Keeping up appearances:
A comparative analysis of Rotterdam city branding with local perception

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ABSTRACT

This thesis aims to contrast city branding and city identity in the perception of Rotterdam locals, examining how these two aspects align and differ in shaping the image and cultural life of the city. The research adopts a two-step analysis, first analysing branding documents and subsequently contrasting city branding with city identity, with the residents' perception of Rotterdam. This qualitative research establishes city branding through Rotterdam's: cultural policies, branding, and slogan. The study compared the city's branding with nine locals' perceptions of the city. The main research question addressed in this study is: Does Rotterdam's city the branding documents of Rotterdam align with locals' perception of the city? While the general branding of the city emphasised the city's uniqueness, cultural branding reveals a focus towards fostering community bonds and a sense of belonging. However, despite, the analysis also uncovered a lack of integration and neighbourhood segregation, which interviewees identified as a significant issue in both cultural and everyday life. The research explores how this lack of integration is manifested in the division of neighbourhoods, resulting in the formation of distinct creative clusters. Furthermore, the thesis investigates the alignment and divergence between city branding and city identity in representing Rotterdam's cultural life. Both city branding and identity exhibit a strong emphasis on Rotterdam's architecture and the imperative to create an inclusive cultural environment. However, they differ in their portrayal of the city's nightlife, with locals expressing the need for a thriving nightlife while the municipality neglected its promotion. The tensions arising from these misalignments underscored the dangers of ineffective city branding and misrepresentation of city identity. While Rotterdam's city branding aligned with its identity in various aspects, particularly in its portrayal as a raw and bold city with modern architecture, addressing the disparities in the entrepreneurial sector and nightlife is crucial. City branders must acknowledge the significance of Rotterdam's nightlife and accurately depict it in the city's branding efforts.

KEYWORDS: City branding, city identity, city image, Rotterdam locals

Contents

1.Introduction

In the race to capture attention and attract visitors in a globalised world, city branding has become ever more important for local authorities. City branding weaves narratives and visuals to create compelling stories designed to entice and engage. Through carefully crafted marketing of visual and cultural identities, it moulds the image and reputation of cities, enticing visitors and cultivating a sense of city identity.

Globalisation has increased competition between cities, forcing them to become more appealing, inviting and authentic. City branding has become essential to create attractive destinations (Riza et al, 2012). By promoting their individuality, places can differentiate themselves from others and foster economic growth by attracting investments (Gilboa et al., 2015; Haapala, 2003). Cities thus need to be distinctive and stand out. Authenticity is an important factor in efficient city branding: effective city branding needs to communicate authentic city identity (Nieuwland & Lavanga, 2021). Authenticity within city branding is accurately marketing the city and its people. At the same time, it has become harder for cities to maintain their uniqueness with increasing gentrification and globalisation (Nieuwland & Lavanga, 2021). Given the central role that city identity takes on between competing cities, a difficult balance needs to be maintained between portraying cities and locals accurately and crafting a flattering image. This equilibrium is necessary to create a good relationship between tourists and locals, but it is also important to become and remain an attractive destination (Kaefer, 2021). If that balance is not reached or obtained, it can have multiple adverse effects. Tourists may feel misled and disappointed, making it unlikely that they return or incite others to visit.

Moreover, when city branding focuses too much on attracting tourists, it may lead to over-tourism. This not only affects the tourists' experience but also introduces tensions between visitors and locals. This can be attributed to various factors including increased prices, noise pollution, waste generation, and the displacement of non-tourism-related facilities (Kavaratzis, 2009). Representing city identity in city branding attracts tourists that are interested in the specific qualities of the city and portrays the city in ways that locals can proudly relate to. The challenge lies in finding the balance between authenticity and attracting economic development.

The goal of city branding is not only to increase the inflow of tourists and investment but also to cultivate its city identity (Kavaratzis, 2004). City branding can be used to foster and enhance the bond of its community. City branding has often neglected city identity and

the importance of local input in favour of focusing solely on an external audience. For example, a city branding campaign was launched in Hamburg, Germany, in 2009 to establish the city as the capital of arts and culture. Locals felt the campaign offered an unrealistic depiction of the city, as it entirely ignored the economic disparity of the city. Consequently, locals created an online campaign to oppose the city branding (Yilmaz, 2019). This demonstrates the strong tensions that can arise when city branding misrepresents city identity in order to attract international visitors and investments.

This thesis focuses on the long-neglected locals and their perception of city branding and identity. This research focuses on the city of Rotterdam, which has successfully changed its identity from a post-industrial city to the capital of culture (Belabas et al., 2020). Rotterdam succeeded in its project of putting culture at the centre of its identity as evidenced by the fact the city was selected as the 'Cultural Capital of Europe' in 2001 (Cohendet et al., 2010). Since then, Rotterdam has continued to strive to maintain its image as a city of culture. This project dates back to the 1980s through 'Revitalising Rotterdam', with the aim to improve the quality of life by boosting the creative economy (Nieuwland & Lavanga, 2021). Among other things, the project focused on developing large cultural infrastructures such as the *Kunsthal* in 1992, the *Erasmusbrug* in 1996 and the *Markthal* in 2014. These infrastructures have become landmarks of the city skyline – they are reference points for navigation as well as tangible symbols of the city's history, culture, achievements, and aspirations (Nientied, 2018). These monuments helped shape the identity of the city of Rotterdam (Cheshmehzangi, 2020). Buildings and monuments often become symbols of civic pride and identity. They represent the collective achievements and values of a community (Kaefer, 2021). Citizens develop a strong emotional attachment to these structures, fostering a sense of belonging and unity. For example, the Sydney Opera House is a symbol of Australia's cultural achievements and is highly revered by Australians (Kaefer, 2021).

This thesis investigates whether the city identity established in Rotterdam's branding (*Rotterdamse Cultuurvisie 2018, DNA Rotterdam* and *Make it Happen mentality*) aligns with locals' perception of the city. This research analyses the cultural and identity policies of Rotterdam and contrasts them with locals' city identity. The following research question guides the inquiry:

Does Rotterdam's city branding align with locals' sense of perception of the city?
This research question has been divided into the following sub-questions:

a) *How do locals perceive the city of Rotterdam?*

b) *How does Rotterdam's city branding portray the city of Rotterdam?*

c) How do locals perceive the city branding?

Each sub-research question focuses on one of the three theoretical concepts of this research: city identity, city branding and city image. The first sub-research question addresses how locals perceive the city itself: city identity. The second sub-research question establishes Rotterdam's branding. This research used three documents that focused on various aspects of branding, all official documents issued by Rotterdam City: a cultural policy document, a branding document that defines the essence of Rotterdam's DNA and a document that discusses the slogan of the city. Together they offer an insight into Rotterdam's city branding. The last question establishes the city's image. City image is the perception of city branding. Thus, the question will investigate how the locals perceive city branding. The analysis of these sub-research questions provides a comprehensive understanding of Rotterdam's city identity, city branding and city image. Answers to the sub-research questions permit this researcher to compare and contrast the city branding with the city identity to establish if they align. Ultimately, this thesis aims to contribute to the academic literature on the importance of local city identity within city branding.

The three texts used to analyse how the city designs its branding include *Rotterdamse Cultuurvisie 2018* (as the main text)*, DNA Rotterdam* and *Make it Happen mentality.* This research uses qualitative methods and performs a two-step analysis. In the first part, this researcher analysed the policy texts to establish city branding. Then the researcher interviewed locals in order to determine the city's identity. City branding and city identity were then contrasted to deduce to what extent they align.

Researching the contrast between city branding and city identity holds significant academic and societal relevance. Academically, it contributes to the fields of urban studies, marketing and cultural geography by deepening our understanding of the complex dynamics at play in shaping the image and perception of cities. It allows for a critical examination of the tension between authenticity and strategic promotion, shedding light on the challenges facing city identity under globalisation and competition for economic growth.

Many studies have focused on city image and the various steps to improve city image (Avraham, 2004). Smith's (2005) research focuses on tourism and establishes the changes within city branding in order to attract tourists. Rotterdam has been the source of many studies as it has evolved from a post-industrial into a creative city (Nieuwland & Lavanga, 2021). A 2010 study focused on the gender evolution of Rotterdam's city branding (van den Berg, 2010). Another study explored the hybrid evolution of Rotterdam's city identity (Niented, 2018). More recently, a study focused on the perception of Rotterdam's locals'

creative entrepreneurs (Nieuwland & Lavanga, 2021). The study explores the impact of tourism and emphasises the importance of locals as stakeholders. In general, there has been a gap in the literature on the importance of locals within city branding. This reflects in part the fact that residents are generally neglected and undervalued in the analysis of city identity (Kavaratzis & Ashworth, 2005; Merrilees et al, 2009; Bennett & Savani, 2003). Braun (et al., 2013) sheds light on the issue and researches the importance of residents within city branding. The research concludes that locals can play various roles within city branding, from ambassadors to voters, and ultimately are deemed indispensable to effective city branding (Braun et al., 2013).

Residents play a key role in city branding and should be at the root of city identity (Karavatzis, 2004). Not only is it imperative for the municipality to listen to its residents but also to engage in transparent communication and work towards aligning the city's branding with its city identity. This helps build an efficient and authentic city brand which not only attracts visitors but also resonates with residents. Misalignment of city branding and city identity has detrimental consequences on the city's reputation, appeal, and competitiveness. It is thus, crucial that city branding accurately reflects the uniqueness of the city and its people to establish trustworthy and authentic city branding (Gibson & McKenzie, 2011).

From a societal perspective, the approach taken in this research is crucial for city planners, policymakers, and destination marketers. Understanding the distinction between city branding and city identity helps municipalities make informed decisions about how to position their cities in a competitive global landscape. This difficult balance needs to be obtained between attracting visitors, economic development as well as fostering city identity. By studying and evaluating the contrast between city branding and city identity in Rotterdam, this research can contribute to the objective of helping to ensure that residents are actively involved and have a voice in shaping the narrative of their city.

Ultimately, researching the difference between city branding and city identity has the potential to enhance the sustainable development of cities, strengthen the bond of the residents, and foster a sense of pride and belonging, while also attracting visitors and promoting economic prosperity. The aim is to encourage Rotterdam's municipality to improve and adapt its branding efforts to better reflect the city's authentic identity.

The following chapter explains the relationship between the theoretical concepts and how they relate to one another: city identity, city branding and city image. Chapter 3 provides an overview of the two-step methodological approach and why qualitative methods are best suited for this research. The next chapter highlights the results, first discussing the branding

documents and how Rotterdam has different approaches to city branding. The broader image of the city differs from the cultural branding. Rotterdam's general branding focuses on uniqueness. However, its cultural branding subsequently takes a different path: fostering its community bonds. After discussing the branding documents, the next section contrasts city branding with city identity, leading to a discussion of how business-centred Rotterdam's branding is, in contrast to the local perception. The following section argues that both branding, and identity view the city as diverse yet that it also lacks integration. City branding and identity differ in their depiction of this lack of integration. This thesis will argue that this integration problem is manifested in both branding and identity through the division of neighbourhoods, creating creative clusters. This thesis will then explore how the city branding and city identity align in many ways yet misalign in their representation of Rotterdam's cultural life. Both show a strong focus on Rotterdam's architecture and the need to make Rotterdam's cultural life inclusive yet differ in their perception of the nightlife.

2. Theoretical framework

This research uses three main theoretical concepts: city identity, city branding and city image. City branding is derived from product branding. This thesis uses the model established by Kavaratzis and Ashworth (2004) for product branding (Figure 1) and applies it to city branding (Figure 1). The model defines the relationship between brand identity, brand positioning and brand image (Figure 1).

Figure 1 -
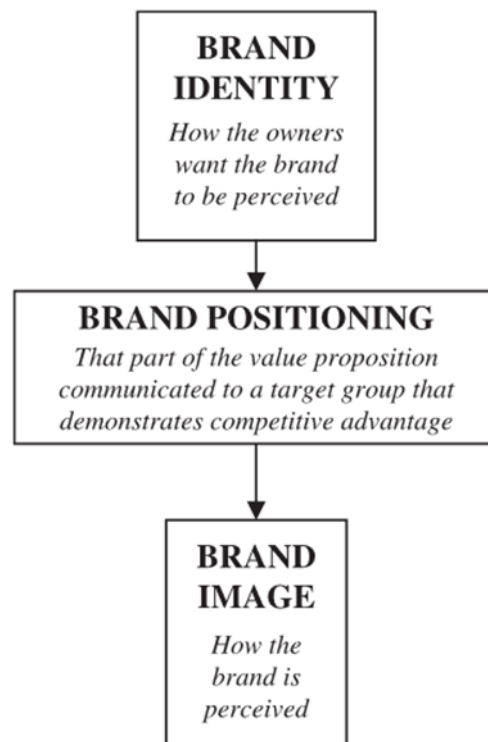
Source: Karavatzis, M. & Ashworth G. J. (2005). City branding: An effective assertion of identity or a transitory marketing trick? *Tijdschrift Voor Economische En Sociale Geografie*, *9* (5), p. 508

City branding draws inspiration and shares similarities with product branding in terms of its underlying principles and strategies. Just as products seek to stand out in the market, cities aim to differentiate themselves to attract visitors, residents, and businesses. City branding is more complex than product branding as it involves navigating a complex network of stakeholders, capturing the multifaceted nature of the place, managing emotional

connections, adapting to change, and considering external influences (Kavaratzis, 2004). These factors contribute to the complexity of city branding compared to product branding.

