is a remarkable example of a creative industry which is strongly clustered, in Amsterdam to be precise. Amsterdam, a typical second-tier fashion city (Wenting et al., 2011), has been able to attract (European) headquarters of Dutch and international clothing firms since the 1990s. Among these firms were G-Star, Scotch & Soda and Tommy Hilfiger, for which the decision to locate in Amsterdam was mainly business driven (Pandolfi, 2015). The proximity of the international airport and the harbor, the favorable tax system and a highly skilled labor market make for this favorable business environment (Pandolfi, 2015). Amsterdam does not belong to the group of first-tier global fashion cities (Wenting et al., 2011), but some strongly believed the city had the potential to become internationally known for its denim fashion industry (e.g. Founder House of Denim, in Pandolfi, 2015). As a “not-so-global” fashion city (Larner et al., 2007, p.381), denim was (after years of lobby work for this ‘AmsterDenim’ concept with the big brands and fashion weeks by entrepreneur James Veenhoff) incorporated in the private sector-led creative industries group (Pandolfi, 2015). This group, related to the municipality’s economic clusters

agenda, had the task to initiate three projects related to knowledge and innovation, entrepreneurship and promotion of the cluster, and ‘AmsterDenim’ became the spotlight project (Pandolfi, 2015). Gradually, denim became an overarching theme representing Amsterdam’s fashion economy. This way, a positive association between this category of the fashion industry and the city was started and developed (Pandolfi, 2015). Initially, this was part of a renewed effort to use the creative industries for city-marketing purposes, and aimed at attracting talent and investment to Amsterdam (Pandolfi, 2015). As Jansson and Power (2010) showed, certain place images can become powerful and lasting place myths, and spur firms in the industry to be in the ‘right’ place. Today, several denim fashion related firms and start-ups, public-private actors, educational institutes and other initiatives have sprung up in the bigger Amsterdam region and contribute to the formation of a commercial and creative denim fashion cluster (see Appendix I).

## **4. Cities and their symbolic power**

The previous chapters described agglomeration economies and spin-offs dynamics as drivers of cluster formation, and looked at how these changed the geography and evolution of the global fashion industry. Within the creative field of the urban cluster, industrial activities as reflected in among others the local labor market and production and consumption networks, are mixed with social phenomena. An attractive living environment, derived from attractive urban amenities and a tolerant, diverse and open atmosphere, explained personal motives that may be involved in the locational behavior of creative workers. In addition to these tested business and personal motives in location decisions, the following paragraphs deal with how place characteristics which are seen as personal motives in the literature based on Florida's (2002; 2005) work (the 'look and feel' of the city), may also be valued as business motives.

### **4.1 Urban associations as place-based assets**

The urban atmosphere and amenities are related to a certain symbolic power of the city. This symbolic power of place comes from specific geographic or local characteristics and gives cities a unique competitive position on the global market. In the same way, Scott (2000, p.10) refers to the "characteristic styles, sensibilities and thematic associations" of place. Jansson and Power (2010, p.890) stated that in the creative industries "place-based associations, images, and brands with very real market values" are connected with products, firms, and sectors. Place-based associations can be intangible and found in history, traditions, memories, narratives, reputations, shared cultural languages or in the local culture. The local spirit, or 'zeitgeist', is another place-based element (Drake, 2013, p.519). Associations can also relate to visual local urban environment, which involves among others tangible cultural heritage, public art, buildings and architecture, parks, gardens and historical sites. The visual and emotional associations of places can act as catalysts for creativity and many creative workers place great emphasis on these (Clare, 2013; Drake, 2013). These images function as sources of inspiration and give final products their unique character (Scott, 2006).

For firms in the creative and cultural industries, a particular location ensures almost always a unique competitive advantage, whether it is in design, production or consumption (Scott, 2006). Jansson and Power (2010, p.891) said that "positionality, acclaim, recognition, and reputation" of places are important strategic assets for firms in these industries. The

fashion industry for example sees a heavily pronounced global division of labor (Scott, 2006). Standardized production is more and more outsourced to low-cost countries, while the knowledge-based, innovation-focused part of the industry often stays in high-cost locations, as explored in among others a study into the local and global dimensions of Swedish fashion by Hauge, Malmberg and Power (2009). They found that the notion of origin contributed to the production of immaterial value, which was used by the fashion companies for commercial gain and international expansion (Hauge et al., 2009). Indeed, location, or place, can differentiate and enhance the value of products (Hracs, Jakob, & Hauge, 2013) and is therefore of increasing competitive importance (Porter, 2000).

#### **4.2 Place in product through inspiration and branding**

In a study on independent musicians and fashion designers by Hauge and Hracs (2010), creative producers engaged with place in several ways. Not only did they draw inspiration from localized scenes, they also linked their products to those places and created brands that provided spatial signifiers of their origins to differentiate them from other producers (Hauge & Hracs, 2010). For firms selling products high in symbolism, spatial origins and associations can be valuable resources (Hauge et al., 2009).

The fashion design industry, including the denim fashion sector which receives particular attention in this study, the input of symbolic knowledge is clearly embedded in marketable output (Power & Hauge, 2008). The value of fashion design merely depends on aesthetics, and as Molotch (2002) argued, place can influence aesthetics. Hence, place, as a set of institutions and images, becomes a critical input into the production process. The aesthetic component is a reflection of how well the designer is able to understand and integrate the symbolic knowledge into the final product (Wenting, 2009). Or as Molotch (2002, p.665) stated: it is the designer's job "to make real the social, symbolic, and aesthetic currents of their time and location". Drake (2013) confirmed that place provides inspiration and acts as a source of ideas for creative workers, if it is the right place. It can be found in a "stockpile of knowledge, traditions, memories, and images" (Scott, 2010, p.123), in urban buzz (Storper & Venables, 2004) and in 'noise', which relates to "rumors, impressions, recommendations, trade folklore and strategic information" in places where firms and workers co-locate (Grabher, 2002, p.209). Temporary clusters such as trade fairs, exhibitions or festivals can also act as places for inspiration and creating, developing, and communicating ideas and knowledge (Maskell, Bathelt, & Malmberg, 2006). Drake (2003) stressed that an

individual's response to place is subjective, personal or emotional and that the way they use place for inspiration is therefore individual. However, this individual response can be influenced by collective sentiments brought in by for example certain subcultures within the local context (Drake, 2003). Inspired by place, creative workers may then create products which reflect that inspiration and symbolic knowledge in their expressive or aesthetic appearances (Drake, 2003).

Firms in the fashion industry are no longer only concerned with selling clothes, but more and more with selling fashion and design-based images (Jansson & Power, 2010). Brands are the carriers of symbolic knowledge and express aesthetic, symbolic and cultural values (Power & Hauge, 2008). Or as Jansson and Power (2010) stated, brands capture and commercialize fashion and design knowledge that originated in different places and networks. In that way, the origin and sense of place can be traced back in product branding (Molotch, 2002). Sometimes place is considered a brand name in itself and references to that place can give a relevant aura to the fashion brand. 'Made in Italy' or Paris *haute couture* are examples of labels of origin used by the fashion industry as strategic tools (Hauge et al., 2009).

#### **4.3 Fashion and the city**

Cities can profit from positive associations with globalized and popular creative industries, such as fashion and design. Due to an increasing awareness of the economic impact of the fashion design industry, city authorities started to establish links between the industry and the city. Boosterist city authorities often focused on their ranking in the global hierarchy of fashion capitals, and used the positive associations with the fashion industry in their own promotional efforts (Jansson & Power, 2010). In Amsterdam for example, the ideas of Florida about the creative class received strong support from the city authorities. Fashion, as well as other creative industries, were included in urban branding initiatives aimed at revamping the city and regenerating the local economy. In the early 2000s, the focus on creativity was primarily targeted at attracting businesses and middle-class inhabitants (Pandolfi, 2015). As Pratt (2008) argued in his review on Florida's work, this type of place marketing was mostly aimed at attracting a labor pool, which would in turn attract industries and lead to economic growth. In Amsterdam, it was felt that the question what this would mean for the industry itself, for firms, designers and entrepreneurs, was often left aside (Pandolfi, 2015). This suggests that for the creation of a particular fashion identity, an additional focus was needed.

It has only been since 2010 that the field of fashion has obtained not only a structural position in the strategies to attract talent but also in the creative industries concern of the city of Amsterdam (Pandolfi, 2015). As is shown in Rantisi's (2004) case study of New York fashion, fashion designers can give the city a possibility of a unique fashion identity. She studied the ascendance of New York fashion in order to better understand how urban economies can reinforce or alter the bases of their symbolic images. New York's fashion image was reinforced by the relocation of national and international top designers to the city, as well as by the hiring of New York-based designers in European fashion houses (Rantisi, 2004). Similarly, Merlo and Polese (2006) found that the emergence of Milan fashion was strengthened by the specificities of the urban cluster, in which innovation and entrepreneurship could flourish. These cities also had relevant spaces and communication channels which are helpful in the realization of symbolic value. One example of such spaces and channels is a fashion week, during which local design talent can be promoted to consumers, the media and buyers (Rantisi, 2011). Because of this promotional power, the construction of a particular city's fashion identity is also supported. Many emerging fashion cities, such as Amsterdam, have therefore established their own fashion weeks and promotional events (Rantisi, 2011).

Once local associations between place and product exist, they are often reprocessed and strengthened, leading to reinforcement of existing reputations of both place and product (Scott, 2006). The local (re)production of norms, practices and reputations is enabled by how career paths of creative workers are often shaped, namely by processes of mediation, repetition and reputation (Vinodrai, 2006). Moreover, the local recognition of the success of a particular industry will attract new business. Places with a positive reputation based on this recognition and success may see more start-ups in that same industry (Feldman et al., 2005). This could lead to unique and non-reproducible specializations, resulting in urban and regional competitive advantage and economic growth (Scott, 2001). With Amsterdam scoring high among Dutch fashion designers on its reputation as a fashion city, Wenting, Atzema and Frenken (2011) found that this impacted the locational behavior of fashion designers in the Netherlands. As these designers tend to locate in Amsterdam, this in turn reinforces the image and reputation of Amsterdam as a fashion city.

## 5. Conclusion

### 5.1 Insights from theory

Within the theoretical part, theoretical and empirical works on the topics of industry clustering, the spatial formation of the fashion design industry and the symbolic power of cities in relation to the creative industries have been reviewed and brought together. The review of how and why economists, cultural economists and economic geographers have approached the multifaceted phenomenon of place in relation to explaining the agglomeration of the creative industries, has revealed a number of insights. Firstly, *the explanations for cluster formation are all relevant and cannot be seen as independent from each other*. Over time and through a wide range of disciplines, the cluster concept has been applied to different socio-economic contexts. In the reviewed literature, different features of the cluster were stressed, giving an idea of the breadth of explanations for cluster formation. Not surprisingly, these studies almost always took a comparative approach. For example, some studies set locational behavior of firms off against the locational behavior of workers (Florida, 2002, 2005), some looked at the innovative capacity of firms and industries and compared benefits of co-location found in specialization with those found in diversity (Lorenzen & Frederiksen, 2008), and there were studies comparing agglomeration economies with urban amenities (Wenting et al., 2011) or spinoff dynamics (Boschma, 2015; Wenting, 2008) as drivers of clustering. Besides discussing that all explanations for cluster formation are relevant and cannot be seen as independent, the literature review also made clear that while common processes may be at work in different clusters, place influences the particularities of the formation of the cluster. Secondly, the review showed that *human relationships are key and place still matters*. A common feature in all discussed theories is that human relationships and interchange is key in making clusters work. In addition, the empirical work focusing on fashion cities or regions (Hauge et al., 2009; Merlo & Polese, 2006; Pandolfi, 2015; Rantisi, 2004; Vinodrai, 2006; Wenting et al., 2011) is done in idiosyncratic places, each having its own unique context. This is relevant, as it shows that while certain common systems, structures and processes for the formation and success of clusters are essential, there always remains a unique feature of place influencing the trajectories these clusters follow, not in the least influenced by social relations. This is also consistent with the idea of the creative field: the creative field can “in all its manifestations [...] never be adequately grasped as a function

of a set of “independent variables”, but only in terms of structures of direct and indirect interdependence that play out in many different ways in different geographical and historical circumstances” (Scott, 2006, p.18). The previous observations led to the last key insight that *locational behavior is subject to the three interrelated dimensions of business, people, and place*. For creative entrepreneurs, who are at the same time a worker and a firm, place is about where they can at the same time maximize their business and personal benefits. Applying these insights to the position of creative entrepreneurs, a gap in the existing literature can be identified. Not only can their locational behavior be spurred by traditional place-based economic motivations for their firm and personal motivations for their residencies, their desire to incorporate a particular symbolic knowledge from their environment into their products and brands could also play a role.