Figure 2 -
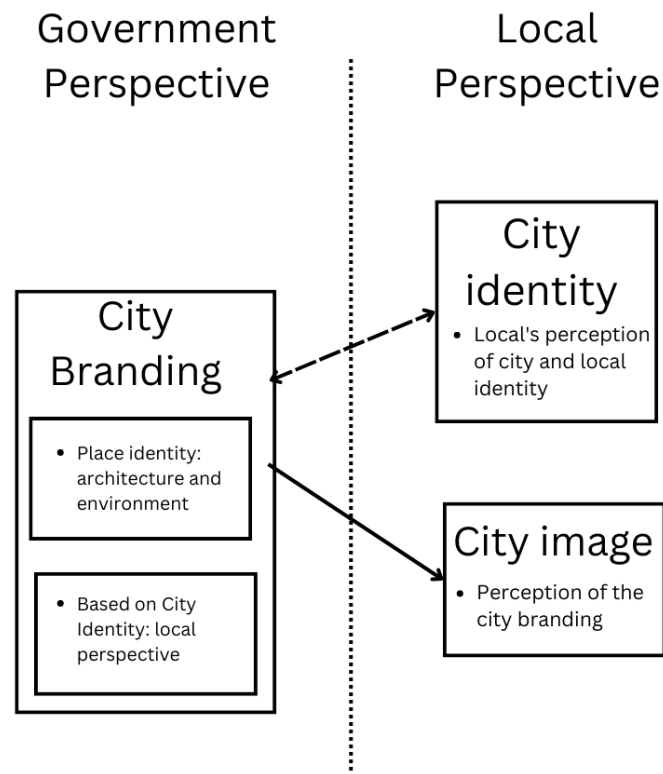
Source: Author Own

The relation between the three variables is highly intertwined as they all affect one another. Each of these concepts will be further elaborated on in the following sections. Efficient city branding should be based on city identity. City branding impacts and affects city identity, as efficient marketing impacts the way we view things. Furthermore, city identity is not stagnant and is constantly evolving. Thus, city branding, and city identity should evolve together: city branding should adapt and change to reflect city identity.

2.1 City Identity

2.1.1 Defining City Identity

As previously mentioned, city identity is not created but rather based on local identity (Ashworth & Kavaratzis, 2005). City identity has multiple elements whose study spans several academic disciplines: the city's environment, its development, the social norms and

perceptions and its people (Cheshmehzangi, 2020). Cheshmehzangi (2020) discussed two important components of city identity: first, the visual elements, such as city landscape and aesthetics of the city, and how they play an important role as they help make the city recognisable. The second element is the relation between space and people: how the spaces are used. City identity is thus an amalgam of these two aspects: the relationship between residents and their city.

The visual aesthetic of the city plays an important role in city identity (Lynch, 1960). City identity encompasses the individual but also their context, as it focuses on how the individual relates to their environment (Relph, 1976). The physical spaces evolve and change and alongside so those are the way people do. City identity goes beyond tangible objects and can be expressed through intangible attributes.

2.1.2 City Identity: the shared experience

Identity is the relationship between 'self and otherness' (Cheshmehzangi, 2020). Despite the individual experiences, there is still a discernible common core between residents. City identity is the shared city experience (Haapala, 2003). Identity is defined as 'a persistent sameness with oneself [...] and a persistent sharing of some kind of characteristic with others' (Erikson, 1956 p.102). City identity is paradoxical; it focuses on distinctive attributes as well as the generalisation of shared characteristics. It is a shared experience and is thus a generalisation, yet it remains the distinctive feature of a group of people (Cheshmehzangi, 2020). This makes the crafting of a city identity hard as cities are not populated by a coherent group but rather a myriad of diversity and thus different groups are bound to have varying ideas.

City identity is the unification of the voice of the residents and what brings them together (Smárason, as cited in Govers et al, 2017). City identity is an evolving concept that is impacted by numerous different influences. This includes city branding, as the way the city is portrayed affects the way the citizens perceive it (Figure 2).

2.2 City Branding

2.2.1 Defining City Branding

City branding is the construction, communication, and management of the city (Ashworth & Kavaratzis, 2005). City branding directly influences tourism and attracts new residents as well as economic investments (Gilboa et al, 2009). Product branding is widely researched and is defined as a multi-dimensional process where values are attributed to

products to create a connection with the customer and ultimately increase sales (Kavaratzis, 2004). Branding is used to differentiate a product and create a specific identity (Nientied, 2018; Cova, 1996). City branding is the application of product branding onto a place; however, many authors have discussed the limitations and even the impossibility of treating a place like a product (Nientied, 2018). City branding uses the qualities of city identity to create a unique brand identity. It was popularised during the 1980s to improve cities' public image (Harvey, 1989). This was used hand in hand with entrepreneurial programs that focused on redeveloping certain neighbourhoods through local cultural projects (Kaefer, 2021). Effective city branding is based on local identity; however, representing city identity is a difficult task.

2.2.2 Importance of local community and Identity

City branding targets residents, tourists, and companies (Braun et al, 2013). Participation of residents is essential in successful city branding (Degen & Garcia, 2006; Bingham et al., 2005). City branding needs to reflect authenticity for it to be successful. If city branding does not accurately represent city identity, not only is there a disconnect between government, visitors and locals but also a loss of authenticity (Nieuwland & Lavanga, 2021). When city branding inaccurately portrays the city and its locals, not only may the visitors be disappointed at the reality of the city, but it will also create tensions between visitors and locals. This inauthenticity leads to scepticism and a lack of trust in the city's branding. Misrepresentation ultimately leads to a lack of authenticity within city branding, which creates a negative reputation as well as the inability to attract investments and businesses (Riza et al, 2012).

Successful city branding not only impacts the local community but the world, as it is an invitation for anyone to visit (Anholt in Kaefer, 2021). It can not only help establish and re-enforce its local identity through a good reputation; however, that is only possible if locals are seen as important stakeholders. This leads to a difficult balance: as local identity gains value, it is thus in the local government's interest to commodify it. City branding needs to accurately reflect local identity as well as attract tourists and economic development. Too much commodification and commercialisation lead to a loss of authenticity which in turn affects the quality of the city branding. The authenticity of city branding is crucial, as inauthentic city branding is proven to be less effective and creates tensions within local communities (Kaefer, 2021).

When city branding is effective, it attracts people which brings economic investments, which in turn also brings gentrification (Lavanga & Nieuwland, 2021). Gentrification has become the biggest factor in the evolution of growing cities. Gentrification brings many positive changes, as well as negative changes. It is at the centre of many academic debates; however, it extends beyond the aim of this paper. It can also contribute to the discrepancy between branding and identity (Belabas et al., 2019). In this research, gentrification will be limited to a consequence of globalisation and effective city branding.

2.2.3 Distinctiveness within city branding in a growing competition

To stand out, cities need to be unique, thus specific regions will advertise their distinguishing features. A monument may be advertised for its distinct history or visual identity. This not only re-enforces the identity of that specific region but also helps establish it on a regional or national level (Turok & Bailey, 2004). When efficiently advertised, a monument or infrastructure can become the city's symbol. The Guggenheim Museum of Bilbao dated from 1997, which entirely changed the landscape of the city and ultimately became the symbol of the city. It brought an increasing amount of change as well as economic development to the entire area. Through the museum, Bilbao was able to change its city from an unknown town into a cultural phenomenon called the Bilbao effect. The monuments and buildings play a crucial role in city branding, it is not necessarily the function of the building but rather what it can promote (Kaefer, 2021).

2.3 City Image

2.3.1 City Image on a local level

City image is how the city branding efforts are perceived by locals. This thesis focuses specifically on residents. As previously mentioned, residents are often not considered important stakeholders in the creation of city branding. This is evidenced by the fact that there is a gap in the literature concerning the importance of residents within city branding. Authenticity and trustworthiness have a significant impact on successful city branding. When city identity is based on local identity and represents them accurately, it attracts tourists and newcomers alike (Braun, 2012; Riza et al, 2012).

A study contrasted the different factors that are valued by tourists and locals (Gilboa et al, 2009). A city needs to cater to both their needs and advertise itself to simultaneously attract and represent both these parties. The study established that tourists valued different things than locals: tourists focused more on leisurely activities while residents favoured

services. Local needs tend to be overlooked to attract tourists. In the long term, it is important not only to focus on the tourists' needs but also to value residents' needs, even if they do not have as immediate an impact on economic growth. Another study establishes six dimensions to a city's image including the city's international standing, pulse, and urban lifestyle (Anholt, 2006). This demonstrates that it is difficult to cater to both groups as they both have different demands and needs. Tourists focus more on entertainment and experiences, while locals care for the quality of life. These differences are a recurrent problem within this field as ultimately both need to be addressed (Gilboa et al, 2009). City branding thus needs to not relay both messages: high quality of life as well as fun experiences for tourists to experience.

2.3.2 Impact of City Image

City branding boomed in the early 1980s as a tool to boost economic development (Harvey, 1989). It was quickly established that improving a city's public image helped attract visitors and development. If a city has a strong public image, it benefits the local community as well as the municipality (Braun, 2012). However, there is a difficult balance to achieve: cities such as Venice or Amsterdam have been over-marketed and have now become overwhelmed with tourists. This leads to tensions between locals, government, and tourists. Over-tourism is difficult to manage for instance, Venice was recently forced to create policies to charge entrance fees to be able to maintain and repair the city. A city branding that focuses on attracting external audiences thus does not necessarily lead to favourable outcomes for the city in the long run.

City branding expresses ideas; however, these are often understood and interpreted differently. City branding creates the idea of a unified group that relates to the city and its attributes. City branding focuses on what locals have in common and how they can relate to one another, it re-enforces and fosters the sense of community. This creates a dynamic of 'us versus them', the people in the community and the people outside of the community (Kaefer, 2021). The group can stand out through their common characteristics, but to do so there needs to be a division.

City branding, city identity and city image are intricately related and co-exist with one another (Figure 2). They are not constant but rather always evolving and changing, affected by one another. City branding uses city identity to create an authentic brand, however, city branding is perceived and understood through city image. Thus, in efficient city branding, city image needs to align with and represent city identity.

3. Methodological Choices

This chapter outlines the methodology used to answer the research question:

Do the cultural policies of Rotterdam from the Rotterdamse Cultuurvisie 2018, align with locals' sense of the city? This chapter gives an outline of its process, from the methodology, the sampling to the data collection. This research has a two-step approach with two sets of data: primary and secondary data (Table 1).

Table 1 -

Primary data: Interviews	Secondary data: Branding documents
10 hours of interviews from locals.	*Rotterdamse Cultuurvisie 2018.*: Cultural policy document about Rotterdam's cultural projects and what the municipality wants to achieve in the coming years.
	DNA Rotterdam: Information about Rotterdam's branding and the six adjectives used to characterise the city.
	Make it happen mentality: Information about what the slogan of the city means.

Source: Author Own

The secondary data is a content analysis of three documents: *Rotterdamse Cultuurvisie 2018* as the main text*, DNA Rotterdam* and *Make it Happen mentality*. These 3 texts help answer the first sub-question: *How do the branding documents (Rotterdamse Cultuurvisie 2018, DNA Rotterdam and Make it Happen mentality) portray the city of Rotterdam?*

The main source of data is ten hours of interviews with nine participants that establish the following two sub-questions: *How do you locals perceive the city branding? How do locals perceive the city of Rotterdam?* The data from the interview was then compared and contrasted with the branding document to answer the research question.

3.1 Branding Documents

The branding documents are a total of three texts. The first document is *Rotterdamse Cultuurvisie 2018*, which is a policy document that focuses on the cultural vision of the city of Rotterdam dated 2018. This document outlined the cultural identity of Rotterdam as well as the cultural vision of the municipality. The document offered a thorough analysis of the cultural vision of the city of Rotterdam. It analyses its cultural history and discusses the changes that need to be implemented.

This document was complemented with the two texts: *DNA Rotterdam* and *Make it Happen mentality* from the website "Rotterdam.Make it Happen". The website was created by the Rotterdam Branding Toolkit and is an 'online platform that is developed and run by Rotterdam Partners on behalf of the Rotterdam.Make it Happen Brand Alliance' (FAQ, *Rotterdam.Make it Happen*) to create content to promote the city. Rotterdam Branding Toolkit is a collaboration between the City of Rotterdam, the Port of Rotterdam, Erasmus University Rotterdam, Rotterdam Topsport, Rotterdam Festivals and Erasmus MC (FAQ, *Rotterdam.Make it Happen*). The first document, *DNA Rotterdam*, outlines six adjectives (raw, bold, entrepreneurial, culture, forward and international) used to define the Rotterdam brand, while the second document, *Make it Happen mentality*, focused on the city slogan 'Make it happen' and offered an in-depth explanation of the meaning of the 'Make it Happen' mentality.