## **5.2    Blueprint for analysis**

In view of the above, the foundation for the empirical research has now been laid. For the purpose of the analysis, a blueprint has been developed based on the three key insights: all of the discussed explanations for cluster formation will be adopted, human relationships will receive particular attention, and place deserves its own consideration. Although the explanations cannot be seen as independent from each other, for the purpose of clarity in the research analysis, they have been categorized as ‘business-related’, ‘people-related’ and ‘place-related’ dimensions. The business-related dimension is mainly comprised of aspects that make localization and urbanization economies happen, including labor market pooling and specialized suppliers. The people-related dimension holds a third externality, namely knowledge spillovers, and focuses on human relationships and interchange in general. The consumer market have been made part of this category, since I regard consumers as individuals who engage with producers in the creation of value of symbolic products. The third category, possible place-related explanations, include not only references to personal engagement of the creative entrepreneur with place, but also tangible and intangible aspects which may be resources for creative inspiration and symbolic and economic value. The categories and key words as listed under the dimensions in the blueprint have been discussed in more detail in the literature review in Chapters 2, 3 and 4. Since the role of symbolic power of place in relation to the locational choices of the creative entrepreneurs, and in broader terms, to the clustering of this industry, is subject of this study, this will be explored in more detail. With the place-related dimension as starting point, the personal and business

engagement of the creative entrepreneurs with Amsterdam will be questioned throughout the interviews. To gain this insight, open questions on their personal opinions and feelings on the symbolic value of denim fashion and Amsterdam will be posed, as well as whether and how they use this for inspiration and branding or marketing purposes. The topics in the interview guidelines (see for an outline Table 4) reflect the conceptual blueprint and deal with a) the firm, b) the product, c) the city, d) brand communication and marketing, and e) motivations underlying the location choice.

**Table 1. Blueprint for analysis**

Business	People	Place
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Firms and labor market</b></li> <li>• Competitors</li> <li>• Multinationals</li> <li>• Suppliers</li> <li>• Skilled workforce</li> <li>• <b>Institutions and services</b></li> <li>• Educational institutions</li> <li>• Research institutes</li> <li>• Cultural organizations</li> <li>• (Fashion) media</li> <li>• Events (fashion shows, trade shows, exhibitions, festivals)</li> <li>• Not-for-profit branche organizations or trade unions</li> <li>• <b>Infrastructure</b></li> <li>• International transport (airport, harbor, rail)</li> <li>• Local infrastructure (highways, public transport, cyclepaths)</li> <li>• <b>Financial system</b></li> <li>• Financial benefits</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Individuals/communities</b></li> <li>• Consumer market</li> <li>• Workers (same industry)</li> <li>• Workers (other industry)</li> <li>• <b>Networks</b></li> <li>• Social/personal networks (family and friends)</li> <li>• Professional networks</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Personal</b></li> <li>• Housing</li> <li>• Feeling at home</li> <li>• <b>Visual environment</b></li> <li>• Public space (e.g. built environment, architecture, public art, cultural heritage, historical sites, parks and gardens)</li> <li>• Its people (inhabitants)</li> <li>• <b>Intangible aspects</b></li> <li>• Reputation (city reputation related to industry, local legitimation)</li> <li>• Place as brand name (place image/myths)</li> <li>• Culture (languages, conventions, norms, identity, history, traditions, memories, narratives, images, zeitgeist)</li> <li>• Atmosphere (tolerance, openness, diversity)</li> <li>• Trust</li> </ul>

*Source: own composition based on literature review*

## METHODOLOGICAL PART

### 6. Research design

A case study on the denim fashion cluster in Amsterdam has been chosen to answer the research question of this thesis. A case study can be used to investigate “a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident” (Yin, 2009, p.18). This research design fits the phenomenon of clustering in the creative industries. The creative field provides a dynamic context for the development of the industry cluster, while the cluster can simultaneously be seen as a creative field on its own, connecting industrial activities and social phenomena in space and place. The choice for a case study also arises from the objective to better understand the complex social phenomena at hand. Looking at the locational choices of Amsterdam-based denim fashion entrepreneurs, the thesis is also concerned with the symbolic power of Amsterdam. This particular role of place has not yet been extensively studied through empirical research on clustering of the creative industries. This study explores to provide more insight into this. Based on this research interest and aims, a qualitative research strategy was chosen. A qualitative strategy offers the possibility to describe, in words, the context within which people’s behavior takes place (Bryman, 2016). Both deductive and inductive approaches to linking theory and research will be adopted in the exploration of the locational behavior of the entrepreneurs. Relevant theoretical ideas on industry clustering and the attractiveness of place for firms and workers will be tested in this case study. An inductive approach is applied to find out whether place symbolism plays a role in the agglomeration of firms in the denim fashion industry in Amsterdam. While this is based on existing theory about the symbolic value of place in the creative industries, this study suggests to investigate a possible relation with the concept of clustering. The findings could therefore hint at new theoretic inferences on the drivers of clustering.

## 7. Research methods

The research design has given the framework within which the collection and analysis of data will take place (Bryman, 2016). As there is an interest in exploring whether an additional approach to explaining the agglomeration of creative firms can emerge out of the data, semi-structured interviews with key creative entrepreneurs in the chosen case have been held. It is felt that such interviews would reveal the motives for location in Amsterdam best. Moreover, the results provide up-to-date data which can be compared with existing literature on clustering of the creative industries, and more in particular of the fashion design industry. In the following paragraphs, the construction of the framework for collecting and analyzing the data will be further explicated.

### 7.1 Data sampling

The denim fashion industry cannot be clearly demarcated, since industry or business classifications (such as Dutch Standaard Bedrijfsindeling (SBI) codes) or firm codes lack for this subcategory of the wider fashion industry. Yet, the Amsterdam denim fashion cluster is rather small and specific and cluster participants – those that are relevant for this study – can therefore be found and designated as such relatively easily.

Before approaching the intended interview participants, a mapping of the Amsterdam denim fashion cluster was carried out. This resulted in an overview of denim fashion firms (*Dutch-origin* as well as *international*), non-profit organizations in the field of denim (*intermediary*), initiatives and events with a focus on denim (*promotional events, festivals, trade shows, awards*) and related educational programs and knowledge institutes (*secondary vocational education, higher professional education, expertise & experience center*) in the Metropolitan Region Amsterdam<sup>1</sup> (MRA) (see Appendix I for short version). By combining data obtained from Orbis, the Chamber of Commerce, company and personal pages on LinkedIn and corporate websites, the original overview provides information on the year of incorporation or foundation, the year of location in the MRA, the location, the size of the firm, and the name of the founder, manager or key representative. However, the overview is

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<sup>1</sup> The reference to the MRA will only be made in paragraph 7.1; ‘*Amsterdam*’ will be used throughout the thesis as term for the place Amsterdam.

not all-encompassing and therefore does not give a full account of all thinkable cluster participants. Although the existence of among others Amsterdam-based representative offices or showrooms of European denim mills (e.g. Candiani Denim) and global denim and jeans manufacturers (e.g. Soorty Enterprises, ISKO), agents, several (fashion and denim) media initiatives and promotional events, and the retail and wholesale part of the value chain is recognized, they are not included in the overview as they were felt to fall too far outside the scope of this study. Although the investigation into all relevant cluster participants has been carried out meticulously, there is a risk that firms meeting the criteria and belonging to the relevant categories in the overview have not been included due to unawareness of the researcher.

From the overview, two types of participants have been targeted by means of purposive sampling: the main participants and one secondary participant. The category ‘Dutch-origin denim fashion firms’ is considered the main population for this case study, with each of the listed firms forming the sampling frame for this case. A non-probability sampling approach is considered feasible and has been chosen to collect data. All firms that meet the criteria as described in Table 2 are identified as appropriate cases to address the research question.

**Table 2. Shared criteria of selected case firms**

<b>DENIM FOCUS</b>	For the purpose of this study, denim fashion firms are defined as firms with a focus on denim or denim related fashion.
<b>CREATIVE PROCESS</b>	The firm is engaged in at least one of the following stages of the creative process: design, alteration or production, or marketing and sales.
<b>LOCATION</b>	The firm is located in the Metropolitan Region Amsterdam (MRA). This choice is based on the idea that firms and workers in the wider MRA may partly benefit from the same agglomeration economies, urban amenities and associations with Amsterdam as firms and workers located in the city of Amsterdam. The MRA belongs to the top 5 of Europe’s strongest economic regions and consists of the Provinces of North Holland and Flevoland, 33 municipalities, and the Transportation Region Amsterdam ( <a href="http://www.metropoolregioamsterdam.nl/pagina/20161229-over-mra">www.metropoolregioamsterdam.nl/pagina/20161229-over-mra</a> ).
<b>YEAR OF FOUNDATION/ LOCATION IN MRA</b>	The firm has been founded and/or located in the MRA in or after 2008. While the first Dutch denim firms were founded in the MRA in the eighties (Cars Jeans, Scotch & Soda, G-Star) and the first international firms arrived in the nineties (Pepe Jeans, Tommy Hilfiger), investigations (own overview, Appendix

I; Pandolfi, 2015) showed that it has only been since 2008 that a significant number of smaller denim fashion design firms have been established in or relocated to Amsterdam (or the MRA). This was also the year that the launch of House of Denim in 2009 was prepared. Moreover, denim had entered the economic agenda of Amsterdam in the late 2000s as a representation of the wider fashion industry in Amsterdam. Over the years, it obtained a more structural position within the clusters agenda, and it had been part of strategies focusing on creativity to attract talents and businesses to the MRA (Pandolfi, 2015). For those reasons, the research focuses on the last decade (2008-2018).

The secondary participant does not belong to the main population for research; however, due to its prominent role in the development of the cluster, the non-profit organization he represents (the House of Denim) was purposively selected “because of [its] relevance to the research question” (Bryman, p.408). The House of Denim has played a role in among others setting up the Jean School, a vocational school for denim developers, and it has founded Denim City, which hosts among others a denim lab, an academy, a workshop and a denim archive. This participant is thus selected to bring in a different perspective on the cluster and to broaden the general understanding of the Amsterdam denim scene. James Veenhoff is also co-founder of Fronteer Strategy; on page 52 a part of the interview is included in which he elaborates on the Fronteer Lighthouse Brand Development model in relation to the suggested ‘place in product’ idea, connecting Amsterdam and denim.

Based on the selection criteria, 14 firms classified as denim fashion firms engaged in one or more stages of the creative process and founded or located in Amsterdam between 2008 and 2018. Of these firms, founders and general managers are considered most capable of explaining location decisions. Initially, and over the course of 4 months, an interview request was sent out by e-mail to 11 firms (see Appendix IIa). In total 8 firms responded positively and an interview was scheduled accordingly (see Table 3). One firm did not respond, whereas two firms did respond positively at first but actual appointments were not made due to agenda restrictions and unforeseen circumstances (one of the firms appears to have become inactive since September 2008). Mainly due to time and cost constraints during the last phase of the research, 3 firms were not approached. The sample size of 8 respondents is considered appropriate for this study, as more value is attached to exploring individual motivations for locational choices than to making generalized conclusions about the whole population. The

House of Denim, the secondary participant, was approached directly with a request for an interview (see Appendix IIb). Bryman's (2016) remark to keep in mind the size of the sample in order to avoid inappropriate generalizations in the analysis will be taken under advisement.

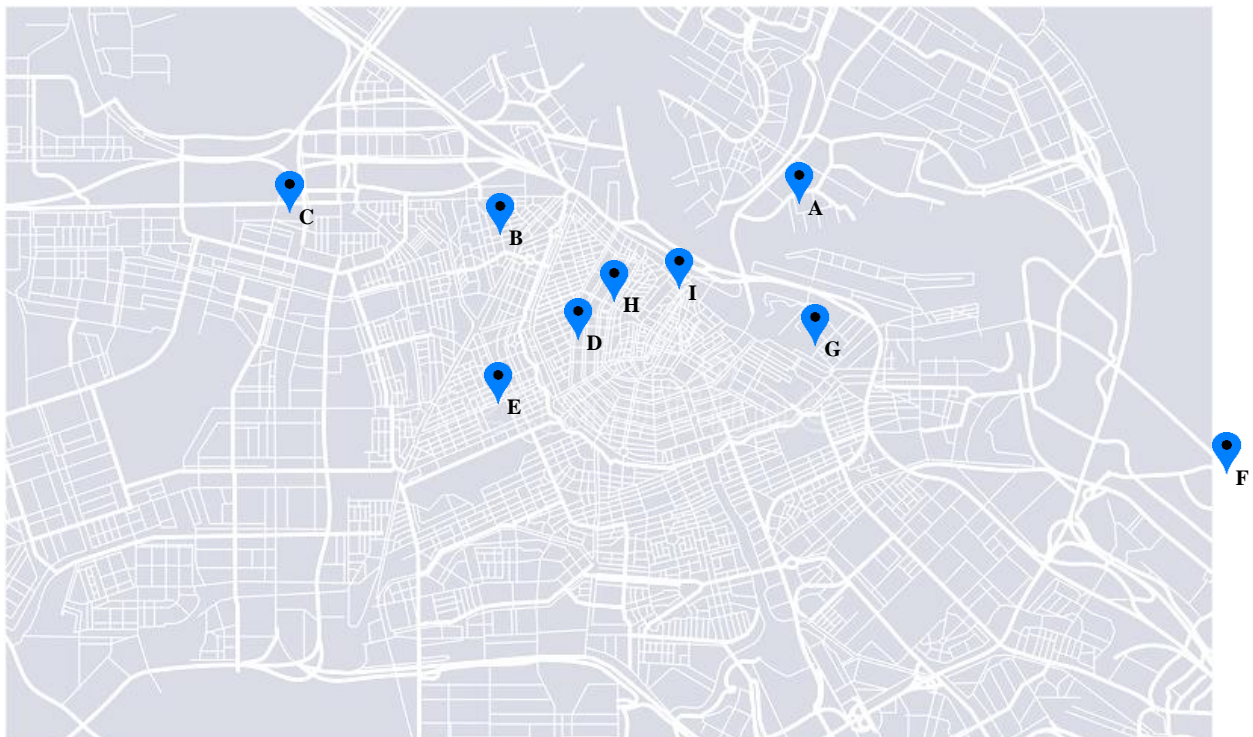
## 7.2 Data collection

The analysis presented in this thesis is based on 9 semi-structured interviews conducted between 6 July 2018 and 7 November 2018 with founders and managers of denim fashion firms (N=8) and with the founder of House of Denim, a non-profit organization for craftsmanship, sustainability and innovation in the denim industry (N=1) (Table 3). The interviews took place with one person, in the participant's office, shop or studio in Amsterdam. On average, the interviews lasted 52 minutes. Except for one interview which was conducted in English, all interviews were conducted in Dutch. The interviews were audio-recorded with the consent of the participants, and transcribed afterwards. Verbatim quotations, translated from Dutch into English by the author when necessary, are included throughout the results in Chapter 8 to reveal how participants voiced meanings and experiences in their own words. The audio-recordings and transcripts are in the possession of the author and will be available upon request.

**Table 3. Sources: an overview of the case firms and interviews**

	<b>FIRM</b>	<b>MAIN LOCATION</b> (at time of interview)	<b>RESPONDENT</b>	<b>INTERVIEW DATE</b>	<b>INTERVIEW DURATION</b>	<b>INTERVIEW LANGUAGE</b>
<b>A</b>	Amsterdenim	Spijkerkade 11, Amsterdam	Ewout Key Rameijer, general manager	29.08.2018	65 minutes	Dutch
<b>B</b>	Benzak Denim Developers	Veemarkt 207, Amsterdam	Lennaert Nijgh, founder/owner	18.07.2018	80 minutes	Dutch
<b>C</b>	Blue Print Amsterdam	Ferdinand Huyckstraat 26, Amsterdam (studio in Lijnden not on map)	Celia Geraedts, founder/co-owner	29.08.2018	55 minutes	Dutch
<b>D</b>	Denham the Jeanmaker	Prinsengracht 495, Amsterdam	Jason Denham, founder/Chief Creative Officer	12.07.2018	40 minutes	English
<b>E</b>	House of Denim	Hannie Dankbaarpassage 47, Amsterdam	James Veenhoff, co-founder	01.11.2018	55 minutes	Dutch
<b>F</b>	Kings Of Indigo	Krijn Taconiskade 440, Amsterdam	Tony Tonnaer, founder/owner	01.11.2018	50 minutes	Dutch

<b>G</b>	LEBL Studios	Wittenburgergracht 189, Amsterdam	Leon Blok, founder/owner	07.11.2018	45 minutes	Dutch
<b>H</b>	MICKKEUS	Bergstraat 3, Amsterdam	Mick Keus, founder/owner	06.07.2018	40 minutes	Dutch
<b>I</b>	TOSSIJN	Zeedijk 59A, Amsterdam	Koen Tossijn, founder/owner	12.07.2018	40 minutes	Dutch

**Map 1. Visualization of firm location in Amsterdam**

Before appearing at the interview, quick and dirty preparatory fact sheets were made with information found on websites and social media (see Appendix III). Besides the name and visiting and social media addresses, the fact sheet included basic information on the participant (including work and educational background), the location, logo, brand, company values, and any other information considered relevant for the interview. Earlier, background knowledge and insights on the denim fashion scene were gained by observation, networking and learning during the one day conference ‘Denim on stage: university meets industry’ (part of the HERA-funded research project “The Enterprise of Culture”) in 2015, the Amsterdam Denim Days festival in 2017, and the Kingpins Show in 2018. This expanded my understanding of the context, and proved useful in shaping the direction of enquiry during the interviews. An interview guideline was developed for the firms (Table 4 presents the outline;

Appendix IV holds the full version in English); for the interview with the House of Denim six key discussion topics were established to touch upon during the further non-structured interview (Table 5).

**Table 4. Outline of guideline for semi-structured interviews with main respondents**

<b>I. Introduction</b>	
Express appreciation for meeting, introduction of me and the research, ask permission of recording	
<b>II-a. About the firm</b>	
-	Topics: brand, product, brand values, collaborations
<b>II-b. About the product [exploring product / product symbolism]</b>	
-	Personal opinion: where does ‘denim’ stand for
<b>II-c. About the city [exploring place / place symbolism]</b>	
-	Personal opinion: where does ‘Amsterdam’ stand for
-	Relevance of Amsterdam culture, reputation, traditions or narratives for business
-	Meaning and significance of ‘Amsterdam denim city’ status for business
-	Creative inspiration by visual urban environment of Amsterdam
<b>II-d. Brand communication and marketing [linking place with product]</b>	
-	‘Amsterdam’ as part of brand communication or marketing
-	Communication or marketing through Amsterdam-based brand channels
<b>II-e. Motivation behind location choice [exploring motives]</b>	
-	Business-related dimension: firms, labor market, institutions, services, infrastructure, financial
-	People-related dimension: individuals/communities, networks
-	Place-related dimension: personal, visual environment, intangible aspects
-	Satisfaction
-	Personal opinion: thoughts about the importance of physical location
<b>III. Conclusion</b>	
Check for coverage of all topics, offer room for additional comments from the participant, ask participant if there is an interest to be informed about the results, indicate timeframe, and conclude the interview by thanking the participant.	

**Table 5. Key discussion topics for interview with secondary respondent**

1	Reflect upon the development and future of the denim ‘ecosystem’ in Amsterdam
2	Does denim ‘from Amsterdam’ contain the place of their origin?
3	Expectations: what do denim fashion entrepreneurs expect from the House of Denim? What does House of Denim expect from the denim scene?
4	What are the most pressing issues or latest trends in the denim industry?
5	Which mechanisms are in place to stimulate innovation (and what role does the Jean School have in this)?
6	Future role and ambitions of the House of Denim

### 7.3 Data analysis

This qualitative research is partly chosen to test some theories on the clustering of creative industries and partly to let some new theoretical ideas emerge out of the data. This last grounded theory approach is “iterative, meaning the data collection and analysis proceed in tandem, repeatedly referring back to each other” (Bryman, 2016, p.381).

The starting point of the analysis has been provided by the research question and the three objectives that followed from that question. Based on this and the theoretical ideas as brought forward in the literature review, the initial blueprint for the analysis was created (Table 1). To make sense of the data and link this process to the theoretical part, I started the data analysis by deductively and inductively coding thematic phrases, sentences or words in each transcribed interview in order to reduce the amount of data. Coding is “the process whereby data are broken down into component parts, and those parts are then given names” (Bryman, 2016, p.11). The blueprint had given the initial pre-established codes but during the coding process, new codes were added and some pre-established codes were altered or deleted. This activity led to the final coding frame as presented in Table 6, with four main categories, each with their own codes clustered in subcategories (the ‘labels’). The coded data have all been integrated in the coding frame in Excel, which made it possible to identify similarities and differences, and discover themes and patterns. The result of this exercise: a story revealed itself in the data. In the following empirical part of this thesis, this story is told along the lines of the main objectives of this study: the locational behavior of the entrepreneurs, the place-based associations they may have related to Amsterdam, and the benefits they experience from being located in the denim fashion cluster in Amsterdam.

**Table 6. Coding frame****AMSTERDAM**

- **Label I = Amsterdam private**  
Codes: Family/Friends, Feeling at home/Quality of life, Previous study, Residence
- **Label II = Amsterdam intangible**  
Codes: Buzz; Culture; Diversity/Openness/Tolerance; Place as brand name; Reputation
- **Label III = Amsterdam visible**  
Codes: Built environment/Public space

**DENIM / DENIM BUSINESS**

- **Label I = entrepreneurship**  
Code: Fashion; International; Motivation
- **Label II = values**  
Codes: Craftsmanship/Tailoring; Quality/Aesthetics; Sustainability

**PLACE IN PRODUCT**

- **Label I = inspiration**  
Codes: Inspiration
- **Label II = branding**  
Codes: Branding
- **Label III = marketing**  
Codes: Marketing
- **Label IV = visibility**  
Codes: Office/Shop

**LOCATIONAL CHOICE**

- **Label I = financial**  
Codes: Rent private/business
- **Label II = firms and labor market**  
Codes: Suppliers/Manufacturers; Distributors/Wholesalers/Retailers; Multinationals; Competitors; Skilled workforce; Investors
- **Label III = individuals/communities/networks**  
Codes: Consumers/Clients; Professional network/Collaborations
- **Label IV = infrastructure (physical)**  
Codes: International transport infrastructure; Local transport infrastructure
- **Label V = institutions and services**  
Codes: (Fashion) media; Public support/Branch organizations; Cultural organizations; Training/Educational/Research institutions/Labs; Related events
- **Label VI = spinoff dynamics**  
Codes: Parent company/Learning/Established network

## EMPIRICAL PART

### 8. Results

The interest in why certain denim fashion entrepreneurs tend to locate in Amsterdam and to what extent this could be explained by the symbolic power of Amsterdam has led to an investigation into the factors that affected their decision to run their business from Amsterdam, but also into which symbolic associations they relate to Amsterdam and whether the notion of ‘Amsterdam’ is used as part of their brand communication or marketing strategies.

In the first paragraph of this chapter I am briefly introducing the case firms and respondents one by one, indicating what I perceived as the decisive factor why they established their firm in Amsterdam. Except for one respondent (Ewout Key Rameijer, general manager Amsterdenim), all respondents are the founders of the case firms. All firms were founded in Amsterdam except for Amsterdenim (founded by Ben Fokkema in 2014 in Marum, Groningen). In this paragraph I discuss insights on whether spin-off dynamics can explain the clustering of the denim industry in Amsterdam. In the second paragraph, I reflect on the place-based associations the entrepreneurs expressed. What does ‘Amsterdam’ stand for according to them, and do they use this personal notion of place as a source of inspiration for their work or as a value-enhancing association for their brand or products? In the last paragraph, some benefits for entrepreneurs resulting from the agglomeration of denim fashion firms in Amsterdam are emphasized. This discussion is structured along the line of different elements that are part of the creative field: firms, workers and consumers, supporting institutions and services, and the infrastructure. The combined results from the literature review and the empirical work, but also the flaws in this study and suggestions for future research are presented as the overall conclusions in Chapter 9.

## **8.1 Case firms and their main motivations to locate in Amsterdam**

### **8.1.1 General observations on pre-entry experience and entrepreneurship**

The range of case firms in this study is diverse. Insights on every single firm, based on the interviews, data analysis and my personal interpretation of the results, should therefore not be seen as transposable to other case firms. Included are for example firms of which the founder is the only employee but also firms with over 200 employees worldwide, firms which mainly sell locally but also firms with an international network of wholesalers and retailers, firms which offer bespoke denim tailoring services but also firms producing a broad range of fashion apparel. The business and marketing strategies also differ for the case firms: some are strongly founder-focused and others are more product- or brand-focused.

Although there is a great variety in case firms, a pattern related to previous education and working experience of their founders emerged from the data. The formation of the Amsterdam denim fashion cluster seems to be strongly affected by spinoff dynamics. All respondents who are the founders of their firms have a higher educational background in fashion. Jason Denham studied in the United Kingdom, the others in the Netherlands. Except for Koen Tossijn who attended the arts academy in The Hague, the Dutch founders were trained at the Amsterdam Fashion Institute (AMFI). For Tony Tonnaer, Celia Geraedts, Lennaert Nijgh and Leon Blok, studying in Amsterdam meant that Amsterdam became their place of residence (and to date, that is still the case). Mick Keus, who also studied at AMFI, started his firm in his hometown The Hague, but returned to Amsterdam for a combination of business and private reasons. Celia Geraedts also returned to Amsterdam to start Blue Print Amsterdam, after she had worked for Levi's in Belgium for a while. This may illustrate what Porter (2000, p.263) argued, namely that "while local entrepreneurs are likely entrants to cluster, entrepreneurs who are based outside the cluster frequently relocate, sooner or later, to a cluster location." This also goes for Ewout Key Rameijer (the respondent with no educational background in fashion but in business), who relocated Amsterdam to Amsterdam two years after the foundation in Marum in the north of the Netherlands. Jason Denham came to Amsterdam when the company he was working for in London moved its European headquarters to Amsterdam. Amsterdam then became his place of residence too. Having developed local social and professional networks and an appreciation for the way of life in Amsterdam seems quite often to be a reason for the entrepreneurs to stay in Amsterdam and start the own firm here.