3.1.1 Selection Criteria for branding documents

The branding documents were selected from a wide range of branding and policy documents. This research makes use of documents dated from recent years available on the website of the municipality of Rotterdam. The date was important as it offers the opportunity to establish if the policies have been implemented, yet it was crucial that the document not be too old as otherwise the policies would have been outdated. Thus, the *Rotterdamse Cultuurvisie 2018* fit within these criteria. Furthermore, because Rotterdam used cultural development as part of 'Revitalising Rotterdam', culture plays an essential role in the city's identity (Nieuwland & Lavanga, 2021). Thus, the analysis of a cultural document is essential in the analysis of Rotterdam's city branding.

A second source of material for the content analysis is the website Rotterdam.Make it Happen, offering a detailed account of the official branding of the city. *Rotterdam's DNA* gave the six official adjectives that supposedly best encapsulate Rotterdam as well as 'the basis of the Rotterdam brand' (Branding document, *Rotterdam's DNA*). This text offered a

clear structure into the official branding of Rotterdam and was thus an obvious choice for this thesis. Together, the documents offer a wide view of the branding of the city, from the municipality with the policy document, as well as more tangible branding with Rotterdam's DNA. The last document offers a new dimension: the slogan. The official slogan is "Rotterdam. Make it Happen." This document adds a more detailed and descriptive understanding of the branding. The first text establishes a broad and general branding of the city, through the official six adjectives while this second text *Make it happen mentality* goes in-depth and explains the meaning of the slogan.

These three documents offered a strong understanding of the Rotterdam identity branding through the cultural vision.

3.1.2 Content Analysis

The documents were analysed by using six code themes. These codes were the official six adjectives describing the city branding from the text *DNA Rotterdam* used to define the city branding. These are *bold*, *raw*, *forward entrepreneurial*, *cultural* and *international*. These adjectives are quite broad and can be understood differently, thus by using them to structure the analysis, this research established in which way the city branding portrays Rotterdam as *bold*, *raw*, *forward entrepreneurial*, *culture*, or *international*. The documents were analysed in multiple rounds: firstly, the documents were read thoroughly and then coded using the six adjectives. These adjectives are quite varied. While the theme of international is quite easily defined, others were more ambiguous, such as *raw* or *bold*. This research defined *culture* as the description of the cultural sector as well as a cultural identity. The code of entrepreneurship is defined as the innovation of businesses as well as talent in a professional setting. The code *international* focus on the topic of internationalness as well as tourists. The code *bold* is defined as outgoing, while the code *forward* focuses on topics that depict initiative and modernity. The last code, *raw,* is defined as genuine and authentic. The codes were all divided to help structure and recognise the main themes that emerged from the data (Appendix C – Codebook Branding Documents).

3.2 Semi-structured interviews

Interviews were best suited for this research as they offered the opportunity for individuals to express their perceptions (Becker et al, 2012). Moreover, it helped create a comfortable environment where the interviewee can express various opinions. This research used in-person semi-structured interviews with open-ended questions (Flick, 2006).

Interviews were the most important component of this data collection. These interviews were carried out following the interview guide (see Appendix - Interview guide). The interviews ranged from fifty minutes to over one hour, with a total of just over ten hours. The interviews were all conducted in English.

Qualitative methods provide the opportunity for a nuanced and comprehensive depiction of individual perceptions, allowing for a detailed discussion of participants' perceptions of the city. Qualitative research helps reflect the individuality and subjectivity of each of the interviewees as it is flexible and adaptable (Babbie, 2020). As highlighted by Saunders et al. (2018), such methods make complex topics into more manageable components, facilitating deeper analysis. Additionally, qualitative methods offer increased flexibility, as they allow for ongoing adaptation to the focus of investigation in response to new data, as emphasised by Yin (2009). Consequently, these methods structured the gathering of extensive background information and the resolution of any uncertainties that had arisen during the interview process.

3.2.1 Selection Criteria for Interviews

The sample of this research were residents living in Rotterdam since 2018. This thesis defines locals as such because the policy document is dated from 2018, thus participants needed to have lived there for at least five years. The participants needed to be Dutch-speaking and comfortable in English, as the interviews and searches were executed in English. Their national background was important: being Dutch meant they could integrate with Dutch locals without the impact of a cultural or language barrier. The sample focused on students or people working outside of the cultural field. Lavanga and Nieuwland (2021) have specifically focused on the impact of the rising popularity of Rotterdam on creative entrepreneurs. Thus, this thesis explored the perception of people outside of the cultural sector. This criterion helped establish a sample of people whose perception was not coloured by their background in the cultural sector. Another criterion was their age: participants needed to be between 20 and 35. This age category of young adults made their experience comparable while still maintaining diversity in their experience (Table 2). There were no criteria for gender as it was not a determining factor for this research. The participants needed to come from a wide range of neighbourhoods in order to offer a diverse range of data as well as some representation of the city.

Table 2 -

Participant	Gender	Nationality	Age	Occupation	Living in Rotterdam	Neighborhood	From Rotterdam
1	Female	Half-Dutch	24	Work	6 years	North	No
2	Male	Dutch	26	Work	20 years	Kralingen	Yes
3	Male	Dutch	35	Work	13 years	North	No
4	Female	Dutch	21	Student	18 years	Charlos	Yes
5	Female	Dutch	29	Work	10 years	Bleidrop	No
6	Male	Dutch	28	Work	7 years	North	No
7	Female	Dutch	27	Work	9 years	Kralingen	No
8	Female	Half-Dutch	21	Student	5 years	Der Esch	No
9	Female	Dutch	22	Student	22 years	West	Yes

Source: Author Own

The sampling method used for this thesis was snowballing. Snowball sampling was a convenient sampling method. This method is applied when it is difficult to access subjects with specific characteristics. In this method, the researcher recruited future subjects among their acquaintances (Naderifar et al., 2017). The snowball method was the most efficient for creating a sample of Rotterdam locals. This researcher collected data through a personal network and then used the network to gain access to more Rotterdammers. As this researcher is not a Rotterdam local, it was a group harder to reach. Initially, this researcher used their personal network to find the first round of participants. After the first interviews, the researcher used the snowball method and asked if the participants knew others that fit within the population. This proved a reliable method to obtain more participants.

3.2.2 Operationalisation

The interview guide is structured to answer the sub-questions:

a) How do locals perceive the city of Rotterdam?

c) How do you locals perceive the city branding?

The interviews were structured from broad and easy questions to more specific ones (Appendix - Interview guide). The interviews were introduced with very general questions: in the beginning, the interviewees were asked to introduce themselves, which helped make them at ease (Becker et al, 2012). The interview had the following structure: from the perception of the city, and city branding to cultural city. The first section answered the first sub-question while the other sections answered the last sub-question. The interview guide employed in this

study showed flexibility by accommodating deviations from its initial structure in response to emerging ideas in the form of follow-up questions. Moreover, it allowed for adjustments to the interview duration based on the level of engagement shown by the respondents. Consistent with the inductive approach, the interview guide underwent continuous revisions and refinements informed by emerging data and information This approach facilitated the comparison of interviews and facilitated the identification of common themes and patterns, as outlined by Yin (2009).

This structure meant the interviewee could ask follow-up questions for more clarification as well as dive deeper into more personalised exploratory questions. Semi-structured interviews offered more freedom to adapt the questions to the interviewees, which helped create a relaxed interview (Babbie, 2020). The questions were broad and offered the interviewee the opportunity to share personal experiences and perceptions of the city.

Furthermore, the questions were created after the analysis of the branding documents, where certain themes had already emerged. The branding documents portrayed Rotterdam as: a city of opportunity, a city of diversity and a cultural city. Thus, the interview guide asked open questions to establish if the participants viewed the city in those terms. The following section goes into more detail about the operationalisation of the concepts.

3.2.2.1 City Branding

City branding is the communication of the brand and how the municipality wants to be perceived. City branding is influenced by the city's identity (Figure 1); however, it is created by the city municipality through policies and branding. City branding was operationalised by analysing the key themes of the policy document *Rotterdamse Cultuurvisie, DNA Rotterdam, and Make it Happen mentality*. City branding was hard to operationalise within the interviews as it is ultimately how the municipality wants to be perceived and not the reality of how they are perceived. Thus, city branding was mainly identified through document analysis.

City branding was operationalised by the analysis of the policy documents. These codes were based on the branding adjectives used to define the *Rotterdam DNA*: *bold*, *forward, entrepreneurial, culture, raw* and *international*. These adjectives were the essence of Rotterdam's branding. They offered a general idea of how the city wants to be perceived and provides the essence of Rotterdam's branding. They remained quite vague, therefore using these words as codes helped establish in which way the municipality viewed the city as *bold, forward, entrepreneurial, culture, raw* and *international. Culture, entrepreneurial* and

international were easy to identify as they were quite clear in their definition. *Culture* was a code for anything culturally related: from the cultural scene to the culture of the local community. *Entrepreneurial* was a code for anything business related, while *international* was a code for the description of Rotterdam as a multi-cultural city as well as international residents and visitors. While the rest of the adjectives show a more complicated definition, thus this researcher used the definition from the branding documents. In the text *bold* and *raw* are defined as 'Rotterdam is a bold city, and its raw and authentic culture stimulates contrast and creativity in business, the visual arts, poetry, politics and dance' (Branding document, *Rotterdam's DNA*). This definition reflected how interconnected the subject of culture, business and creativity are. *Forward* was defined as 'Rotterdam is the city of entrepreneurship. Anyone who wants to achieve something – something new or special – will find their way in Rotterdam. Here it doesn't matter where you come from, but where you want to go (Branding document, *Rotterdam's DNA*). Similarly, to the previous definitions, *forward* was defined as a mindset, a way to do things, which can be applied to business as well as everyday life. Thus, this researcher used a broad definition of *bold*, *raw* and *forward* to encapsulate the various aspects of the terms.

3.2.2.2 City Image

City image is the local's perception of city branding. City branding can easily be mis-understood or mis-interpretated. City branding is the core of the brand and its ideology, while city image is the reality of how the brand is perceived. In this research city image was defined as the perception of Rotterdammers of city branding. This was operationalised through multiple aspects: perception of the city, perception of the branding adjectives of the *Rotterdam DNA* and perception of the slogan. The perception of the city is impacted by city branding (Figure 1), thus this aspect was operationalised by asking interviewees to describe the city of Rotterdam with their own adjectives, as well as what made them perceive the city this way. These adjectives were then compared to the official branding adjectives. Then the participants were asked why they used different adjectives than the official ones and what shaped the way they view the city. Moreover, the interviewees were asked if they believed that the official adjectives used by the municipality represented Rotterdam accurately.

To operationalise the slogan interviewees were asked if they knew the slogan of the city, and where they knew it from. Furthermore, the interviewees were asked how they perceived the slogan, and if they believed the slogan was an accurate representation of the city, this showed the effectiveness of city branding through its slogan.

3.2.2.3 City identity

The city identity was contrasted with the city branding. The city's sense of identity was defined as the local's perception of the city (Figure 2). This was operationalised by asking the interviewees to describe the city and the atmosphere. Furthermore, the sense of city identity was divided into different parameters: whether the people defined themselves as locals if they felt represented by the various buildings, monuments or infrastructures. This offered a clear sense of how the locals perceived the city through its physical space and how participants relate to their city. Rotterdam's identity was operationalised through tangible and intangible variables: the atmosphere described by locals and the perception of locals of monuments and sculptures. Moreover, the city identity has also intangible elements, for example, the fostering and creation of a sense of community. This was operationalised by asking participants if they felt like locals and description of the atmosphere of the neighbourhoods, they lived in. These questions focused on the participant's perception of the city. Furthermore, the interviewees were asked what their favourite infrastructure or monument was as Rotterdam's reinvention was established through cultural infrastructures, so it was important to measure how residents perceived the prominent monument and which best represents the city.

The three concepts were operationalised differently: city branding was operationalised through the analysis of the branding documents; the city image is operationalised by asking participants how they viewed and understood the branding (adjectives and slogan) and the city identity was operationalised by asking participants about their perception of the city (infrastructures and atmosphere).

3.2.3 Data collection

The interviews were conducted in person except for interviews 5 and 9, which were conducted online. The interviews were conducted in English, English being the shared language of both participants and the interviewer. The interviews were held professionally and followed the interview guide; however, the participants included both strangers and acquaintances. Whether the participants and interviewer had previously met had an impact on the interview: this made the conversation smoother and more casual, which meant the interviewee was comfortable and able to speak freely. On the other hand, it was harder to steer the interview and remain on the topic. When interviewing participants that were strangers, it was easier to remain neutral, but it took more time to make them comfortable.

3.2.4 Thematic analysis

The data was coded using thematic analysis. This method was efficient in organising and structuring data into patterns (Babbie, 2020). The researcher used the policy document and compared it to the interviews. This contrast showed the locals' perception of city image as well as city identity. The analysis was performed using the software Atlas.ti, which helps create the codes. The codes were drawn from the themes and topics from the data. They were created after reducing and minimising the codes to the important answers. This stage was established after reviewing the data multiple times and focusing on the important information.