Before starting their own brands, all of the founders worked for fashion companies in Amsterdam, mostly in the denim industry. Within the group of respondents, some work connections can also be seen: Jason Denham from Denham the Jeanmaker and Tony Tonnaer from Kings Of Indigo both worked for Pepe Jeans Europe and Kuyichi; Leon Blok from LEBL Studios worked for Denham the Jeanmaker; and Lennaert Nijgh from Benzak Denim Developers worked a few years for Tony at Kings Of Indigo. This aligns with findings that fashion designers who have started their own brands (such as Jason, Tony, Leon and Lennaert) have usually gained pre-entry experience through different jobs in the same industry (Wenting, 2008). Wenting (2008) also found that spinoffs tend to locate close to their parent firms. This may therefore provide one credible explanation of the clustering of the denim fashion industry in Amsterdam.

The following introductions on each case firm have been compiled with data from the interviews and from the firms' official websites. In some cases, secondary data from interviews conducted by Wouter Munnichs, freelance denim and retail specialist and founder of the online denim magazine Long John, was used to supplement the description (interviews with Leon Blok, Ben Fokkema, Koen Tossijn and Tony Tonnaer, as posted on <https://long-john.nl>). The underlined text in each introduction indicates what I understood to be the main reason why the respondent decided to start their business in or relocate it to Amsterdam.

### 8.1.2 Amsterdenim

Ben Fokkema is founder of Amsterdenim. Having worked in Amsterdam for Lee, Wrangler, Mustang and Scotch & Soda, he started the brand in Marum (Groningen) in 2014. Since 2016, Amsterdenim is managed by Ewout Key Rameijer, with Ben still involved but according to Ewout "very much pushed into the background". Ewout has an educational background in business and a professional sales and marketing background mostly in the fashion industry. In 2016, he moved Amsterdenim from Marum to Amsterdam, where he expected to gain greater visibility and better findability by buyers. Currently, Amsterdenim is working hard to expand its online retail network and it hopes that a higher brand awareness will lead to more stores selling Amsterdenim in the near future. Recently, Amsterdenim was introduced in Antwerp through a store called YOUR. Ewout explained this development as follows:

"Next week we will start with a very important reference store, YOUR, a very cool shop. So yes, we will launch in Belgium and that will definitely put us on the map there."

Amsterdam and denim are not only unified in the brand name, but also in the product, with details referring to associations people may have with Amsterdam (e.g. the three crosses from the Amsterdam coat of arms, a measuring rod for the Normaal Amsterdams Peil, and the brown fabric of the inner pockets referring to the sails of boats ). In doing so, Amsterdenim wants its customers to have the opportunity to “buy a piece of Amsterdam” (but they also just want to sell jeans).

### 8.1.3 Benzak Denim Developers

Lennaert Nijgh is founder of Benzak Denim Developers. At a young age Lennaert (friends called him ‘Benzak’) was “infected with the indigo virus” and then knew he wanted to create his own denim label one day. In order to gain knowledge and experience before setting up this label, he went to study at the Amsterdam Fashion Institute. Coming from The Hague, Amsterdam then became his hometown, and he never left. At the moment, “everything for him happens in Amsterdam”: he enjoys city life, his friends, and the opportunities for his business. In 2008, after graduation, he started Benzak Denim Developers, while he kept on working as a denim product developer and production coordinator at JC Rags, and later, as ‘King of Product’ at Kings Of Indigo. In 2013 he introduced the first ‘Benzak Made in Japan’ jeans, combining his passion for Japanese denim and craftsmanship. In 2016 Lennaert was ready to start focusing completely on his own firm, and this was the year his second product line, Benzak European Made, saw the light. He creates lifestyle products for the ‘modern day cowboy’: that “rebellious, cool, gives no ‘f’ and lives by his own rules” type of guy. While the brand is sold in shops and online in the Netherlands, Benzak’s turnover comes mainly from abroad: Germany, Switzerland, the United States, China, Taiwan and more recently, Korea, are his main markets.

### 8.1.4 Blue Print Amsterdam

Celia Geraedts is founder of Blue Print Amsterdam, an artisanal indigo dye and print studio with locations in Lijnden and Amsterdam. Celia, educated in Media Styling at the Amsterdam Fashion Institute and in Fashion Design & Strategy at ArtEZ, founded this company after she had worked for Levi Strauss & Co. in Brussels. She said about her move to Amsterdam:

“When Levi’s asked me to move with them to the United States, I made a conscious decision to go back to Amsterdam. I wanted to do my thing here. I also knew that what I am quite unique in what I do, so it was also a smart move.”

Before working for Levi's, Celia had also worked as a freelance graphic designer for XX by Mexx and VF Corporation, and as a tutor in Design at the Amsterdam Fashion Institute. Her professional network in Amsterdam is extensive. In her studio in Lijnden and the atelier in Amsterdam, she creates bespoke print design and high end indigo dyed products for clients including Levi's, Denham the Jeanmaker, Kings Of Indigo, Wrangler, Tommy Hilfiger, Scotch & Soda, Marco Polo Denim, Converse and Tenue de Nimes. Celia is committed to raising the awareness of the unsustainability of color in the industry and to keeping the craft of indigo dying alive.

#### 8.1.5 Denham the Jeanmaker

Jason Denham is founder of Denham the Jeanmaker, the second brand he established in Amsterdam. Jason, born and raised in England, studied Fashion Design and Business at the University of Manchester. In 1996 he was hired by Pepe Jeans in London, and was soon relocated to Amsterdam when Pepe Jeans Europe moved its office here in 1997. About this move he said:

“[Pepe Jeans London] decided to relocate the business to Amsterdam, partly for the geographic and partly for the culture, but to be part of mainland Europe – so I did my Brexit a long time ago and came here”.

In 1998 he established Clinic+ in Amsterdam, a denim agency through which he consulted various brands, and co-created Kuyichi in 2000. Jason also co-founded the Amsterdam-born premium label Blue Blood in 2003, before establishing the brand carrying his family name in 2008: Denham the Jeanmaker. About his motivations to start building this brand in Amsterdam he said:

“Something which I learned very quickly when I moved here was how international the lifestyle and people were. Amsterdam has a very open culture and is a very open place, so it felt like the right place for me to build this brand.”

His passion for details (what defines, drives and distinguishes them) and the truth (how they approach their work) form the foundation of Denham's brand philosophy: ‘The truth is in the details’. Today, 10 years after the foundation of Denham the Jeanmaker, Denham is sold in more than 20 countries globally, including key stores in Amsterdam, Antwerp, Hamburg, Tokyo, Osaka and Sydney. It has satellite offices in Dusseldorf, Tokyo and Shanghai, and over 200 employees worldwide.

### 8.1.6 Kings Of Indigo

Tony Tonnaer is founder of Kings Of Indigo (K.O.I.). With an educational background in Fashion (he studied at the Mr. Koetsier, the predecessor of the Amsterdam Fashion Institute), Tony started working for Pepe Jeans Europe in Amsterdam in 1997. Here, he learnt the ropes from the design team of Jason Denham and Trevor Harrison. As their Sourcing and Development Director, he left Pepe in 2002 to head up Kuyichi, the first organic denim brand in the Netherlands. In 2010 Tony started his own brand K.O.I., which was established ‘from home’ – which has been Amsterdam ever since he studied at the Mr. Koetsier. Over the years, Tony built up his professional and social networks in Amsterdam. About the start of his own firm he said:

“I was still liking denim and fashion very much. I am good at it, and I thought, well I can go and start something different and exciting, but this is also the right moment to start my own label. I was looking forward to that, to do something that I am experienced in.”

The choice for its first location, in Amsterdam Noord, was due to the location of the main investor, which hold office there. After he and the investor separated their ways in 2018, Tony chose the new location: IJburg in Amsterdam. Close to home, and still with an Amsterdam-based postal code, which is important to him because it shows that K.O.I. is a brand of Amsterdam origin. Based on his experience within Kuyichi, the concept of sustainability is now being perfected within K.O.I. Tony is proud that K.O.I. stands for a progressive approach towards transparency, sustainability and innovation in the denim industry. He describes the ‘jeans people’ in his business as “casual, easy to get along with, direct in their communication, and aware of the reality”. Currently, K.O.I. is active selling its collection to over 250 retailers in 12 countries and online, and it hopes to include the United States as a new market this fall.

### 8.1.7 LEBL Studios

Leon Blok is founder of LEBL Studios, which he started right after graduation from the Amsterdam Fashion Institute in 2016. For LEBL Studios he creates bespoke tailored denim, but he is also a freelance designer in the premium denim and denim related industry. During his study, he worked for Levi Strauss & Co. as a shop assistant, for Levi’s Vintage & Levi’s Made and Crafted as a designer, and for Denham the Jeanmaker as a repair specialist. With a passion for high quality fabrics, pattern making and craftsmanship, he aims to produce exclusive products that accumulate emotional value over the years the owner wears them. Amsterdam is not a fashion city according to him:

“Amsterdammers are no people who spend an awful lot of money on clothing. When you compare it to New York, London or Paris you see people who are more used to spending money on fashion”.

Leon finds the level of denim developments in Amsterdam rather trivial. About the denim scene in Amsterdam he said:

“I have high expectations of myself and high expectations of the level I want to reach, and this does not really feel like my world”.

Amsterdam had however become his place of residence during his study and when he started his own studio, staying was a rational choice, without giving it too much thought. Leon said about this:

“I didn’t really choose for Amsterdam. When I could really choose, I would probably pick another place on earth, it would not be Amsterdam. Financially, that is a different story however. I would love to go to Japan, or New York, for a couple of years.”

This aligns with his vision that his work could be expanded internationally, were it not for the individual approach necessary to serve each client with bespoke tailored jeans.

### 8.1.8 MICKKEUS

Mick Keus is founder of MICK KEUS jeans atelier Amsterdam, now located just around the corner of the Nine Streets area. Mick studied Fashion at an intermediate vocational education institute and Fashion and Design at the Amsterdam Fashion Institute, and briefly worked for G-Star. As a custom-fit jeans designer, he founded his up-cycle jeans atelier in 2012. Mick thinks that “almost every jeans is ugly, except those of Levi’s”. Out of his love for the iconic Levi’s 501, he is now reworking and adjusting vintage Levi’s 501 to create jeans that will become one with the new owner. MICK KEUS stands for made-to-measure and it’s pay-off is ‘Future Proof’, indicating his interest in sustainable business. Mick started his business in his hometown The Hague, but deliberately moved his business to Amsterdam to attract more consumers who are young, hip and willing to spend money, as well as to be visible and within easier reach of the media. About The Netherlands as a country for fashion he is clear:

“The Netherlands is simply not a country for fashion. Let us also not try to be one. Denim, that’s cool, that’s what we are, but fashion, that is really out of our league”.

Mick has ambitions to expand internationally:

“I would like to go to San Francisco , I have been asked to start something in Melbourne. I would like to open shops in Berlin, Copenhagen, and London.”

In the near future, he hopes to develop his jeans label into a fashion label.

### 8.1.9 TOSSIJN

Koen Tossijn is founder of Atelier Tossijn. Koen studied Fashion and Textile at the Royal Academy of Art The Hague, after he worked for a private label company that produced for companies like WE and Coolcat. In 2009 he started to create made-to-measure jeans, with the aim to compose a broader collection with basics. Since April 2017, his first brick and mortar shop TOSSIJN is located in the bustling Zeedijk in the city center. What TOSSIJN stands for is reflected in its tagline: ‘The New Standard. Making ordinary products on another level’. About denim, Koen said:

“It is a beautiful fabric, but denim is for many people an alternative for fashion. It is an anti-thing, and it will always be an anti-thing”.

The positioning of Amsterdam as a denim city, claiming jeans, is according to him an “[invented] answer to a lack of culture, a lack of fashion culture”. Koen indicated that the main reason to establish Atelier Tossijn in Amsterdam is because he was born and raised in Amsterdam, it is his hometown, where he feels at home and where his family lives. About his current label Koen said:

“This story has more potential on an international level than in Amsterdam. Amsterdam is too small to position such a niche story as this. I would have preferred to do this in London, but there was no chance of that.”

On 29 November 2018, Koen informed his community that he will be closing TOSSIJN on 31 December 2018.