The thematic analysis offers flexibility (Becker et al, 2012). This comes with limitations, as there are several ways of interpreting the data, which can lead to inconsistency (Holloway & Todres, 2003). Qualitative research has been criticised for lacking academic rigour, despite offering opportunities for exploration and insight. To address this issue, a systematic approach proposed by Gioia et al. (2013) was used, which 'aims to bring qualitative rigour to the methodology and presentation of inductive research'. According to Gioia et al. (2013), it is crucial for inductive research to identify relevant concepts that can form the basis for constructing theories and validating constructs to fully realise the benefits of this approach. To achieve reliable interpretations that are both reasonable and justifiable, inductive researchers should use a methodical approach to conceptualising and analysing data. The system proposed by Gioia et al. (2013), the thematic analysis coding method, divides data into various thematic areas through multiple stages of coding. This coding method was employed to uncover and highlight the key findings.

After each interview, the researcher wrote a summary which helped summarise the main arguments of the interview. This helped gain a better understanding and identify the significant themes and motifs. These summaries were a clear direction that helped structure the main analysis. This helped to conduct a more cohesive analysis of the data collected, which was informed by the 1st-order analysis approach of Gioia et al. (2013).

The interviews were transcribed verbatim using transcription software (Otter.ai) and were proofread for accuracy following the recommendations of Saunders et al. (2009). During the initial summary writing process, the researcher remained objective in order to minimise personal analysis to ensure that the data remained as raw as possible. The analysis followed the 1st-order analysis approach of Gioia et al. (2013) when conducting the initial coding process, which allowed the coding to remain true to the language used by the

participants and avoid oversimplifying categories. Once the data was collected, it was analysed using thematic analysis. Thematic analysis required a systematic and rigorous method to achieve an unbiased result (Nowell et al. 2017). It helped recognise patterns and topics within the data (Attride-Stirling, 2001). The coding stage of the analysis went beyond summarising by interpreting and constantly comparing the data (Nowell et al. 2017).

3.3 Ethics

During the interviews, the researcher followed specific principles. Each participant was given the choice to maintain confidentiality concerning their identity. The interviews were conducted with willing participants, and the opportunity to end or withdraw from the research was offered from the start. Furthermore, a consent form was given to each participant summarising the aims and goals of the interview. The participants all consented to being recorded and transcribed. They were also encouraged to ask questions before or at any point during the research period. After each interview, participants were allowed to clarify or reiterate any points they desired.

Researchers have ethical responsibilities towards interviewees and to do so need to uphold ethical standards (Saunders et al., 2018). To uphold ethical standards, this researcher adhered to the five ethical principles outlined by Babbie (2020) which include minimising harm, obtaining informed consent, protecting anonymity and confidentiality, avoiding deception, and providing the right to withdraw from the research.

Throughout this process, honesty was upheld with the participants and the researcher refrained from using deceptive tactics. According to Bailey (2007), deception occurs when individuals are unaware of their involvement in the research, receive misleading information about the purpose or details of the study, or are given false information about the researcher's identity. To mitigate any such risks, participants were fully aware of the researcher's background, interests, and intentions in conducting the research. Efforts were made to create a safe and comfortable interview.

4. Results

4.1 Results of branding documents

This section answers the sub-research question: *How does city branding portray the city of Rotterdam?* A first analysis of the city branding document *DNA Rotterdam* dated 2014 demonstrates that the general city branding focuses on entrepreneurship. The following section uses the 2018 cultural policy document *Rotterdam Cultuurvisie* to show that the cultural city branding concentrates its residents by emphasising inclusivity. This determines the different approaches: the broad characteristic of the city is business-focused while the cultural branding of the city is centred around its community.

4.1.1 DNA Rotterdam Overall city branding: a strong focus on entrepreneurship and architecture

The 2014 branding from the document *DNA Rotterdam* outlines adjectives that 'boil down' Rotterdam's DNA (raw, bold, entrepreneurial, culture, forward and international) (Branding document, *DNA Rotterdam*). This branding gives the overall essence and character of the city, providing a broad understanding of what the city represents. The branding of the city establishes Rotterdam as a city of opportunity: business-focused.

The six adjectives (raw, bold, entrepreneurial, culture, forward and international) were used as codes for the analysis of the branding documents. From these themes, three topics were identified: entrepreneurship, culture, and community (Table 3). Entrepreneurship, culture, and community are the city's branding focus. The majority of themes, however, are business-centred (Table 3). The city's general branding priority is to establish Rotterdam as a business centre. The second priority is to advertise Rotterdam as a cultural city. Culture and entrepreneurship are two of the official six branding adjectives from *DNA Rotterdam*. Thus, not only are they the official adjectives that best represent Rotterdam's branding, but they are also important within Rotterdam's policy documents. The last topic, community, appears the least (Table 3). It is thus not the city's main branding. Notably, the adjectives of the branding outlined in *DNA Rotterdam* do not focus on the residents of Rotterdam.

Table 3 –

Codes	Themes	Main topics
Bold	Visual aesthetic	Culture
	Dynamic	Entrepreneurial
Forward	Opportunity	Entrepreneurial
Entrepreneurial	Creative entrepreneur	Entrepreneurial
	Innovation	Entrepreneurial
Cultural	Architecture	Culture
	Inclusivity	Community
	Strong cultural Identity	Culture
Raw	Authentic	Culture
International	Tourism	Entrepreneurial
	Inclusive community	Community

Source: Author Own

When looking at the themes, many are interconnected between entrepreneurship, culture and community (Table 3). It is clear that the branding documents want to merge these topics: they are not separate but rather inter-connected goals of the branding.

Rotterdam's architecture plays an important role in its city branding (Table 3). City branding uses the distinctive monuments or buildings of a city to effectively market itself and set it apart from other cities (Nientied, 2018). Rotterdam's city branding is using its unique architectural landscape to stand out, especially from other Dutch cities, whose architecture is more traditional. Rotterdam's architecture, bridges, and skyscrapers are an essential component of the city's branding. This demonstrates good city branding in the sense that it makes use of its unique architectural assets.

From its architecture to the official adjectives of the overall city branding (*DNA Rotterdam*), Rotterdam's broader branding focuses on standing out and uniqueness. The adjectives encourage individuality and distinctiveness with the words: *raw*, *bold* and *forward*. The branding pushes the expression of uniqueness. The branding adjectives do not mention community or shared identity. In order to stand out, individuals need to be apart from the group and break away from conformity. The branding adjectives from *DNA Rotterdam* encourage singularity and authenticity.

Despite the mentioning of community in several parts of the document, the overwhelming use of the theme entrepreneurial demonstrates the municipality wants Rotterdam to be viewed as a place of business. The focus on architectural landmarks, while certainly distinctive, also de-emphasises the notion of Rotterdam as the sum of the people,

focusing rather on the tangible, physical assets of its buildings and structures. The overall branding characteristic of the city focuses on its uniqueness and its distinctiveness.

4.1.2 *Rotterdam Cultuurvisie* city branding and the Importance of Community

Rotterdam Cultuurvisie's cultural goals are 'inclusivity, innovation and interconnectivity' (Branding document, *Rotterdam Cultuurvisie*). These objectives were central to the policy document, as they represent the cultural aims and aspirations of the municipality. The cultural policy document stands out in contrast to *DNA Rotterdam's* broader city branding. The latter, as previously discussed, focuses on establishing Rotterdam as a business-focused and marketing its uniqueness and architecture.

Innovation relates to the topic of *entrepreneurship* and is a continuation of the city's previously discussed broader branding (*DNA Rotterdam*), while inclusivity and interconnectivity have a strong focus on community and diversity, an aspect that is not represented within *DNA Rotterdam. DNA Rotterdam* has a strong emphasis on singularity and authenticity. *DNA Rotterdam*, Rotterdam's branding essence, focuses on standing out from other cities and establishing itself as unique. It focused on entrepreneurship and its distinct architecture. Thus, the city's broader branding demonstrates an emphasis on distinctiveness, while the *Rotterdam Cultuurvisie* cultural branding shows a strong focus on the community. Two out of the three cultural branding terms refer to the connection between individuals: inclusivity and interconnectivity, while not even one of the adjectives from *DNA Rotterdam* does. These differences reflect various branding strategies: Rotterdam's overall branding needs to stand out and show its uniqueness. However, the cultural sector as an essential part of Rotterdam's identity needs to maintain its authenticity. Rotterdam's cultural branding needs to foster and encourage the flourishing of its city identity, choosing to do so by moving away from the individualistic approach and focusing on fostering authenticity and city identity through a communal approach.

This contrast shows the different approaches of city branding: the overall city branding needs to establish its distinctiveness, while the cultural sector focuses on protecting and encouraging the burgeoning of its community. Innovation encapsulates two dimensions: creativity and entrepreneurship. Cultural branding thus offers a continuation and echoes of the overall city branding. Cultural branding emphasises something that the overall branding did not portray: the connection between people. By fostering its city identity, city branding can conserve its authenticity. When city identity is neglected, city branding can no longer accurately portray city identity and becomes inefficient in the long run. Authenticity is a

crucial component of city branding (Nieuwland & Lavanga, 2021). The commercialisation and commodification of city identity lead to a loss of authenticity (Kaefer, 2021). Thus this cultural branding is a clear attempt of fostering and protecting an authentic local identity.

4.2 Comparison of branding document and interviews

This section contrasts city branding, as analysed through the municipality's policy documents, and Rotterdam's city identity, established through interviews with its residents. The city identity is established after coding and analysing the data from the nine interviews. The branding adjectives (raw, bold, entrepreneurial, culture, forward and international) were used to code the interviews. This helped contrast and compare how city identity and city branding viewed the city as raw, bold, entrepreneurial, culture, forward or international. After several rounds of coding, thematic analysis helped establish the important themes (Appendix B - Figure 3). The themes show how participants perceive Rotterdam. There is a strong focus on architecture – Rotterdammers value their city's physical space. Rotterdammers perceive the city as dynamic and diverse. Moreover, they had certain criticism of the way Rotterdam is being governed. They discussed the rising negative effects of gentrifications as well as the lack of integration. City identity perceives the city more critically than city branding.

The themes established were then contrasted with the city branding themes to create four categories: entrepreneurship, diversity, creative clusters, and cultural life (Figure 4). These categories were created after contrasting the themes of data from branding and interviews (Appendix B - Figure 5). These categories serve to show that while there is some alignment between city branding and the way Rotterdammers perceive their city, there are several important differences. The branding demonstrates a cohesive image of a dynamic city while the city identity is more critical. City identity, through the participant, offers a critical view and points out shortcomings regarding diversity and inclusivity in Rotterdam, contrasting with the overly positive branding.

The first section discusses the contrast between city identity and branding and how city branding focuses on the municipality's agenda – representing Rotterdam as a business hub – rather than accurately representing city identity. Moreover, this section argues that the city branding is business focused, in contrast with city identity. Another misalignment of city branding, and identity is discussed through Rotterdam's contrasting diversity – the city is an international hub yet lacks integration. This idea is reinforced when examining the separation of Rotterdam's different neighbourhoods and the creation of creative clusters. Lastly, this section discusses the various misalignments in the portrayal of Rotterdam's cultural life.

Figure 4 -
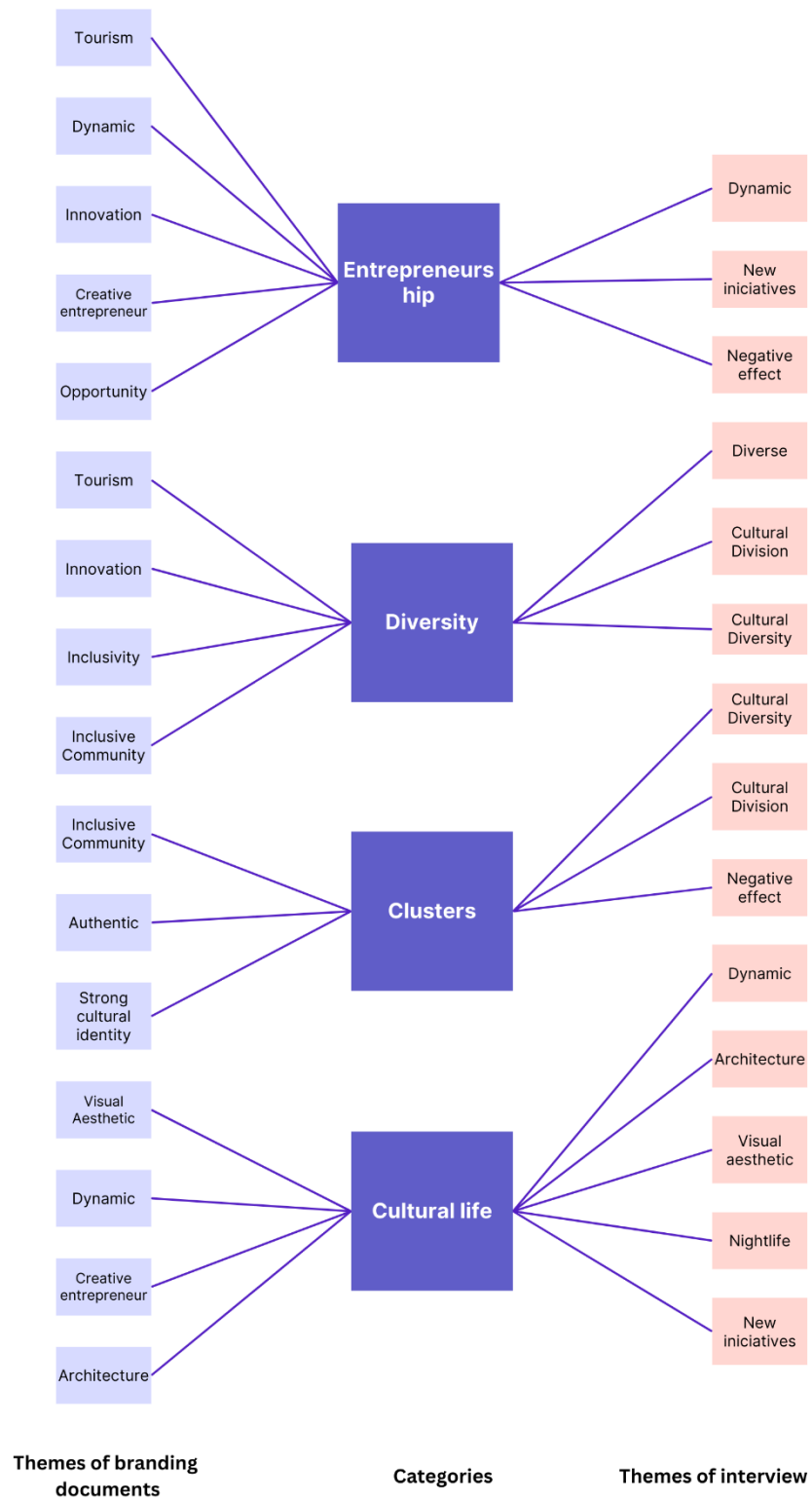
Source: Author Own

4.2.1 City branding's agenda: business-focused

City branding and city identity differ in their vision of entrepreneurship. The interviews reveal that Rotterdammers are more critical in the way they view entrepreneurship, while the branding mainly depicts the positive impact of creativity. The city branding focused on entrepreneurship a lot more than the city identity. This is evident from the sheer number of themes: branding has almost double the number of themes in entrepreneurship than city identity (Table 3). The negative impacts of business and entrepreneurship – chief amongst which gentrification – were discussed in many of the interviews. Though some only mentioned positive aspects of entrepreneurship, others discussed the displacement of residents, a topic that will be discussed later in this research. Out of nine interviewees, three are students and the rest are working people (Table 1), with Interviewees 1 and 3 working in business. Interviewee 1 discussed that if they were to look for a more established company they would probably have to move to Amsterdam. While Interviewee 3 currently works in Amsterdam, Rotterdam, in their view, is not the business centre that the city branding wants it to be. Interviewee 4 mentioned how the branding of Rotterdam as an entrepreneurial city felt 'a bit empty' (Interview 4). The emptiness mentioned by the participant is a clear lack of authentic city branding.

Participants discussed the fast-changing landscape of Rotterdam, with skyscrapers 'appearing from one day to another' (Interviewee 1). Interviewees 5 and 9 argued that their entire neighbourhoods are being gentrified, as evident from the increasing number of cafés. Rotterdammers discussed at length the negative effect of gentrification and how fast the city is evolving, from the housing crisis to the rising prices. Unanimously, Rotterdammers discussed the rising prices of property and the difficulty of finding proper housing. The frequent mention of gentrification and its associated processes mean that the current process of gentrification must be considered a part of its identity. The city branding does not reflect the impact of gentrification. By continuously advertising Rotterdam as a business centre, the city's branding aims to attract investors and developers, thus fostering development and accelerating gentrification. City branding is commercialising the city to attract more business.

A similar disconnect between city branding and identity was established in the participant's opinion of the slogan Rotterdam. Make it happen.). The city slogan is an important part of the city's branding. The majority of the participants recognised the city slogan once they heard it, but they could not recall it themselves. Participants 1, 2, 5 and 9 confused it with the slogan of Rotterdam's football team Feyenoord, 'geen woorden maar daden' (no words but actions), or with the local proverb 'niet lullen maar poetsen' (don't

blabber but clean up). Both of these can be more idiomatically translated as 'actions speak louder than words'. The slogan is not yet memorable to the locals; it has not established itself. While both Dutch versions express a similar message, as Interviewees 3 and 4 argued, the English version is more polished and, in comparison, 'it doesn't have the same spirit' (Interview 4). If the locals view it as curated and proper, it does not represent the city's identity. The city slogan acts as a representation of Rotterdam to the world, and the fact that it is in English demonstrates that it is an international city ready to welcome visitors. The city is positioning itself as an international destination and trying to attract international visitors and investments. This city slogan is thus created for that audience: international visitors and investors.

The city branding's focus on entrepreneurship and the city slogan demonstrates a discrepancy in the alignment of city branding and city identity. Rotterdam, despite its emphasis on entrepreneurship in its branding efforts, has not managed to position itself as a direct rival to Amsterdam. Rotterdam may have made significant strides in promoting its entrepreneurial ecosystem, but it has not reached the level of competition and recognition that Amsterdam enjoys in terms of being a leading hub for business and innovation. Amsterdam has a long-standing reputation as a global business and cultural centre, with a well-established infrastructure and a history of attracting international companies and talent. With its strong business branding, Rotterdam is trying to establish its own place as a dynamic business and cultural centre. It is difficult to know if misrepresenting the city branding will help the municipality achieve that or simply create tensions.

4.2.2 Rotterdam's diversity and lack of integration

Both city branding and city identity view the city as diverse. Rotterdammers unanimously viewed a lack of integration as a growing problem. City branding reflects the issue, yet not sufficiently in contrast with city identity. The cultural branding has a strong focus on inclusion. Thus, by focusing on inclusion, the city branding acknowledged the lack of diversity and the need for more integration within the city. Thus, city branding is aware of the problems and is reflecting the city's identity.but not to the full extent

Cultural branding emphasises the importance of diversity and inclusion within Rotterdam's cultural life, because 'about half of Rotterdammers have a migration background' (Branding document, *Rotterdam Cultuurvisie*). The commitment to diversity and inclusion goes beyond the audience of the cultural sector and extends to 'program, staff and partners' (Branding document, *Rotterdam Cultuurvisie*). The municipality not only wants

to attract a diverse audience but reflect Rotterdam's diversity within its own cultural sector. The diversity of the cultural audience means the necessity to include all Rotterdammers in the cultural scene. In order to achieve this, it is important to cater to Rotterdam's diversity. The goal is to achieve 'a more diverse audience in which all Rotterdammers recognize themselves' (Branding document, *Rotterdam Cultuurvisie).* Thus, it is crucial to make the culture sector inviting and cater to the diverse taste of the audience.

This research has found that diversity is also an important part of city identity. Most participants saw Rotterdam as a diverse city. When participants in this research were asked to describe Rotterdam, 'diverse' was the most frequently chosen attribute (Figure 6).

Figure 6 -

Adjectives used by participants to describe Rotterdam
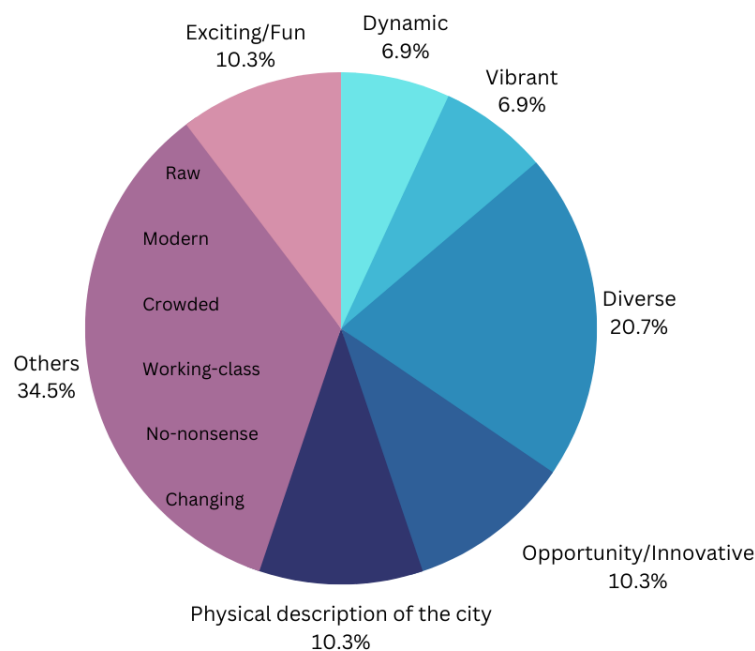
Source: Author Own

Participants were asked to describe Rotterdam using their own words, and many adjectives aligned with the city's branding from *Rotterdam's DNA* (Table 4). The city's image aligns with the city's branding, in the way the city is viewed. Rotterdam is accurately perceived and branded as diverse. The most common answer was synonyms of *international,* such as diverse or multicultural. The city identity offers a more nuanced perception of the diversity of the city and its lack of integration. This division reflects the contrasting

characteristic of the city: it is a diverse city 'built by immigrants for immigrants' (Interview 3). Participants discussed Rotterdam's diversity as well as its lack of inclusion.

Table 4 -

Adjectives describing DNA Rotterdam	Adjectives used to describe Rotterdam
International	Diverse, multi-cultural
Raw	Raw, working-class, concrete
Bold	No-nonsense, vibrant
Forward	Innovative, changing, modern,
Culture	Architecture
Entrepreneurial	Dynamic, opportunity
Others	Water, working-class, crowded, exciting, fun

Source: Author Own

Many participants mentioned the lack of integration and described Rotterdam as a city of contrasts. It is a diverse city with 'many different cultures' (Interviewee 3), yet Interviewees 2, 4, 6, 8 and 9 discussed the lack of proper integration. The participants specifically discussed Kralingen and its lack of diversity. Interviewee 4 described it as 'very white'. The lack of diversity demonstrates the inadequate integration and was brought up by several interviewees (Interview 2, 4, 5, and 6). Moreover, they argued that, with the rising prices, more and more locals were unable to live in the city. These concerns reflect the importance and lack of diversification: the city must maintain its local residents. Interviewees 4, 5, 6, and 9 mentioned how local Rotterdammers are being driven out of the city in favour of 'yuppies', referring to wealthy young urban professionals (Halton, 2021).

City branding and identity both reflect the diversity of Rotterdam. However, city branding does not entirely reflect the lack of inclusion that is demonstrated in city identity. Rotterdam is a diverse city but not every neighbourhood is diverse. The city branding discussed inclusion; however, there is a greater problem: the lack of diversity is linked to the rising prices of living costs. The city branding shows a more optimistic outlook on the situation, while the city identity shows a more realistic understanding. The issue of exclusion of the local population does not have a simple solution and may be beyond the scope of the branding documents. The city branding with the goals of increasing inclusivity and

interconnectivity shows some awareness of the problem of exclusion, although they do not present a solution to the problem. Rotterdam is a city of diversity, but the city is not fully integrated. This idea was present in the interviews as well as within the branding documents, but not to the same extent. City branding and city identity align in their portrayal of Rotterdam as a diverse city and its problems of inclusion. Nevertheless, the problems of exclusion and lack of integration within city identity are not entirely represented in the city branding.

4.2.3 Clusters of cultural identity

As previously discussed, Rotterdam has a problem of inclusion, both acknowledged in the city branding and represented in the city identity. This lack of inclusion is evident particularly in the distinct neighbourhoods that exist within the city and establish disparate clusters, forming a strong local identity. City branding and city identity discuss the division of neighbourhoods. City branding advertises it as an asset – strong local identity – while city identity offers a more nuanced view –a separation of people.

Rotterdammers emphasised two contrasting neighbourhoods: Kralingen and Rotterdam South. The participants discussed Kralingen and Rotterdam South in very different tones. Interviewees 2 and 7 live in Kralingen (Table 2) while Interviewees 2, 4 and 9 grew up in Rotterdam South. Thus, the pool of participants drew from both of these areas. Interview 2 mentioned that they are 'very blessed to be able to live in Kralingen' while Interview 7 and 8 described the beautiful houses and forest of that same neighbourhood. Interviewees 2, 4 and 6 offered a more critical look at the neighbourhood as they discussed the lack of integration and diversity within Kralingen. While discussing Rotterdam South, half of the participants argued that they rarely go there, and Interviewee 3 made jokes alluding to its lack of safety. Interviewee 8 mentioned the higher number of 'Moroccan and Turkish' people in the South. The South is more diverse and is also viewed as less safe. Kralingen and Rotterdam South show the strong contrasts between the different neighbourhoods and how each neighbourhood offers something different. City identity portrays Rotterdam as a city with layers, with different neighbourhoods reflecting contrasting offers: up-and-coming neighbourhoods as well as more gentrified ones, reflecting the multiplicity of the city. Rotterdammers showed a strong focus on Kralingen and discussed it at length negatively and positively, while the city branding does not mention it at all.