## 8.2 Place-based associations, inspiration, branding and marketing

### 8.2.1 Amsterdam as an attractive living and working environment

Amsterdam offers the respondents an attractive place for living and working. The small-scale and friendly, open character of Amsterdam in combination with its international allure and ample opportunities to enjoy life are common associations that most of the respondents have. Jason Denham articulated this as follows:

“When I first moved here I came from London, and I thought okay Amsterdam is a tiny little village, never gonna work for me. [...] A lot of people talk about Berlin and all this kind of places as being great cool creative places, but I think Amsterdam really is a leader in that. [...] Even though it’s small, you have incredible venues and you can see every band in the world in a beautiful intimate venue or in a big scale venue which has since been built while I have been here. But also the art and culture and festivals and everything that is going on.”

The five respondents who said something about the rent they pay for their office or studio in Amsterdam (Lennaert Nijgh, Tony Tonnaer, Leon Blok, Koen Tossijn, and Celia Geraedts) all share the idea that the amount they pay is not cheap but reasonable for Amsterdam. Celia indicated that thanks to the awarded Sociale Helden starters subsidy they were able to start with Blue Print Amsterdam on the location Ferdinand Huyckstraat. The subsidy enabled her to pay the rent for the first year. She regrets however that for living, Amsterdam has become way too expensive and that as a result it “repulses creative people”. Tony confirms that facilities are what starting entrepreneurs in Amsterdam need. As a response on the question what they need the most, he answered:

“Creating facilities. Give them some starting capital and working space. Make sure they have that space and that they can afford it. In the meantime we can afford our office, but cheap in Amsterdam is still €6.000 per month. When you start, you just don’t have this money. Create creative hubs, a creative denim hub or flexible working space in Denim City for example, for young designers to start working there and have their own little showroom.”

### **8.2.2 Place and symbolic power**

There is only one Amsterdam: it is truly a unique place. The respondents in this study all expressed how they are personally engaged with the city. This is relevant, because as entrepreneurs in a creative industry they are likely to integrate symbolic knowledge as they extract it from their own surroundings into their final products. In the end, this may even influence the aesthetic component of their products. This symbolic power can be found in a variety of appearances, both tangible and intangible. It can for example reside in the local spirit and the urban atmosphere, in history and traditions, but also in the built environment or in an image or reputation.

The casual lifestyle and the corresponding clothing style of the Dutch have been brought up by some of the entrepreneurs as a reason why denim is big in Amsterdam and the Netherlands. Besides being ‘casual’, Amsterdam has been described by some as having the image of being an open and welcoming city that offers ample business opportunities. Jason Denham embraces this as a British-born Amsterdammer, and as the founder of his firm:

“We are very open to all the nationalities coming here and doing business with us.”

Symbolic knowledge can also be found in the reputation of Amsterdam and in its image as a denim capital. The city has been described by some of the respondents as a small-sized but international city, which both were seen as positive characteristics.

“Amsterdam has a cosmopolitan character, but you cross the city from east to west on your bike in only 30 minutes” (Lennaert Nijgh).

“Amsterdam, [...] fairytale-like, beautiful, [...], international and young. [...] Amsterdam is also a sweet city. [...] It is friendly, everything is so cute. It’s not a big international city, because it feels like a village and I like that. It is very personal, unlike cities such as New York, and that is quite special, that’s beautiful.” (Mick Keus)

The power of Amsterdam’s international name or fame has also been mentioned by Celia Geraedts and Tony Tonnaer, who both see this as a benefit for their work:

“What Amsterdam gives me is its international reputation. I could run my business in Maastricht and indicate that I am from Maastricht, but that doesn’t really do it.” (Celia)

“Internationally, people find Amsterdam an interesting city. That helps, and that influenced my choice to locate in Amsterdam”. (Tony)

While some respondents commented on the fact that this image of being a denim capital has been constructed, it can also support entrepreneurs in doing their business. The entrepreneurs expressed some different views upon this image of Amsterdam. Jason Denham for example indicates that he truly supports this statement:

“And it’s kind of known that there is like two denim capitals in the world, the denim capital of the world being Tokyo, and definitely the denim capital of Europe which I have been promoting and saying for a long time, is Amsterdam.”

Koen Tossijn considers the denim image of Amsterdam from a different angle:

“An image of Amsterdam that doesn’t really bear a relation with reality has been created. [...] Since the serious city-marketing efforts of IAMsterdam it has become so enormously crowded in the city. Amsterdam needs to be everything. We have the craziest festivals such as the Amsterdam Light Festival. It really doesn’t make sense but it’s all tremendously marketed. Amsterdam has become a brand, and denim is just one part of it.”

Celia Geraedts expressed this label of Amsterdam as a denim capital as “practically just powerful bluff” and Lennaert Nijgh said it is “mainly created for outward promotion” but that “it works well for the industry”. At the same time, he also stated that Amsterdam has “very organically developed into one of the most important places for when you are doing something with denim”. Ewout Key Rameijer also stated why he believes Amsterdam has that image of being a denim capital:

“Indeed, the City of Amsterdam is really promoting this. But it is also a set of circumstances: the geographical location and the infrastructure, the workers that are here, and the presence of international firms such as Pepe Jeans, Tommy Hilfiger and Calvin Klein here in Amsterdam.”

Amsterdenim seems a brand that relies on the history and historical visual aspects of the city and on associations with ‘other typical Amsterdam’ products. Ewout Key Rameijer gave some examples of these references which he included in his promotional material:

“In our previous brochure, we had an image of the Gouden Bocht (Golden Bend) and the Rijksmuseum, and we told the story. We also had a version in which we included an advertisement of Van Dobben *bitterballen* next to our ‘Willem’ shirt. So King Willem, *bitterbal*, a nice beer... [...] This really gives that *gezellige* Amsterdam feeling, where we are part of. So it’s not just jeans, but it is also apple pie, *bitterballen*, Amsterdam onions, and yes, that really works for the international market.”

Jason Denham briefly referred to the trading history of Amsterdam as well, but more in a comparative way of doing business back then and now:

“I mean, effectively, we are the same as those Dutch trading companies from 100 years ago. We trade our business from here, but we are connecting all over the world with the center of it here in Amsterdam.”

Ewout also voiced that Amsterdam itself is already a strong brand name. He hopes that that reflects upon his brand. No other respondents indicated that they consciously use the visual setting of Amsterdam in the creative process; however, through inspiration or a bit of branding or marketing ‘Amsterdam’ may still become part of the product (see paragraph 8.2.3). While in the case of Amsterdenim the origin of place is visibly traceable in the product, Lennaert Nijgh indicated he sees the influence of place in a different and broader sense – he looks at this from a style perspective:

“I don’t think our style is typical Dutch, or typical Amsterdam – it’s North European. Not European in general, because those Italians are doing quite something else. They have a rather tacky style [...] Think of Dolce & Gabbana, who make those tacky distressed jeans for years now. When you look at what’s happening in the north of Europe, in the Netherlands and in Scandinavia, that is a cleaner style.”

This suggests that the notion of place can indeed influence the aesthetics of a product. A reference to this influence of place and the local ‘zeitgeist’ (as reflected in the concepts of style and sustainability) was also made by Tony Tonnaer:

“In the north of Italy, a lot of denim is produced. Many denim brands are located there, Diesel, Replay... I see those brands as the old generation of denim brands. Amsterdam is more into this new generation of brands with Denham, Scotch & Soda, G-Star, and Kings of Indigo. This is the future of denim. [...] Sweden also has a number of denim brands and they are somehow comparable with Amsterdam: sustainability is also a hot topic and they are Nordic oriented.”

While a brand as Amsterdenim is incorporating ‘Amsterdam history’ in its branding and marketing, the notions of sustainability and innovation as part of the symbolic power of Amsterdam seem more relevant for the entrepreneurs involved in creating bespoke denim products and firms as Kings Of Indigo, Benzak Denim Developers and Denham the Jeanmaker. Jason Denham spoke about this symbolic relationship between Amsterdam and sustainability as follows:

“The good thing about Amsterdam is the flexibility and the way it moves on and changes trends. [...] Sustainability [...] is a big message with everybody today, but Amsterdam is good at adapting and taking all these kinds of ideas you know. The consciousness and the awareness of what people talk about every day gets bigger and bigger. [...] I see it in the supermarket and I see it in the lifestyle here.”

Tony Tonnaer sees a future for Amsterdam denim in this connection between denim, innovation and sustainability:

“I belief that when Amsterdam would present itself even more on this sustainability theme, as a promoter and as an innovative city concerning denim, they could create an even stronger position as such.”

This aligns with the aspirations of James Veenhoff, who would like to see an Amsterdam convention in place, based on the most important dimensions of innovation and sustainability and signed by ten reputable Amsterdam-based brands (see the interview excerpt on page 52).

### **8.2.3 Place in product**

#### Place in product through inspiration

Place could function as a source of creative inspiration through visual and emotional associations with place people may have. Through inspiration, place could therefore become part of the symbolic product value. The creative entrepreneurs in this study have been asked whether they draw inspiration from being based in Amsterdam, and if so, how. For most, inspiration resides ‘in the air’ and to access it they set an unconscious process in motion. To explain inspiration’s relation with place, or with Amsterdam in particular, seemed a challenging question for most. Most respondents confirmed however that they gain inspiration from being in the city; no one denied that Amsterdam provides inspiration. Moreover, some respondents mentioned that they get inspired by travelling, (old) (denim) garments and the history of denim, in which both the Unites States and Japan play a significant role. Amsterdenim is the only brand in this study that is truly built around associations with Amsterdam. The inspiration for the brand is drawn directly from Amsterdam’s trading history

and the sea, harbor and river Amstel. Through branding and marketing, associations to trade and water can be traced back in the product. It is my interpretation that while the other entrepreneurs understood ‘inspiration’ more as personal or creative inspiration, Ewout Key Rameijer linked ‘inspiration’ from Amsterdam primarily to the brand Amsterdenim and not to his personal engagement with the concept. The following statements illustrate how Amsterdam functions as a place for creative inspiration for Tony Tonnaer, Leon Blok, Mick Keus and Koen Tossijn:

“It is an unconscious process, I live it. Whether it is evening or weekend, jeans are always on my mind. I always look at what people wear and what’s happening. Inspiration can be found in everything. [...] And I like the city. It gives lots of inspiration for what we do as well. The people on the streets in Amsterdam are very diverse, so that is what I like.” (Tony)

“What I make cannot always be traced back to something that I have seen you know. It is just everything that is in your head. Everything you read or watch: it can be art, it can be architecture, people. And not necessarily the style of people, but more their energy, their ways of thinking. My inspiration does not come from Amsterdam in particular, it is a combination of everything: because it comes from the heart, it is everything.” (Leon)

“Amsterdam as a source of inspiration: yes, unconsciously, but for sure. Where you work and live, that’s where you get your inspiration from. But I don’t know how that happens, it’s just there. In people, in the music that I listen to. I am kind of an *einzelgänger*, so yes I am influenced, but I am not sure exactly by whom or by what.” (Mick)

“I get most inspiration from my daily life. And that happens to be here, in Amsterdam. This is where I was born and raised, this is part of my culture.” (Koen)

Lennaert Nijgh looks at old products for new inspiration. Moreover, while in first instance he indicated that he is unconscious of where he gets his inspiration from, he also admits that he should go out more and look for it in Amsterdam:

“I study old things, old jeans, how they are assembled and I look at what’s happening in the market. I do have to admit, I should go into town more often. To be more aware of what’s happening, what people wear, what kind of new shops have opened, what new brands are doing, that kind of things.”

Jason Denham confirms that the city gives him and his team inspiration. Like Lennaert, he “reflects on the history of our industry for design inspiration, to look at old garments, and get inspired by them.” He explained the value of his archive of garments and artefacts:

“So we have a huge archive of old military, all kinds of things. And the archive is basically the inspiration for a lot of things, so here we look at many fashion companies but we look at inspiration from costumes, dresses, tailoring, sportswear, all kinds of things that”.

In addition to the inspirational air of Amsterdam, Tony Tonnaer also draws inspiration from travelling, both for personal and business reasons, and other countries. Related to the denim business, he refers to the United States and Japan as sources of inspiration:

“I believe denim is a global business and in that respect, Japan and America are inspiring countries. You find the heritage, denim work wear, the base of it all, in the States. Japan, the East, they are related to indigo, but in a completely different way. The combination of these two gives us our inspiration.”

Japan functions as a source of inspiration for other respondents too. Place-based associations seem to emphasize the high quality character of products or services. Lennaert Nijgh started his Japan denim line with a small tag in the jeans saying ‘Created in Holland - Crafted in Japan’. After a while, he removed the ‘Created in Holland’ part, as it “did not really add any value in the eyes of my consumers”. However, the ‘Crafted in Japan’ part remained, “because it means something for the production. When people talk about where quality jeans comes from, it is Japan”, according to Lennaert. Celia Geraedts offers indigo dyeing workshops in her studio. The association with Japan is sensible at her place:

“I often hear from people who are part of an indigo workshop, that they ‘feel like they are actually in Japan’. I take that as a huge compliment.”

Leon Blok is also inspired by the Japanese way of working, and his clients may see this reflected in the bespoke jeans created for them:

“My fabrics are from Japan. The way I work is pretty heavily influenced by Japan. Love for the product and the material are always my starting point, it is precision work. On the product level, I share this with the Japanese. I would love to learn more from them and understand their culture better.”

#### Place in product through branding and marketing

The creative entrepreneurs all have established or are responsible for their brands. Positioning the brand so that it appeals to consumers in terms of their needs or wants and expectations is commonly understood as branding, while marketing is about developing a market for the brand that leads to sales. The denim fashion entrepreneurs have been asked whether the notion of Amsterdam, as how they describe it, is part of their branding or marketing activities. It is striking that most of the respondents mentioned that they are proud to be a firm that started and is now rooted in Amsterdam. This has led some to include the word Amsterdam in the name of the firm: Mick Keus chose to add ‘jeans atelier Amsterdam’ to the main name MICK KEUS, and Celia Geraedts named her firm Blue Print Amsterdam. Leon Blok refers to

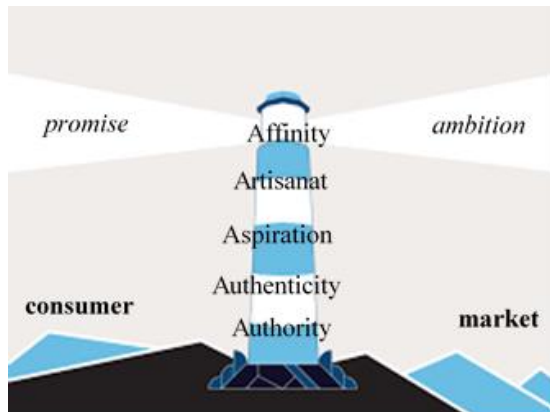
the place of origin of his product in the jeans itself: a label indicates ‘Exclusively made for you in Amsterdam’. While this label is meant as a size tag (the size is ‘exclusively made for you’), the reference to Amsterdam serves as a proud indicator of where it has been made. According to Leon, there is no real maker culture in the Netherlands and there are just a few people who can really make this type of bespoke tailored garments. For Leon, being a maker in Amsterdam, this is a unique selling point. He remarked that he also regularly uses the hashtag #madeinamsterdam on Instagram. Also Tony Tonnaer said he is proud to have an Amsterdam-based brand, although he prefers to brand Kings Of Indigo as an international brand. Lennaert Nijgh recently started to mention Amsterdam on some of his shirts. This suggests a feeling of pride, as the brand mirrors himself: ‘Benzak’ (his nickname), an urban guy from Amsterdam, refers to the origin of the brand with printed words “Benzak - Modern Day Cowboys - Amsterdam” on shirts. Amsterdam and denim are united in the brand name Amsterdenim. Ewout Key Rameijer from Amsterdenim, but also Jason Denham are heavily focused on building a brand. For Amsterdenim, Amsterdam plays a significant role in the immaterial production of symbolic value through marketing. Ewout articulated that as follows:

“Our name is Amsterdenim, we can’t deny this so we better use it. Amsterdam is a pretty strong brand, especially abroad. [...] We have embraced the story of Amsterdam. Look, you can also downplay this whole thing, because this is just a denim jacket, made in Italy. But this is the brand that we are building, this is Amsterdam. Just a piece of Amsterdam, that is what we sell.”

Some of the respondents are not very active in terms of marketing their brands. Lennaert Nijgh (“At the moment it’s a waste of money to organize something for pure marketing reasons, without selling anything”), Leon Blok (“I don’t have a marketing budget”), Koen Tossijn (“Online and my store, that’s it”), Mick Keus (“I am not really into marketing and I am not promoting myself either, because it sells itself very well”) and Celia Geraedts (“A lot is based on word of mouth”) focus differently on finding and expanding their markets where sales can be profitable.

### James Veenhoff about Amsterdam and denim: 'Place in product'

"We [at Fronteer] have developed a marketing model that works for what we want to do. This is a lighthouse, and the lighthouse is the brand; on the left the consumer and on the right the market. Towards the market you express an ambition and to the customer you make a promise. Assuming that you want to be a premium brand, so that you are considered superior to intrinsically equivalent products, we have identified a number of dimensions of premiumness.



#### Lighthouse Brand Development model

Source: Fronteer

Here is *authority*: what proves that you are better? Then there is *authenticity*: why do I believe or trust this brand? And then, *aspiration*: what is cool or fun about this brand, why do I want to associate myself with this? Here, there is *artisanat*: craft, innovation, not so much craft in the retro sense, but how are you as a brand innovative within the definition of the industry? And the highest is *affinity*: why do I identify myself with this brand, or with their meaning or purpose. So in short: - the best, - the real, - the coolest, - the most innovative, and - a brand like me.

Where do the best jeans come from? That's the USA, because the category is California = freedom = rebellion = cowboy, miners, railroads... that's all USA. What is most authentic? Probably also something with the USA. Wrangler, those are authentic brands. Aspiration, that's the segment where the Italian brands are: Diesel and Replay, the fashion jeans. When you talk about craftsmanship, there's Koen and Mick, and Japanese brands such as Evisu. You could say, is it a craft or is it authentic? I don't know. But what makes these Amsterdam brands so interesting is that they can play here, and maybe play here in the sense of sustainable innovation. So coming from Amsterdam is not yet a driver of authority, like 'it's better because it's from Amsterdam'. It is not more real either. It might be cool. That's what Amsterdams Blauw [Scotch & Soda] does, it's cool. What Amsterdam denim is trying to do is, well, they are authentic and from Amsterdam, but Amsterdam does not have that line yet. Look at Red Light Denim [Kings Of Indigo] . It's the first denim with a single origin premium recycled fabric. Single origin, that's interesting, that makes it authentic. In certain segments that's a valuable driver. Origin, but also the raw materials, are important when you are a 'local made' brand. So what we actually do with all those stories is saying 'those Amsterdam brands are doing it all a bit different'. What I really seek to realize is that all Amsterdam brands share basic principles on the most important dimensions of innovation and sustainability. Will that make a pair of pants better? We do not really know. Does it make it more authentic? Maybe for some consumer groups, but it is not the USA you know. But it does indicate that we as Amsterdam-based brands all look at the market in a certain way, and then 'originating from Amsterdam' could be seen as a driver for premiumness."

### 8.3 Experienced benefits from agglomeration

#### 8.3.1 Presence of local, international & global brands, skilled workers and consumers

Today's presence of global (denim) fashion brands, Dutch denim brands which have developed an international presence and local brands in Amsterdam, provides a dynamic labor market with skillful workers. James Veenhoff, co-founder of the House of Denim, believes that the formation of the denim cluster in Amsterdam started in the mid-1990s, when two companies laid the foundation for this development:

“Pepe Jeans London came to Amsterdam in 1996 and that same year, G-Star left the Secon Group. For me, this meant a break with the period before: suddenly two big and ambitious brands with international management started to develop and design from an Amsterdam-based headquarter. That is when Amsterdam started as denim capital. En that is why it is relevant, because those teams, so the Pepe team of 1996 - 1997 - 1998, and the G-Star team from that same period, they have laid the foundation for today's ecosystem.”

Tony Tonnaer commented on this development as follows:

“Nowadays, the right employees can be found in Amsterdam. Because there are so many brands, more and more experienced people join the labor market. When I started at Pepe Jeans in 1997, well, there was Pepe Jeans and G-Star, and nothing else from the denim industry. This made it difficult to find people with the right experience.”

To illustrate how these labor market dynamics could work, I am citing Tony again:

“When I started working for Pepe Jeans, I had zero experience in denim. I learned it all at Pepe, just by doing and by learning from the people there who did have that experience”.

Years later, Lennaert Nijgh contacted Tony when he noticed a new denim brand was about to be launched “by a guy from Amsterdam, who has done quite a number of (denim) things before” (Lennaert, about Tony). Lennaert was thinking about starting his own label, and wanted to ask Tony about his experiences in order to learn from him. Not much later, Tony in turn asked Lennaert to join his new brand, Kings Of Indigo (K.O.I.). Lennaert worked for almost 5 years for K.O.I. before fully committing to his own label Benzak Denim Developers. This illustrates how, as Vinodrai (2006) argued, the (re)production of practices and knowledge flows through the local labor market when highly skilled workers move between firms. Celia Geraedts (Blue Print Amsterdam) stated during the interview that in this denim fashion industry “everybody is switching jobs every 3 to 4 years”. She herself has built up a large professional network in the scene over the years, and she sees people moving between firms.

The fact that larger fashion or denim companies are located in Amsterdam ensures the accumulation of specialized knowledge in the workforce. In addition, the launch of the Jean School, a vocational education institute in Amsterdam which offers one of the first specialized educational programs in denim development, in 2012 and the introduction of a minor in Denim at the Amsterdam Fashion Institute, part of the Amsterdam University of Applied Sciences, in 2013, have been helpful in delivering trained and educated people to the workforce. The Jean School is an idea and initiative of the House of Denim, that created the program in close collaboration with firms from the industry and the ROC van Amsterdam, of which it has become an official program. About this co-creation, James Veenhoff said:

“Co-creation is based on a number of guiding principles, of which ‘select the best’ is the number 1. We have worked with Levi’s, Tommy Hilfiger and G-Star to set up this initiative”. As Lorenzen and Frederiksen (2008) stated, this kind of institutions support the development of skills that are necessary in this specialized industry. Some of the founders of the case firms, such as Jason Denham, Tony Tonnaer and Lennaert Nijgh, play an active role in these institutions. They are involved in the development of the curriculum, give lectures to students, but also take in student denim developers as interns. While students get the chance to learn from experienced denim designers and developers and to start building their network, firms have access to talented graduates and contribute to the formation of a local community of practice. This is one way in which these firms could reduce their search costs for talent (Wenting et al., 2011). The Jean School is located in Denim City, the innovation campus founded by the House of Denim. Denim City also hosts Denim City Lab, a denim R&D center which is “designed to accommodate brands, mills, laundries and other value chain partners together or independently” (<https://denimcity.org>). Tony Tonnaer reflects on the externalities this may bring to professionals:

“I truly believe in hands-on development of denim, and in that sense, the Denim City Lab is a good addition. My development philosophy is ‘as close to home as possible’ and working directly with the producer, from prototype to samples to production. When you work with an international producer which happens to be represented in Denim City Lab, that could be a very good option.”

Indeed, there is no significant production of denim fabric in Amsterdam or in the Netherlands. However, Amsterdam nowadays hosts some representative offices of foreign denim mills. This offers the entrepreneurs who work with foreign denim mills some externalities in terms of lower transaction and time costs (Wenting et al., 2011). Celia Geraedts and Tony Tonnaer referred to the presence of these offices in relation to the benefits they enjoy:

“Because Amsterdam is denim city, many denim mills have their offices in the Netherlands, for the European market. Therefore they now reach out to me Casim is not located in Amsterdam, but ISKO, Soorty, and Orta, they all have offices in Amsterdam. Super convenient.” (Celia)

“Because Amsterdam does have that central role in Europe, a number of denim mills just have their offices here. So Orta, Celik, Candiani, they are all represented, in Denim City or somewhere close. Those people regularly visit us. One of the characteristics of sustainable entrepreneurship is that you build up long-lasting partnerships; these people are also based here in Amsterdam.” (Tony)

Mick Keus also commented on the fact that he is more visible for the media, now that he is located in Amsterdam instead of in The Hague. It is his idea that “people from the media do not travel to The Hague so easily, but they do come to Amsterdam”.

Some of the respondents suggest that the agglomeration of denim fashion firms in Amsterdam relate to the casual lifestyle of Dutch people. While this does not explain the cluster location in Amsterdam per se, having a steady consumer base is a reasonable explanation for the presence of many denim related firms. The Brit Jason Denham formulated it like this:

“I believe that the people in Amsterdam, and it’s not just Amsterdam, it’s the Netherlands, but I think it’s a very casual culture that supports jeans lifestyle. I often say that the Dutch eat jeans for breakfast, lunch and dinner. It’s the culture of all day every day, which is great, I love it. Where I came from, London, people would formal dress suits during the day and they put on their jeans at night, that’s a different kind of thing. But here there is a great appetite for jeans, which is the first things that helps.”

While most of the respondents consider the Netherlands a country without a true fashion culture, they acknowledge the fact that the Netherlands is a country of denim lovers. From affordable and aimed at the mass to expensive and exclusive, denim can be found in every category. Due to the personalized character of their work, those respondents who specialize in bespoke tailoring or designing (Leon Blok, Mick Keus, Koen Tossijn, and Celia Geraedts) are often bound to Amsterdam as the place where they can service their clients. Leon Blok for example illustrates this as follows:

“The quality of life in the Netherlands, in Amsterdam, is obviously very high and I enjoy it very much. However, business-wise I would make a different choice. Look, I either have to make a product which I can sell abroad, or I should start offering more products, with other price levels, or different designs that could sell better locally.”