Locals argued that the diversity of neighbourhoods comes with a negative aspect: the division of people. On the other hand, city branding advertised this division as a strong local

identity. Rotterdammers spend a lot of their time within their own neighbourhoods, segregated between the areas they reside in (Branding document, *Rotterdam Cultuurvisie*). Participants showed an awareness of the separation and divisions between neighbourhoods and people. Interviewees 5, 7 and 8 used the term 'bubble' when discussing their experience of everyday interaction within their area. Interviewee 8 called it the 'international bubble' and argued that certain cultural events that celebrate non-Dutch cultures rarely include Dutch residents. These bubbles are also present within the cultural industry as many cultural events happen on a local level: 'experience culture together at a neighbourhood festival, a performance or a neighbourhood concert' (Branding document, *Rotterdam Cultuurvisie*). The separation between neighbourhoods also brings a separation of people. The city branding argued that 'Many Rotterdammers experience their free time mainly in the vicinity of their home' (Branding document, *Rotterdam Cultuurvisie*). Similarly, Interviewee 9 compared their neighbourhood to a village, where everyone knows each other. The separation of people comes at the cost of the strong local identity. There is a strong sense of community, but it is shaped within each neighbourhood, thus establishing separation from the rest of the city.

City branding emphasised the positive attribute of this separation of districts: fostering strong local identity. As each district creates a strong cultural identity, they can create local cultural events: 'Local cultural life is increasingly the breeding ground for innovation and creativity and a source of new offerings in new genres of new talent' (Branding document, *Rotterdam Cultuurvisie*). The separation of neighbourhoods thus re-enforces a strong local cultural identity resulting in the creation of small creative clusters where creativity and innovation thrive through the solidification of local identity. Establishing a sense of identity comes at the cost of creating a dynamic of 'us versus them' (Kaefer, 2021). This reinforces the common characteristics of the people in the community but also separates them from others. The city branding in contrast to city identity depicted an overly positive image.

City branding mainly focused on the positive, while city identity discussed both aspects. This division has positive and negative consequences. Firstly, it helps create strong neighbourhood identities in which people can relate and identify themselves. However, it also establishes a certain division – for example, as previously mentioned ,most interviewees rarely go to the South Side. Because of this multiplicity of different cultural identities, neighbourhoods have different things to offer. This idea was reiterated by Interviewees 1, 5, and 6, who discussed how the city always has something new to discover.

In sum, Rotterdam is not a unified city but rather an array of diversity and opportunity through the many neighbourhoods. City branding and city identity depict this separation of people; however, the city branding mainly discusses the strong local identity. City identity represents both: the variety of opportunity created through this separation as well as the strong segregation of people.

4.2.4 Cultural life

Culture is central to Rotterdam's branding. This has been the case since the 1980s with the project 'Revitalise Rotterdam' (Nieuwland & Lavanga, 2021). The project used the creative industry to improve the quality of life. This section compares the portrayal of culture within city branding to how culture is reflected within city identity. There are misalignments in the discussion of the lack of inclusivity within Rotterdam's cultural life, but both branding and identity align with the importance of Rotterdam's architecture. There are strong differences and even tensions involving the city's nightlife. These categories were selected after contrasting the various themes of both data (Figure 5). Inclusivity was a big topic within the city branding and was reflected by the interviewees, who showed different levels of comfort when discussing culture. Architecture was also an important topic in both city identity and branding. The last section discusses Rotterdam's nightlife: this industry is shown to be central to the city's identity, yet it did not appear in city branding. This contrast shows a conflict of interest within Rotterdam's cultural life.

4.2.4.1 Failure to include all Rotterdammers in cultural life

The city branding strongly emphasised the need to include all Rotterdammers within its cultural life. However, not all interviewees felt that Rotterdam's culture was accessible. Interviewees 3, 5, and 6 felt uncomfortable when asked about Rotterdam's cultural life and went so far as to say that they were unable to comment due to a lack of knowledge.

Participants 3, 5 and 6 were uneasy as they felt somewhat excluded from Rotterdam's cultural scene. This shows that the municipality has not yet achieved its objective of inclusivity within the cultural sector. This may be due to different perceptions of culture between the municipality and the people. In the interviews, the idea of culture was often limited to museums and fine art, and participants 3 and 5 mentioned that they do not go to many museums when asked about Rotterdam's cultural life. Many participants automatically understood culture as fine art.

However, the same interviewees spoke informally about how they enjoyed Rotterdam's cultural life when it was framed differently. They more readily discussed the culinary scene or even the local markets when these were not framed as a part of Rotterdam's cultural life. All participants actively participate in the cultural life, but not all saw themselves as culturally active as they did not often visit museums. The culture within Rotterdam is not deemed accessible.

Furthermore, when asked to describe the city of Rotterdam in their own words, only one of the participants described it as cultural (Interview 9, Table 5). Yet when asked directly if the participants saw Rotterdam as a cultural city, all of them said yes. Participants view the city as a cultural city but do not see it as a defining feature even though culture is one of the branding adjectives.

Participants showed different levels of comfort while discussing Rotterdam's cultural life. This discrepancy can also be explained by the fact that participants and the municipality have a different understanding of culture. The participants focused on fine art when discussing culture, while the *Rotterdam Cultuurvisie* discusses culture in a much broader sense. Either way, there is a need for change: Rotterdam's branding has not managed to position itself as a cultural city in the eyes of the locals or to create an inclusive cultural sector for all Rotterdammers. There is an inherent problem of inclusion within the cultural industry. In the branding documents, the municipality recognises this need, having focused on inclusivity as a major new objective. The city branding is thus properly addressing the issue present within city identity.

4.2.4.2 Important architectural aesthetic

Rotterdam's city branding and identity align with their appreciation of the city's architecture. Architecture plays an important role in city identity; it holds historical significance and reflects the residents' perseverance. Architecture plays a key role in city branding because it is necessary to stand out in comparison to other cities, thus Rotterdam has been able to use its unique visual landscape to distinguish itself (Lavanga & Nieuwland, 2021). City identity includes Rotterdam's architecture as a pillar of its identity, and aligns with Rotterdam's branding.

Architecture is the overwhelming subject of the interviews (Figure 3). The architecture of Rotterdam plays a strong role in its cultural identity: it reflects its difficult history as well as the creativity and resilience of its people. Interviewees 2, 3, 5, 7 and 9 mentioned the historical significance of Rotterdam's architecture and how it reflects the

people's perseverance. It reflects its history and that even after the destruction of Rotterdam, it was able to make itself anew. Rotterdammers view the physical architecture as a symbol of identity that demonstrates their determination and endurance. It plays a lesser role in city branding but remains important. Interviewees 1 and 7, similarly to city banding, saw the city as modern and contemporary, however, a handful of interviewees were more critical. Interviewees 2 and 6 discussed the lack of green spaces within the city. This demonstrates that interviewees have a more critical appreciation of the space and discuss the limitations of urban planning.

The tall buildings and modern bridge help create a striking visual aesthetic. When discussing Rotterdam's cultural scene, a third of the answers mentioned the visual aesthetic of the city (Figure 7), and when asked to describe the city, some of the participants mentioned the city's physical attributes (Figure 6). The branding documents discussed the 'architecturally characteristic buildings' (Branding document, *Rotterdam Cultuurvisie*) and named a couple of symbolic infrastructures. Two of these infrastructures were mentioned by the majority of participants: the *Erasmusbrug* (a modern bridge dividing the city between North and South) and the *Markthal* (a modern building with food stalls as well as an apartment complex). All the participants except for Interviewee 2 discussed *Markthal* while all the participants mentioned the *Erasmusbrug*. The two infrastructures were both parts of the greater effort to create cultural urban regeneration in the recent decades: the *Markthal* was built in 2014, and the *Erasmusbrug* was opened in 1996.

The bridge has become the symbol of the city, yet only one participant viewed it as their favourite infrastructure (Table 6). On the other hand, not a single participant named the *Markthal* as their favourite piece of the city. Even though they have become emblems of the city, they are not necessarily locals' favourites. Interviewee 4 took a strong stance against the *Markthal* criticising it for its excessive prices and calling it a tourist attraction (Interview 4). The interviewee argued that it lacked any authenticity and was unaffordable for the locals. That is not necessarily the case for the *Markthal*, as the majority of the locals in this study spoke positively about it. Moreover, Rotterdammers have even come up with a nickname, '*Koopboog*' (buying-arc), which demonstrates the locals' acceptance of the building.

The *Beurstraverse* (an underground shopping street in the city centre) was mentioned by several interviewees (Interviewees 3, 5 and 8), who referred to it as the '*Koopgoot*' (shopping gutter). Architecture plays a central role in the city's identity: 'Rotterdammers derive their identity from the city and its architecture' (Branding document, Rotterdam Cultuurvisie). By creating nicknames for urban structures, Rotterdammers claim these

buildings as their own and create their own city-wide culture. The nicknames are usually straightforward and simply describe the infrastructure: 'Just call it that way, you know, we're not trying to make it nicer than it is. It's just like, it is what it is' (Interview 3). Interviewee 3 explained that the nicknames are more honest than the official names and feel more authentic. Interviewees 5, 7 and 9 also referred to several buildings with their local nicknames, such as "*koopboog*" for the *Markthal,* and *The Santa Klaus* sculpture was called the *"kabouter"* (leprechaun).

This directness and forwardness is an abrupt way of accepting and embracing these infrastructures within the Rotterdam identity. This illustrates how the physical spaces of the city become personal and part of the identity (Cheshmehzangi, 2020): the city identity of Rotterdam has incorporated these buildings. Part of the city's identity is to know and refer to these buildings through their nicknames, thus signalling one's identity as a Rotterdammer. City identity is shaped by the tangible structures of the city, evolving and adapting with the buildings but also the interaction between people and spaces (Kaefer, 2021). City identity is present in the intangible: nicknaming the buildings. Moreover, these nicknames help differentiate between locals and visitors, it creates a group: people who know the nicknames and people who do not. This separation is a reflection of city identity and helps reinforce a sense of community (Kaefer, 2021).

City branding aligns with city identity by accurately representing the importance of the city's architecture. Participants demonstrated how they embraced the various infrastructures by nicknaming them. The city branding uses various infrastructures to advertise the city's entrepreneurial and creative spirit. Rotterdam's architecture plays a pivotal role in the city's identity.

4.2.4.3 Reality of the cultural life: the importance of the nightlife

City branding and city identity strongly misalign in their depiction of Rotterdam's cultural sector. Rotterdam's cultural branding has a strong focus on fostering local events. It does briefly mention the fine art and the theatre scene but omits the nightlife, while one of the most common topics within city identity was Rotterdam's nightlife.

Culture is a broad term and participants had different perceptions of what it was. Unanimously, however, all discussed Rotterdam's nightlife. This demonstrates that, in city identity, nightlife plays a crucial role which is not represented within city branding. Participants felt strongly about Rotterdam's nightlife. There is a range of interests in nightlife, but all discussed it (Table 7). An important factor that might explain this contrast is

the interviewees' age and occupation: the interviewees that discussed Rotterdam's nightlife the most were the students and the youngest interviewee (Table 2). Different cultural activities can be impacted by age and occupation, the younger the participants are the more they are involved in nightlife. However, participants overall mentioned nightlife almost a third of the time they discussed Rotterdam's cultural life of Rotterdam (Figure 7).

Figure 7 -

Rotterdam's cultural life discussed by interviewees
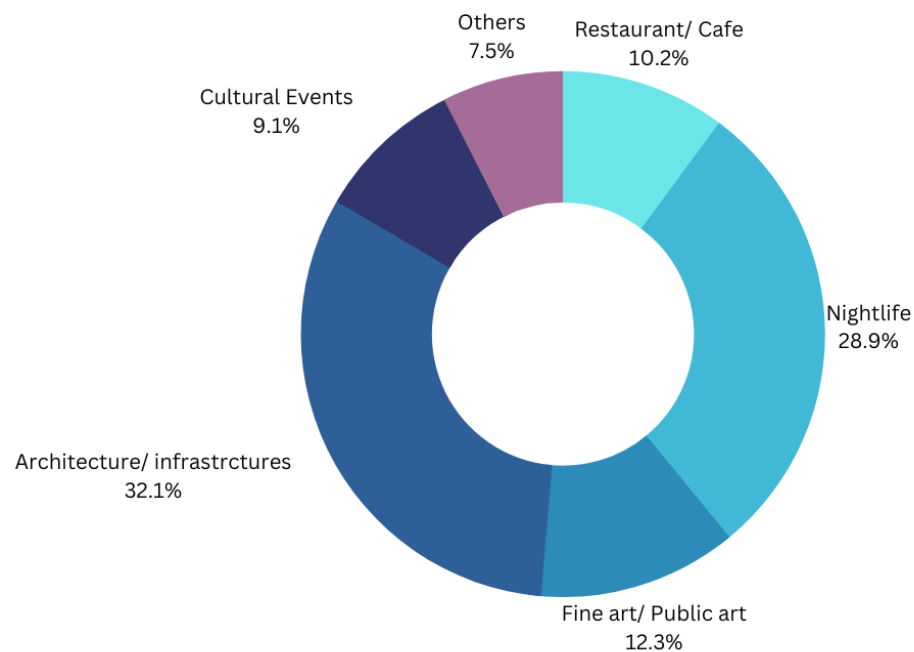
Source: Author Own

This is the second most popular topic within cultural life, after architecture (Figure 7). While not all participants spoke positively about the nightlife, the ones that did not simply complained about the lack of good nightclubs. Interviewee 5 argued that there was a lack of clubs for people over 30: 'Where do you go dancing nowadays?' (Interview 5). Interviewee 3 argued that the municipality was to blame for the lack of good nightlife: 'They want to organise stuff, but the municipality just stops it' (Interview 3). Similarly, Interviewee 9 discussed the growing tensions between the creative organisations who want to foster nightlife and the municipality. They explained that it was nearly impossible to host events involving nightlife due to the lack of affordable venues. Participants gave various opinions in regard to the nightlife: some complained about the lack of proper nightclubs while others expressed how much they enjoyed Rotterdam's nightlife. Either way, all participants

expressed the importance of good nightlife. Thus, nightlife plays an essential role within Rotterdam's city identity.