Although the Netherlands does have many consumers of jeans, those brands with growth ambitions need to look across the border to find larger consumer markets. Denham the Jeanmaker, Kings Of Indigo, and Benzak Denim Developers are already active in other countries; Amsterdenim is currently finding ways to enter new markets. The small local market seems therefore to stimulate the entrepreneurial spirit in the denim cluster.

### **8.3.2 Support from the City of Amsterdam, branch organizations and events**

A support network of institutions and services are part of the creative field to which the entrepreneurs belong. This network appears to have substantial relevance for most respondents, although some seem to use it more actively than others. Not only could some support in establishing new connections and creating relevant networks be helpful, but also offering shop, studio or office spaces against a reasonable rent helps new entrepreneurs them to lift off. To illustrate, Koen Tossijn benefits from the support of the City and opened his shop on the Zeedijk:

“This is something the City of Amsterdam cares about, ensuring that a number of young entrepreneurs can open their shops here [on the Zeedijk]. With Patta, Bonne, Comme des Garçons, and Stüssy this street now reflects the character of Amsterdam. It is different than the Nine Streets area, which is a copy from a copy from a copy, from any other European city.”

Celia Geraedts and her business partner participated in Sociale Helden, an initiative of the City of Amsterdam aimed at social entrepreneurs in need of seed money to realize their plans. They won the available subsidy of €20.000. Celia is thankful for this opportunity:

“With this subsidy we have sustained the first year. We were able to rent this space and buy some basic materials. Because of this, we were able to lift-off. Such an initiative is more than welcome, because if you don’t have €20k on the bank, how do you start? This is super encouraging. It is super cool that Amsterdam says “go and try it out, do it, we believe in you.”

Moreover, the City of Amsterdam also collaborates with foundations such as M-ODE and House of Denim and organizations such as the Amsterdam Denim Days or Modefabriek. The joint organization or support of events stimulates connections among entrepreneurs and with relevant local and international actors. Leon Blok for example participated this summer in a show organized by M-ODE, a foundation that supports talented fashion designers, developers and entrepreneurs who believe in sustainable innovation. He elaborated on what organizations like M-ODE could do for young entrepreneurs:

“They [M-ODE] collaborate with the City of Amsterdam and are therefore able to organize events such as trips to Paris, so that if we would have an interest in launching in France, we could experience and learn how we are best to enter that market.”

Some events that started in Amsterdam have also been exported to other countries over the last few years. The Amsterdam Denim Days has spun off to New York two years ago, and this last fall it landed in Nashville. This enables participating entrepreneurs to present themselves in new markets, start new international networks and strengthen existing local ones. Tony Tonnaer for example has participated in the Amsterdam Denim Days right from the start, and was a participant in the first New York Denim Days. This year, he was invited by the City of Amsterdam to join them during the first Denim Days in Nashville. Tony explains what this support means for him:

“It is the first time the Denim Days are organized in Nashville, it is still in its experimental phase. I am taking this opportunity to meet with our new American distributor and hope to sign our new distribution agreement. It is a good thing that we can show America what we are doing, start making some waves over there. We will show the future of denim on the other continent.”

Kingpins, the denim trade event which originated in the United States, was organized in Amsterdam for the first time in 2014, during the Amsterdam Denim Days. Today, it has become an event which takes place twice a year and always during Denim Days. It seems that getting this leading international event into the Amsterdam denim agenda has been beneficial for most of the respondents. Tony Tonnaer, Lennart Nijgh and Celia Geraedts explained the benefits they see of having this trade show, which functions as a temporary cluster, in town:

“Last week Kingpins took place. People from all over the world are visiting Amsterdam. Previously, they would gather in Paris, where Denim Première Vision was organized. But now they are all in Amsterdam, and I think that’s pretty cool for the city, at least in my opinion it is.” (Tony)

“Before, we always had to go to Paris, which is not bad at all, but it is very easy now to just grab a bike and visit the Gashouder.” (Lennaert)

“Denim Days is the busiest week and time of the year for me. Usually, I have like 4 new clients who want to visit me or do stuff on location. Almost everybody whom I know from my time at Levi’s is in town for Kingpins. That is super nice. And yes, I believe it is very important to maintain this event for Amsterdam.” (Celia)

Since Mick Keus does not need to source denim fabric (he needs used denim jeans), he said about Kingpins:

“Kingpins is certainly a good event, but not relevant or interesting for me. It does not add any value to what I do”.

However, his short-term work for GAP in the United States might have a link with the people that Kingpins brings into town:

“Because of Kingpins, that guy [the head designer] from GAP was in the Netherlands. Because he had to be here for Kingpins, he also came to my jeans atelier. He was very enthusiastic and wanted me to come to the States to pin-off and adjust second-hand GAP jeans that they had bought on eBay, and so it happened.”

### **8.3.3 Infrastructure for knowledge gathering, creation and transfer**

Amsterdam offers the denim fashion industry a relevant infrastructure of firms, workers and specialized services. As Jansson and Power (2010) argued, infrastructures like these are key in the gathering, creation and transfer of industry-relevant symbolic knowledge. Face-to-face communication and buzz can help entrepreneurs access this type of knowledge, which is often set in persons, firms, networks or the local context. In the previous paragraph, the important role of social and professional networks and of events such as Kingpins and the Amsterdam Denim Days have already been described. These events function as temporary clusters, in which buzz and face-to-face communication take place in a short period of time. Buzz is also present in permanent clusters. Lennaert Nijgh for example had earlier found his job at Kings Of Indigo because he had heard through buzzing that someone was starting a new brand (being Kings Of Indigo) in Amsterdam. Bathelt et al. (2004) mentioned that both firms and talents on the labor market could benefit from buzz, as it brings them together with lower search costs. Lennaert also clearly described the importance of currently being located in Amsterdam in terms of buzz:

“I know that everything happens here [in Amsterdam]. If there is one place where you should be to stay informed, it is here. For denim for sure. I am very afraid I will miss the boat, when I would be located somewhere else. Or that I would be too remote from what is happening, that I don’t know what’s going on. Despite the fact that I do not always actively go out and see what’s happening in the city, it certainly rubs off on me.”

Not only buzz functions as a pipeline of transporting knowledge in, through and out of the cluster. The cluster is also globally linked to knowledge and ideas by global pipelines such as branches of multinationals or international airports. This physical infrastructure carries importance for the entrepreneurs as well in terms of knowledge and reduced costs. Again, there is no significant production of denim fabric in Amsterdam or in the Netherlands. Most

entrepreneurs who rely on these fabrics and/or on the production of denim or other garments, commented on the proximity of the international airport as a benefit of being based in Amsterdam. Visiting denim mills that produce the fabric and possibly turn the fabric into garments is essential for these entrepreneurs, especially when quality and sustainability are important values for the entrepreneur, as it builds trust and long-lasting relationships. For example, Denham the Jeanmaker has offices in 4 countries, a growing global retail network and production facilities in among others Europe and Asia. Jason Denham enjoys benefits of having the international airport near:

“I spend a lot of time in Asia and I travel around Korea and Japan and China and all these places where we are developing our business model. We do manufacturing in Japan so I am running around there, but I am also manufacturing in Italy, I am running around in Portugal, in Europe. From here, I can get anywhere in one flight pretty much so it’s fantastic. The airport and the infrastructure is great, even though Amsterdam is a small city.”

Tony Tonnaer also acknowledged the proximity of the seaport and the possibilities for road transport in Europe in relation to its sustainability mission. Kings Of Indigo sells in 12 countries, produces in the Mediterranean, and sources fabrics from Europe and Asia. He said:

“The infrastructure is super. From here I take a tram, then 7 minutes by train to Schiphol, super easy. We produce in Greece, Italy, Tunisia, Portugal, that’s 2 hours by plane.”

And about getting the garments to Amsterdam:

“We use truck traffic and shipping. No flights, that is also sustainable. It is close by, it is flexible, and easy to reach.”

For the local entrepreneurs who rely on clients visiting them in their studios, the local infrastructure seems to be more important. Mick Keus, Leon Blok and Celia Geraedts commented on the easy accessibility of their studios.

“Amsterdam is compact, people can reach me by bike. That won’t happen in other big cities, such as Berlin.” (Mick)

“Customers who are not from Amsterdam, could just go to Amsterdam Central Station, and from there it is only two bus stops or 20 minutes walking. That is an advantage.” (Leon)

“People always enjoy visiting me in Lijnden. At first, they think it’s inconvenient but it is super easy. You just take tram 1 and in 15 minutes you arrive” (Celia)

## 9. Key findings

In order to support the understanding of why denim fashion entrepreneurs locate in Amsterdam, the previous chapter presented the insights resulting from the qualitative study into their locational behavior. In an attempt to prioritize the factors that influenced the location decisions of the entrepreneurs in terms of chronology and importance, the key findings which are part of the general storyline that emerged from the data are summarized in this chapter.

Overall, the results of the empirical investigation confirm and strengthen the earlier found theoretical insights as presented in paragraph 5.1 to a large extent. Theories on agglomeration economies, the creative class and spinoff dynamics should indeed be seen as complementary to and interwoven with each other, with a prominent role for human relationships and place.

Especially the theory on spinoff dynamics, theorized by among others Klepper (2007), Wenting (2008) and Boschma (2015), seems to explain the spatial formation of the denim fashion industry in Amsterdam over the last decade. All founders of the case firms have gained previous working experience in the (denim) fashion industry in Amsterdam before starting their own firms. While the founders of Amsterdenim and MICK KEUS founded their firms elsewhere before relocating to Amsterdam, all others started their firms in Amsterdam. Based on this finding, I argue that inherited experience and knowledge from the parent firm and being part of a relevant network stimulated these entrepreneurs to create their own firms, often with a replication of routines.

The results also theoretically suggest that Florida's creative class theory (2002) applies. The respondents confirmed the existence of an attractive people's climate, which kept them in Amsterdam after they were born and raised here, had come here to pursue higher education, or had been relocated here for professional reasons. Their preferences for starting a business in Amsterdam are strongly driven by personal motives to reside in Amsterdam. Most respondents confirmed that Amsterdam offers them an environment that fits their ideas of having a good life. While the cost of housing is not considered very attractive by most, the urban amenities, such as the offer in arts and culture, and the small-scale but diverse, open and international character of Amsterdam matches with their values, aesthetics, lifestyles and consumption.

An additional factor is the evolving character of the denim cluster in terms of reputation and benefits to be gained. The results showed that most entrepreneurs located in the cluster benefit from the growing reputation of Amsterdam as a denim city, from opportunities to network in and outside the denim scene, and from the urban buzz. Networking events such as the Kingpins trade show are highly valued by those involved. Moreover, the presence of a skilled workforce is seen by most as an important driver of cluster development. The respondents profit from this too; sometimes as an individual worker being part of that workforce and sometimes as a firm looking for skilled workers. Finally, to a greater or lesser extent depending on the core business of the firm, the proximity of consumers, buyers, (fashion) media and local representative offices of foreign suppliers or manufacturers are considered benefits of the location in the cluster. These results broadly correspond with an earlier study of Wenting et al. (2011) into the locational behavior and economic success of Dutch fashion design entrepreneurs.

Whereas these existing theories have been tested, the theoretical suggestion that the symbolic power of place may be an additional factor for creative entrepreneurs when considering the location of their firm, has also been explored in this study. The idea has been put forward that entrepreneurs who would tap into this source of symbolic power could increase their competitive advantage and enjoy economic benefits. As a consequence, cluster locations would attract creative firms and entrepreneurs. The results shows no convincing evidence that the development of the cluster is significantly affected by this. The results from the interviews indicated however a variety of place-based emotional responses, images and associations which were also implicitly or explicitly connected with products, firms, or the denim fashion scene in general. Some of the entrepreneurs voiced that they experience a positive and motivating feeling of pride – pride in ‘being from Amsterdam’ - as a result from the fact that the city provided them the context to start their firms. They found different ways of recognizing this pride in their work. While one of the case firms is conspicuously referring to Amsterdam in its branding and marketing, the other firms are more subtle in their references to the place of origin. However, it seems that all entrepreneurs are somehow and to some extent processing their personal and professional engagement with the city in their products and firms. Scott (2000) suggested that as a result of the play of history, agglomeration and locational specialization, post-Fordist places can have powerful identities. Although Amsterdam as a second-tier fashion city does not have a long history in fashion, a careful conclusion of this study may be that the presence of these engaged denim fashion entrepreneurs contributes to the gradual rise of Amsterdam’s identity as a fashion city.

## CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The aim of this study is to enrich established theories related to the spatial formation of clusters in the creative industries with new insights into the locational behavior of creative entrepreneurs as they engage with place as a way to increase their competitive position. These insights have been presented as the results from the empirical research in Chapter 8 and interpreted and summarized as key findings in Chapter 9. In this final part of the thesis, a concluding answer to the main research question why denim fashion entrepreneurs locate in Amsterdam and to what extent their locational behavior can be explained by the symbolic power of place will be given. Moreover, some stronger and weaker points of this study are indicated and a suggestion for further research is made.

In sum, I found that most of the creative entrepreneurs had started their firm after they had gained professional experience in one or more Amsterdam-based firms in the same industry. The proposition that spinoffs tend to locate close to their parents has been to a large extent confirmed in the case of the Amsterdam denim cluster. This may be regarded as the main answer on the research question; however, an explanation why they tend to locate close to their parent firm clarifies their motivations. The small but international character of Amsterdam enables the rather casual formation of social and professional networks and offers the entrepreneurs an open, diverse and dynamic place to work and live. Often, they have successfully built up their social life and have family and friends in the same location. Hence, spinoff dynamics, supported by attractive urban amenities and ample opportunities to exchange knowledge within these networks, are therefore likely to contribute to the spatial formation of the denim fashion industry in Amsterdam. For the second part of the research question, the role of place in terms of symbolic power has been explored. The creative entrepreneurs have not indicated that the symbolic power of place has been a decisive factor in their location choice. However, different examples have been discussed in which the entrepreneurs engaged with place through place-based associations, narratives, and images. This, in combination with the firming of Amsterdam's distinctiveness as a denim fashion city and its more general identity as a fashion city, may in the future give reason for a renewed study on the role of place in the symbolic production of fashion in Amsterdam. This study could then focus on the relationship between place, power and identity, and how the fashion industry relate to this. This may give a better understanding on strategies to develop second-tier fashion cities.

One of the strong points of this study is that it has attempted to look at different explanations for the spatial formation of the denim cluster, ranging from established business and personal motives behind the locational behavior of entrepreneurs, to a lesser explored motive, namely the symbolic power of place. This presented a novel way of studying the clustering of creative industries. While this approach does not exclude certain pertinent theories, the broad exploration has also blurred the ranking order of motivations. The question remains how exactly the main motivation of the entrepreneur to locate in Amsterdam came into being. This study has explored the motivations and has given exemplary insights, but it is unable to define exact reasons. Moreover, because it is also a study into human behavior, which is not the field of expertise of a cultural economist, the process of collecting, analyzing and interpreting data may be flawed. While semi-structured interviews were considered the most appropriate method to collect data, the variety of firms and the different courses the interviews took make a comparison of the data problematic and a general conclusion difficult to make. Notwithstanding all of this, this study has given us a better understanding of the role of place in the undertakings of creative entrepreneurs. There lies much potential in the symbolic power of place for those who are involved in the symbolic production of fashion.

From the findings on the locational behavior of Amsterdam-based denim fashion entrepreneurs, also some recommendations follow. Offering an attractive business environment in combination with appealing urban amenities is key in attracting global and international brands. As these firms produce successful spinoffs, city authorities are advised to keep their efforts in maintaining reputable firms in Amsterdam high. Investing in an attractive business climate and urban amenities may further increase the city's attractiveness to firms and talents. Local entrepreneurship should be supported by providing suitable workspace against reasonable rent. International entrepreneurship could also be supported as I discovered a need to access a broader consumer market but a lack of knowhow how to among some of the entrepreneurs. The domestic market is rather small and the results show that the entrepreneurs are either already active on foreign markets or have aspirations to start doing so. An investigation into how local makers, who do not easily transpose their business model to international markets, can be supported to make this transition from the national to international markets may contribute to their economic success and the reputation of Amsterdam as a fashion city. The involvement of city authorities in organizing industry-related events and facilitating networking through events such as Kingpins is highly appreciated and seems to contribute to the success of the entrepreneurs and the denim cluster. Supporting local-global connections and networking is relevant and should be continued.

Students from the Jean School can be advised to make full use of the professional network of the school by taking up meaningful internships, joining international study trips and actively participating in network events. Moreover, topping this program off with a study at the Amsterdam Fashion Institute brings in a valuable additional skills and knowledge set. Graduates from these programs are advised to gain pre-entry experience first when they aspire to start their own firms.

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## APPENDICES

## Appendix I. Overview main developments Amsterdam denim cluster

(continues on page 71)

founded in Amsterdam													
HQ established in Amsterdam													
Sales office or other established in Amsterdam													
founded in MRA (excl. Amsterdam)													
HQ established in MRA (excl. Amsterdam)													
founded in NL (excl. MRA)													
HQ established in NL (excl. MRA)													
					</								

Source: own investigation, based on publicly available, online information.  
 Provided for information purposes only.

[illegible]

## **Appendix IIa. Example of request for interview (main participants)**

Dear Jason,

My name is Annemarie, and I am writing a thesis about the development of Amsterdam as an international 'denim capital'. The thesis is part of my studies in Cultural Economics and Entrepreneurship at the Erasmus Universiteit Rotterdam. I am looking at factors that influence the decision of designers and entrepreneurs in the denim industry to locate in Amsterdam.

For the results of the research it would be great if I could include Denham the Jeanmaker. Would you be interested and available in July for an interview? In approx. 45-60 minutes I would like to ask you a few questions on your company and the reasons why your HQ is in Amsterdam, and also on the role that 'Amsterdam' plays in your branding and marketing.

I hope you are interested in participating. I am sure we will then find a suitable moment sometime next month. Of course, if you appreciate it, I will be happy to share the general end results with you.

Best wishes,

Annemarie

## **Appendix IIb. Example of request for interview (secondary participant)**

Beste James,

Mijn naam is Annemarie, en ik ben bezig met het schrijven van een scriptie over de ontwikkeling van Amsterdam als internationale denimstad. Dat doe ik voor mijn opleiding Cultural Economics and Entrepreneurship aan de Erasmus Universiteit Rotterdam. Ik onderzoek daarvoor welke factoren een rol spelen bij de keuze van denim ondernemers/designers voor Amsterdam als vestigingslocatie.

Tot nu toe hebben Mick Keus, Koen Tossijn, Jason Denham, Ewout Key Rameijer, Lennaert Nijgh en Celia Geraedts meegedaan, en staan er net verzoeken uit voor een interview bij Sophie Hardeman en Leon Blok. Van Menno van Meurs en Tony Tonnaer heb ik helaas nog geen positieve reactie gehad; mocht ik hen er tzt nog bij kunnen betrekken dan zou dat super zijn. Ik ondervraag dus ondernemers/designers die rond 2008 of later zijn gestart in Amsterdam.

Voor het resultaat van het onderzoek zou het heel mooi zijn wanneer ik ook input van The House of Denim kan meenemen. Het onderzoek gaat echt over de clustervorming, en The House of Denim heeft daar een enorme rol in gespeeld. Ik zou dan ook graag een keer een afspraak met je willen maken. Het is vast een hele drukke tijd nu, met o.a. de Amsterdam Denim Days die er aan komen, maar wie weet... misschien kunnen we wat tijd vinden ergens de komende weken. Het interview zal ongeveer een uur duren.

Ik hoop dat je aan mijn onderzoek wilt meedoen. Ik kan in ieder geval op 23, 24, 27, 28 of 31 oktober of 1 of 2 november naar jou toe komen – zit hier iets bij? Uiteraard wil ik de eindresultaten graag delen!

Hartelijke groet,

Annemarie van Vliet

**Appendix III. Example of factsheet**

Enterprise	[name]
Location	[address] [about the location]
Website / Instagram / Facebook	[website address] [Instagram account] [Facebook page]
Logo	[insert logo] [about the logo]
Foundation	[year of foundation]
Respondent	[name/job title of respondent] [about the respondent]
Company/brand name / tagline	[name of company/brand] [tagline, if any]
About	[about the company]
Interview	[date, address, expected language, proposed duration]

**Appendix IV. Example of interview guideline (main participants; English version)**

<b>Semi-structure of the interview</b>
<b>I. Introduction</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Express appreciation for meeting</li> <li>- Introduce myself briefly and explain the research topic</li> <li>- Explain the set-up and envisioned duration of the interview</li> <li>- Ask permission to record the interview</li> </ul>
<b>II. Body</b>
<b>a. About the firm</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Which products (product lines) and brands do you carry?</li> <li>- What does your brand stand for (what are its core brand values)? [examples to mention in case respondent for example misunderstands question: e.g. craftsmanship, creativity, simplicity, sustainability, customer-orientation, exclusivity...]</li> <li>- What are your core activities [check: design, tailoring, production, marketing, sales]</li> <li>- Have you been setting up collaborations with other companies in Amsterdam?</li> </ul>
<b>II-b. About the product</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- What does 'denim' stand for according to you, in 5 words?</li> </ul>
<b>II-c. About the city</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- How would you typify the DNA of the city of Amsterdam, in 5 words?</li> <li>- [Introduction to question: 'According to Amsterdam Marketing, Amsterdam's core values are creativity, innovation, and trade spirit. Amsterdam has a rich history, unique cultural offer, tradition of freedom and tolerance, international outlook, world-class icons, diverse corporate world, and is a place where people live, learn, research and work and where visitors feel at home'.] Thinking about what the local culture, reputation, traditions or narratives of Amsterdam mean to you, how relevant or important are they in your business?</li> <li>- Does being located in the city of Amsterdam gives your brand a feel of [repeat named brand values here], maybe even a back-story, and if so, could you explain this?</li> <li>- Do you believe that Amsterdam is a true international denim city, and why (not)?</li> <li>- Do you use the visual urban environment of Amsterdam as a source of inspiration for your work, and if so, how?</li> </ul>
<b>II-d. Brand communication and marketing</b>

- Is the name 'Amsterdam' or any reference to this place used somewhere in your communication or branding? [mention when necessary: e.g. in advertising campaigns, in the name of the firm, in the brand or product lines, in posts on Instagram, on product labels in your product,...]
- Which brand channels in Amsterdam do you use to communicate your brand value? [mention as example when necessary: flagship/pop-up stores, showrooms, events (Amsterdam Denim Days, Kingpins Show, ModeFabriek, Amsterdam Fashion Week), organizations (e.g. House of Denim), partnerships, on buildings or other physical visual urban elements]
- Which opportunities does the city of Amsterdam offer you to communicate the (immaterial) value of your brand, and if so how?
<b>II-e. Motivation for location</b>
- Why did you/the firm choose to locate in Amsterdam?
- How important has the reputation (+/-) of Amsterdam as a fashion city been in your decision to locate here? And as a denim city?
- [Make sure the following topics will be covered. If this does not come back in the answers on other questions, ask for example how important the following items have been in the decision to locate in Amsterdam? [explain that respondent should briefly react on the following statements; leave out topics that have already been discussed]] <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ It is important for my brand value to be located in Amsterdam</li> <li>○ I experience economies of scale, e.g. by sharing facilities</li> <li>○ I can collaborate with other designers and creative entrepreneurs</li> <li>○ I feel at home in Amsterdam</li> <li>○ I need to feel the buzz of the city</li> <li>○ I enjoy how Amsterdam looks with its canals, its buildings, parks, etc.</li> <li>○ Amsterdam gives me creative inspiration</li> <li>○ Amsterdam offers learning opportunities</li> <li>○ In Amsterdam I discover new consumer trends on the street</li> <li>○ In Amsterdam informal exchange of knowledge with other designers and (creative) entrepreneurs is possible</li> <li>○ In Amsterdam I can relax</li> </ul>
- And how important were the following factors? [explain that respondent should briefly react on the following factors; leave out factors that have already been discussed]

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ The rental costs for office/store</li> <li>○ Dutch tax system</li> <li>○ Location close to the harbor and airport</li> <li>○ Employment opportunities</li> <li>○ The (quality and size of the) local labor market</li> <li>○ Consumers are in Amsterdam</li> <li>○ Competitors are in Amsterdam</li> <li>○ Suppliers are in Amsterdam</li> <li>○ I have my friends/social network in Amsterdam</li> <li>○ I have my family network in Amsterdam</li> <li>○ Presence of a community of creative workers</li> <li>○ Amsterdam is open-minded and tolerant</li> <li>○ Diversity of people</li> <li>○ Diversity of lifestyles</li> <li>○ Diverse and extensive cultural setting</li> <li>○ Amsterdam's vibrant nightlife</li> </ul>
- Are you satisfied with your current business location [talk about the Amsterdam HQ when firm has more locations]? Why (not)?
- Have you considered locating the firm to another place?
- What would you miss (as a firm) when you would be located outside Amsterdam?
- Looking at the globalized and digitized world of business, do you think a physical location is still important for your business? Why (not)?
<b>III. Conclusion</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Check for coverage of all topics</li> <li>- Make room for additional comments from the respondent</li> <li>- Ask permission to transcribe the interview and disclose participation</li> <li>- Ask respondent if he want to be informed about the results</li> <li>- Indicate the timeframe of the research</li> <li>- Conclude the interview by thanking the respondent</li> </ul>