The branding documents do not mention Rotterdam's nightlife. City branding is thus not accurately representing city identity in the depiction of Rotterdam's cultural scene. City branding shows a similar bias that the interviewees exhibited earlier when focusing solely on fine art when discussing culture. Similarly, the branding disregarded an essential cultural aspect: the nightlife. There is a strong focus on cultural events and fine art when discussing culture, and a disregard for the nightlife scene. Nightlife is not a sector the city branding focuses on; however, it is an essential aspect of cultural life. The city branding and policies are not catering to the reality of the cultural life by disregarding the nightlife. This conflict goes deeper than Rotterdam's branding and amounts to a conflict of interests within Rotterdam's governance and policies (Liempt, 2015).

4.2.5 New vision: focus on the community

Rotterdam's cultural branding focuses on inclusivity, interconnectivity, and innovation. These aspects all represent problems brought up in city identity. Inclusivity is the solution for Rotterdam's lack of integration. Interconnectivity addresses the lack of integration between neighbourhoods as well as the lack of diversification of people. Innovation, by contrast, is simply a continuation of Rotterdam's strong entrepreneurship branding and is not as strongly reflected in city identity.

Inclusivity extends to the audience of cultural life as well as the people working within the cultural sector. For the cultural industry to become fully inclusive in terms of its audience, it needs to be available to all Rotterdammers, as well as cater to the diversity of the taste and cultures of the people. To offer the necessary variety to the audience, it needs to offer a diverse program, which can only be achieved with a diverse staff. Thus, an inclusive cultural life can only be achieved with diversity within cultural organisations. This problem was echoed by the interviewees: some criticised the lack of a diverse cultural programme while others seemed excluded by Rotterdam's culture. The city branding reflects the city's identity and shows an awareness of the problem of inclusivity. This direction shows an understanding of the importance of authenticity and city identity within city branding (Kaefer, 2021). Thus, in this topic, the city branding, and city identity are aligned which demonstrates good city branding.

Secondly, interconnectivity addresses the problem of clusters. City identity demonstrates segregation of people: participants argued that they stayed within their

neighbourhoods and, for example, rarely went to the South. The city branding, similarly, discussed that most creative events happen on a local level. Thus, interconnectivity works to break the separation between districts and merge people through culture. Furthermore, interconnectivity and inclusion together work to create a diverse cultural sector where all are invited to create and participate in cultural life. The city branding reflects a thorough understanding of the city's identity and the lack of connectivity. City branding reflects the problems of city identity.

The last aspect of city branding is innovation. This reflects the old branding of the city, which remains focused on entrepreneurship yet extends this idea. City identity did not view the city in terms of entrepreneurship but rather focused on opportunity. Innovation is not only within entrepreneurship but extends outside the business sector. The word innovation provides this broader understanding.

Rotterdam's cultural branding focused on 'inclusivity, interconnectivity, and innovation' addresses many of the issues demonstrated in city identity: from the inadequate integration to the lack of diversity within certain neighbourhoods. Thus, Rotterdam's cultural branding of inclusivity and interconnectivity aligns with its city identity. However, what it does not tackle is the misalignment of city branding and identity in regard to Rotterdam's branding in entrepreneurship and its lack of nightlife branding. This contrast shows that the city branding does not perfectly represent the local's perception of the city. City branding needs to represent the city's identity (Kaefer, 2021), and Rotterdam's branding does in many aspects. In regards to the nightlife, there was a clear misalignment of city branding and city identity which led to frustration from certain participants. City branding needs to properly convey the city's identity in all regards (Lavanga & Nieuwland, 2021). City identity shows a clear unified voice with a clear message: the importance of nightlife. The city's cultural branding needs to listen and adapt to city identity.

This example does not mean Rotterdam has created bad city branding, but it reflects the limitations of city branding and the effects of misrepresenting city identity. In city branding, it is essential for locals to not feel commodified as this creates an aversion and rejection of the city branding. Many authors have discussed the danger of treating cities like products (Nientied, 2018). Cities are more complex and ever-changing, however in this growing globalisation it is undeniable that city branding is a necessary tool to keep up (Kaefer, 2021). The balance between city branding accurately reflecting the city while attracting economic development is hard to develop. City identity is more complex than city branding. City branding should be a representation of city identity and thus local's perception

of the city. An accurate portrayal of city identity is difficult: not only does city branding need to boost economic development and create a dynamic city but also reflect local identity (Nieuwland & Lavanga, 2021).

When city branding is not based on city identity, it creates a lack of authenticity and mistrust. Authenticity and trustworthiness are important factors in successful city branding (Braun, 2012). The inauthentic portrayal of city identity can lead to the commodification and commercialisation of the city and its people. The commodification of people occurs when an inauthentic city branding is created to attract international development. This process involves packaging and marketing the unique qualities and culture of the local population as commodities to appeal to external entities (Medway & Warnaby, 2014). The focus shifts from preserving the genuine essence of city identity to creating a marketable image for economic gain. The result is often a superficial representation that overlooks the authentic voices and needs of the community, leading to the suppression of individuality and the marginalisation of certain groups (Kaefer, 2021). Rotterdam has not yet fully commodified or commercialised its city identity; however, it does not represent the spirit of the city. In this case, the city slogan needs to be less polished to properly represent the city's identity. Furthermore, the city branding should accurately portray the business of the city rather than to try to exaggerate it. Inauthentic city branding evolves into commodification and commercialisation of the city.

City branding shows an ideal representation of cultural life, while people experience everyday life and create their own culture. City branding needs to align with the local's city identity and properly reflect the extent of the cultural sector. The city branding claims that 'Rotterdammers derive their identity from the city', however, this thesis argues that the city derives its identity from its people.

5. Conclusion

This thesis used a two-step analysis to answer the research questions:

Does Rotterdam's city branding align with locals' sense of perception of the city?

The branding documents consisted of three texts: a cultural policy document (*Rotterdam Cultuurvisie*), official adjectives that describe Rotterdam's DNA (*Rotterdam's DNA*) and a description of the Rotterdam slogan (*Make it happen mentality).* They established the city branding through cultural policies, branding and the slogan. These documents answered the first sub-question: *How does Rotterdam's branding portray the city of Rotterdam?*

The city branding offered various focuses. The overall branding contrasted the cultural branding of the city. The overall city branding in *Rotterdam DNA* focused on entrepreneurship and the city's architecture. The cultural branding in *Rotterdamse Cultuurvisie* introduced efforts in order to create a strong community.

The broad city branding tries to stand out and emphasise the uniqueness of the city. The city branding prioritises entrepreneurship and architecture, aiming to establish Rotterdam as a business centre and utilising its unique architectural landscape to stand out. Differentiation is an important step of city branding, as cities need to be distinctive from one another.

The cultural branding shows a new focus: the community. This direction demonstrates an awareness of the importance of authentic city identity within branding. Good city branding needs to be based on authentic city identity (Kaefer, 2021). By focusing on cultivating its city identity, cultural branding helps maintain its distinctiveness and authenticity. which ultimately helps maintain good city branding. Cultural branding does not entirely deviate as it remains focused on innovation and entrepreneurship. This alignment demonstrates the need for Rotterdam to establish itself as a unique destination in its global image while its cultural branding focuses on preserving its authentic city identity.

The city branding was then compared and contrasted with nine participants' perceptions of city identity. Another misalignment between city branding and city identity was established by contrasting the different perceptions of the city image. Many of the interviewees agreed with and felt represented by the branding. City branding and city image align in the very general description of the city of Rotterdam and thus represent to a certain extent city identity. They aligned in the strong portrayal of Rotterdam as a city with modern architecture. Where city branding and city identity were inconsistent was in Rotterdam's strong entrepreneurship branding and slogan. This misalignment shows the reality of city

branding and city image: it portrays how the city wants to be perceived and perhaps not the reality of how it is perceived. Rotterdammers see through the city branding – the city image can thus be described as a city of some entrepreneurship that has not yet achieved the level of success that it advertises. By advertising Rotterdam as a business hub and with the city's slogan in English, city branding shows its agenda. The city branding primarily focuses on the positive aspects of entrepreneurship, which creates a disconnect with the city's identity. The fast-changing landscape of Rotterdam and the effects of gentrification are not adequately reflected in the city branding, which focuses on attracting business and development. The challenge lies in finding the balance between authenticity and attracting economic growth. City branding is not perceived to be authentic as it focuses on an external audience rather than on city identity.

This misalignment of perception presents tensions and shows the danger of bad city branding: misrepresentation of city identity. When city branding overly focuses on attracting economic development, it drives locals away. With more international investors and international 'expats' moving to Rotterdam, the prices rise, and original Rotterdammers can no longer afford to live in the city. This change can bring a loss of authenticity and creativity as it can lead to an exodus of its citizens.

The lack of integration was an issue brought up by interviewees in the cultural sector as well as in everyday life. Locals described Rotterdam as a city of contrasts: full of diversity with thorough segregation between neighbourhoods. This aligns with the city branding's new-found focus on interconnectivity and inclusion.

The city branding emphasises the importance of diversity and inclusivity in the cultural sector, aiming to attract a diverse audience and reflect the city's diversity. City identity reflected a more nuanced image of the city. City identity viewed the city as very diverse, yet it acknowledged the lack of inclusion and integration. While city branding shows an awareness of these issues by promoting inclusivity, it falls short of addressing the challenges faced by the local population. The alignment between city branding and city identity reflects an acknowledgement of the problem, but the branding efforts do not fully capture the complexity of integration issues. A more comprehensive approach is required to address these concerns beyond the scope of this branding document.

The segregation of people ultimately leads to the division of neighbourhoods. Rotterdam's city branding and identity aligned in their representation of this division. City branding advertised how many cultural events happen on a local level, while Rotterdammers demonstrated that they were part of certain 'bubbles' where people interact primarily within

their areas. This division of people strengthens the local cultural identities and fosters innovation. The division between neighbourhoods creates both positive and negative consequences, allowing for strong local identities but also perpetuating class divisions and limited interactions between residents. City branding is actively trying to encourage interconnectivity between areas and people by focusing on inclusivity. City branding and city identity align with the necessity to foster communication and exchange.

City branding and identity aligned with their strong focus on Rotterdam's architecture and visual aesthetic. Rotterdam's architecture reflects its history as well as symbolises its residents' resilience and creativity. The nicknames for buildings by Rotterdammers reflect their connection to and acceptance of these structures as part of Rotterdam's identity. These nicknames contribute to the intangible aspect of city identity. While city branding acknowledges the architectural significance, it downplays its role compared to city identity.

City branding effectively aligns with city identity by acknowledging the significance of architecture, while city identity offers a more nuanced perspective and personal connection to the buildings. City branding and city identity offer different representations of the city's cultural life. City identity demonstrated a strong focus on the city's nightlife and proved how essential it is. On the other hand, the city branding revealed a denial of the importance of nightlife. This presents a conflict of interest between locals and branding: locals expressed the need to create a thriving and authentic nightlife while the municipality does not promote this expression of culture. Interviewees even went so far as to blame the municipality for actively standing in the way of Rotterdam's nightlife. City branding clearly follows an agenda and portrays the city in what they consider cultural, however, city identity argues for a different cultural life.

Rotterdam city's cultural branding, as outlined in *Rotterdam Cultuurvisie*, emphasises inclusivity, interconnectivity, and innovation. In terms of inclusivity, the branding aims to cater to a diverse audience and reflect Rotterdam's cultural diversity within the cultural sector. This aligns with the city's identity and demonstrates an awareness of the problem of inclusivity. Interconnectivity addresses the issue of neighbourhood segregation, aiming to break down barriers and foster connections through cultural events and programs. The branding also recognises the importance of innovation, extending beyond entrepreneurship to encompass broader opportunities for creativity and growth.

City branding presented a polished version of the city and was not entirely reflecting its problems: rising gentrification and lack of integration. City identity offered a more honest

depiction of Rotterdam. Rotterdam's branding aligns with its city identity to a large extent, but it contrasts with the city's entrepreneurial sector and nightlife.

These differences between city branding and city identity are crucial for Rotterdam's future. In regards to its business-focus branding, a long-term effect may be that the city remains focused on attracting development and thus neglects its locals. This would bring rising gentrification, economic development and rising living costs. Ultimately, the real Rotterdammers would no longer be able to afford to live in the city and would thus be forced to leave. The departure of locals has direct consequences on city identity and authenticity. Their departure shifts the uniqueness and core identity of the city. This absence of locals means a wave of new residents who may not have the same tradition or understanding of the local culture. Without people to preserve and upkeep local identity, the sense of community and local identity is challenged. With the loss of city identity, authentic city branding is impossible. Thus, city branding needs to actively foster city identity as well as minimise tensions to keep its locals.

To ease the tensions and foster creativity, Rotterdam's branding needs to adapt to the city's identity. The city identity, through Rotterdammers, demonstrated the importance of nightlife. Thus, to help encourage innovation, it is essential for city branding as well as the municipality to adapt its cultural sector for fostering nightlife. If this is not the case, not only will tensions and a lack of trust set in between locals and municipality, but creative people will ultimately leave Rotterdam to find cities that better accommodate their needs. City branding needs to adapt to city identity to prevent the departure of its local community.

This thesis has aimed to enrich the current literature on city branding and city identity by looking at the case study of Rotterdam. It has identified various alignments and contrasts within city branding and city identity, which may serve to create a better foundation for future city branding. Two main contrasts have been established through this research: the entrepreneurial aspect of the city and its nightlife. The municipality needs to help foster locals' creativity and authenticity wherever possible, which includes Rotterdam's nightlife. This researcher hopes that these findings help better Rotterdam's branding, especially regarding its nightlife and the importance of city identity.

5.1 Limitations & Lines of future inquiry

5.1.1 Future inquiry

This research has shown that Rotterdam is a city of contrasts, full of neighbourhoods with strong cultural identities. There are various paths for recommendations for future

research. One recommendation would be to focus on the different neighbourhood identities and define the various cultural identities. Rotterdam has creative clusters, and focusing on defining the different neighbourhood cultural identity and what the municipality does to foster these creative hubs would be interesting research.

Another investigation would be to establish which projects the municipality has undertaken to create more 'inclusivity, innovation and interconnectivity' (Branding document, *Rotterdam Cultuurvisie*). The cultural policy did not involve concrete plans on how to make these changes, thus establishing what projects have been created and how successful they are would determine if Rotterdam was able to create such changes.

Another path would be to research what the long-term impacts of misaligning Rotterdam's city branding and city identity are. This thesis established that Rotterdam's branding and identity were misaligned in its slogan and its entrepreneurial aspect. Future research could focus on the broader consequences of this misalignment in the efforts to create an international and entrepreneurial hub. Furthermore, the future inquiry could research the discrepancy in Rotterdam's nightlife and the direct effect and consequences it has for its creative sector.

5.1.2 Limitations

As is the case in most, if not all research projects, this master's thesis has a series of limitations that can be highlighted. This research focused on the entirety of the city, which in one way offers a general look at the city's identity, but it is limited by the fact that only nine participants were interviewed, a sample size too small to be fully representative of the city of Rotterdam. Whilst nine local Rotterdammers is not necessarily a small sample, the sample could be extended quite considerably in order to gain validity, as it is unlikely that we have reached empirical saturation (Saunders et al., 2016). Yet, although the sample was limited, it should not be considered a critical issue for this initial exploratory study of Rotterdam's city branding and city identity. Enlarging the sample with considerations for specific neighbourhoods holds promise for enriching the study: this would help establish the specific identity of each neighbourhood. Furthermore, rather than using the snowball sampling method, a more selective and representative sample group according to the categories of age, gender, neighbourhood, migration background, and income would offer a more representative sample group.

Moreover, by analysing cultural policy dated from 2018, it may not reflect the ongoing policies as they may have been altered in the meantime. This highlights the constant development and changes from new policies. Perhaps longitudinal methods would have offered an insight into the impact and development of the perception of the city of Rotterdam; however, this is beyond the scope of this master's thesis due to time constraints. Thus, it is impossible to know what the strategies and plans set up by the municipality to create 'inclusivity, innovation and interconnectivity' and if they have been successful. Researching the tangible plans made by the municipality would establish the success of changing the city.

Furthermore, in regards to the methodological choices, there are several limitations: the decision to focus on Rotterdam's cultural policy shaped the results. Thus, researching Rotterdam's general policies could offer a more rounded depiction of Rotterdam's branding. Furthermore, using the branding adjectives to code the interviews and branding documents shaped the results. It portrayed how branding and identity view the city as raw, bold, entrepreneurial, culture, forward or international. Thus, the analysis only offered results within these parameters. Thus, opening the codes to wider categories would offer a wider range of results.

Considering this methodological approach, it is crucial to acknowledge and address the limitations of this research. Primarily, during the research on this topic, language barriers have posed potential constraints on the amount of information gathered. The participants were not native English speakers but rather Dutch natives, a language outside the researcher's skill set.

Additionally, it is important to acknowledge the potential sources of bias and lack of randomness in the selection of our sample. The majority of our interviewees were found through the researcher's personal network as well as those who subsequently agreed to participate in the study. A different sampling method may thus be able to generate a more representative sample.

The interviews were conducted in English, which is neither the participants' native language nor the researcher's, thus some information may have been lost in translation. While the individuals interviewed generally felt comfortable speaking English, there might have been instances where specific terms or subtle nuances were lost in translation. Moreover, the branding documents analysed were initially in Dutch. The two texts *DNA Rotterdam* and *Make it happen mentality* were translated officially on the website, however, the main text *Rotterdamse Cultuurvisie 2018* was only available in Dutch. The researcher tried reaching out to the municipality in order to obtain the documents officially translated.

However, such an official translation was never created. The last document was thus translated using translating devices. As a result of these circumstances, it is possible that some data and information present in the policy text, which could have facilitated a more profound comprehension, were not considered. While translation tools were employed, assistance from native Dutch speakers was sought whenever clarification was required regarding the interpretation of interview transcriptions or policy texts.

Furthermore, the decision to focus on Rotterdam's cultural policy shaped the results. Thus, researching Rotterdam's general policies could offer a more rounded depiction of Rotterdam's branding. Furthermore, using branding adjectives to code the interviews and branding documents shaped the results. It portrayed how branding and identity view the city as raw, bold, entrepreneurial, culture, forward or international. While the use of the official adjectives as codes is useful to discern how the branding wants to present itself, the analysis primarily offered results within these parameters. Thus, opening the codes to wider categories might present a wider range of results.

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Appendix A – Interview Guide

Interview Guide

Hello, How are you today? Thank you for participating in this interview. My name is Anais Siegler-Lathrop and in this interview, I would like to discuss your perception of the city of Rotterdam and its cultural identity. I will ask you a few questions about a few different topics. Is that okay with you? Please note that there are no right or wrong answers, and I'm interested in your personal experiences.

Would it be all right with you if I record this interview for the purposes of transcribing?

Interview questions:

Introductory questions:
1. What do you do? What's your age?
2. How long have you been living in the Rotterdam/ the Netherlands?
3. What were the reasons you moved here originally?

    A. City Identity

4. Do you enjoy living here?
5. Do you consider yourself a local?
6. What did you think of the city before moving here? Has this changed?
7. Can you use three adjectives to describe the city?
8. What were the experiences or events that made you see the city this way?
9. Follow up questions:

    B. City Branding

10. Do you know the slogan of Rotterdam?
11. What do you think of it?
12. Can you use three adjectives to describe the slogan?
13. Do you think the slogan is a good representation of the city?
14. These city uses these three adjectives to describe the Rotterdam identity, what do they mean to you?

bold/ forward/ culture/ international/ enterprising & raw

15. Have you seen instances of what *bold/ forward/ culture/ international/ enterprising & raw* is in Rotterdam?
16. You used different adjectives to describe Rotterdam why do you think?
17. Which do you think least represent the city?

bold/ forward/ culture/ international/ enterprising & raw

18. Do you personally relate to these adjectives?

19. Do you believe Rotterdam is good city to for entrepreneurs? How have you experienced that?

20. Do you consider Rotterdam a city with opportunities?

      C. Cultural City

21. What is your favourite unique architecture or sculpture of Rotterdam and why?

22. Can you think of an event that you attended in Rotterdam?

23. How would you describe Rotterdam's cultural life? What do you enjoy about Rotterdam's cultural sector?

24. Do you think calling Rotterdam a cultural city is an accurate description? Why?

25. Do you think the city of Rotterdam is a diverse city? In what way?

26. Do you feel that the cultural sector is able to cater to the diversity of the city?

Appendix B – Consent Form

Information and consent form

Keeping up appearances: A comparative analysis of Rotterdam city branding
with local perception

Introduction

I am Anais Siegler-Lathrop and I am researching for my Master's thesis at Erasmus University Rotterdam. I am conducting research on local perception of the city of Rotterdam.

I will explain the study below. If you have any questions, please ask me. While reading, you can mark parts of the text that are unclear to you.

What is the research about?

I am inviting you to participate in this research project about the perception of the city and identity of Rotterdam. The purpose of this research project is to understand the local perception of the city of Rotterdam. The interviews will be contrasted with policy documents to establish if the branding of the city matches the local perception.

What can you expect?

The interview lasts about 60 minutes. If you participate in this study, you will take part in an interview. I will make an audio recording of the conversation. At the end of the interview/discussion, you will have the opportunity to comment on your answers. If you disagree with my notes or if I misunderstood you, you can ask to have parts of them amended or deleted.

You decide whether to participate

Participation in this study is completely voluntary. You can stop at any time and would not need to provide any explanation.

What are the potential risks and discomforts?

I do not anticipate any risks or discomforts while participating in this study.

What data will I ask you to provide?

I will store your data so that I can be in contact with you. For the study, I will also need other data from you.

During the interview, the following personal data will be collected from you: Name, age, gender, ..., audio or visual recordings, occupation, cultural background, ethnic background, sentiments about / feelings about / opinions about, information about physical or mental health.

Who can see your data?
- I store all your data securely.
- Only persons involved in the research can see (some of) the data.
- Recordings are transcribed. Your name is replaced with a number/made-up name.
- Data such as your name, and profession (direct personal data) will be deleted from the transcription.
- We will write an article about the results of the study which will be published (publicly share the results) in (academic) journals and/or books. The results will be accessible by anyone.
- We may use your specific answers in the article. If your answer can be traced to you or we would like to mention your name, we will ask your permission first.

Because you are participating in a group discussion, you should realize that the other participants will also hear your opinion about [...]. We ask all participants not to talk to people outside the group about what was said in the group.

Do you have questions about the study?
If you have any questions about the study or your privacy rights, such as accessing, changing, deleting, or updating your data, please contact me.

Name: Anais Siegler-Lathrop
Phone number: 0645851184
Email: 616153as@eur.nl

Do you have a complaint or concerns about your privacy? Please email the Data Protection Officer (fg@eur.nl) or visit www.autoriteitpersoonsgegevens.nl. (T: 088 - 1805250)

Do you regret your participation?
You may regret your participation. Even after participating, you can still stop. Please indicate this by contacting me. I will delete your data. Sometimes we need to keep your data so that, for example, the integrity of the study can be checked.

Ethics approval
This research has been reviewed and approved by an internal review committee of Erasmus University Rotterdam. This committee ensures that research participants are protected. If you would like to know more about this RERC/IRB, please me at the following number 0645851184.

Declaration of Consent

I have read the information letter. I understand what the study is about and what data will be collected from me. I was able to ask questions as well. My questions were adequately answered. I know that I am allowed to stop at any time.

By signing this form, I

1. consent to participate in this research.
2. consent to the use of my personal data;
3. confirm that I am at least 18 years old[1].
4. understand that participating in this research is completely voluntary and that I can stop at any time; and
5. understand that my data will be anonymised for publication, educational purposes and further research.

Check the boxes below if you consent to this.

Required for research participation,

Data about perception of the city of Rotterdam.

 I consent to the researcher's collection, use and retention of the following data:

Audio recording
I consent to being audio recorded.

I consent to the sharing of my data with Erasmus University in the Netherlands.

Name of participant:

Participant's signature: **Date:**

Appendix C – Figures, Tables and Graphs

Figures

Figure 1 – Brand Identity

BRAND IDENTITY
How the owners want the brand to be perceived

↓

BRAND POSITIONING
That part of the value proposition communicated to a target group that demonstrates competitive advantage

↓

BRAND IMAGE
How the brand is perceived
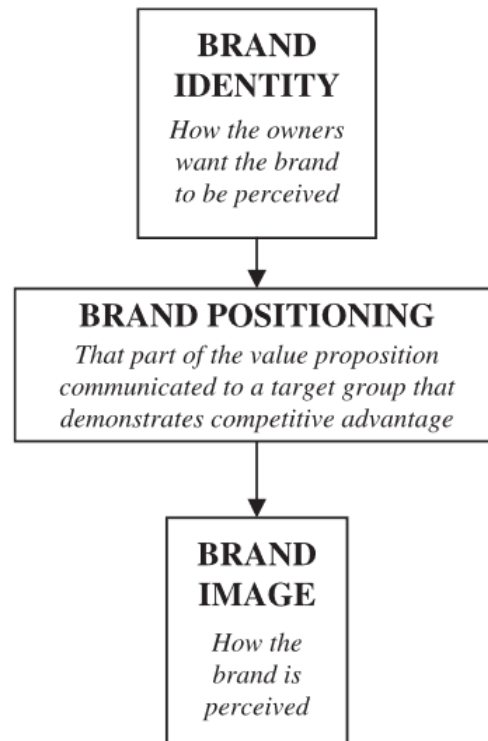
Depiction of the correlation between brand identity, brand positioning and brand image in product branding.

Source: Karavatzis, M. & Ashworth G. J. (2005). City branding: An effective assertion of identity or a transitory marketing trick? *Tijdschrift Voor Economische En Sociale Geografie*, *96*(5), p. 508

Figure 2 – City branding, city identity and city image

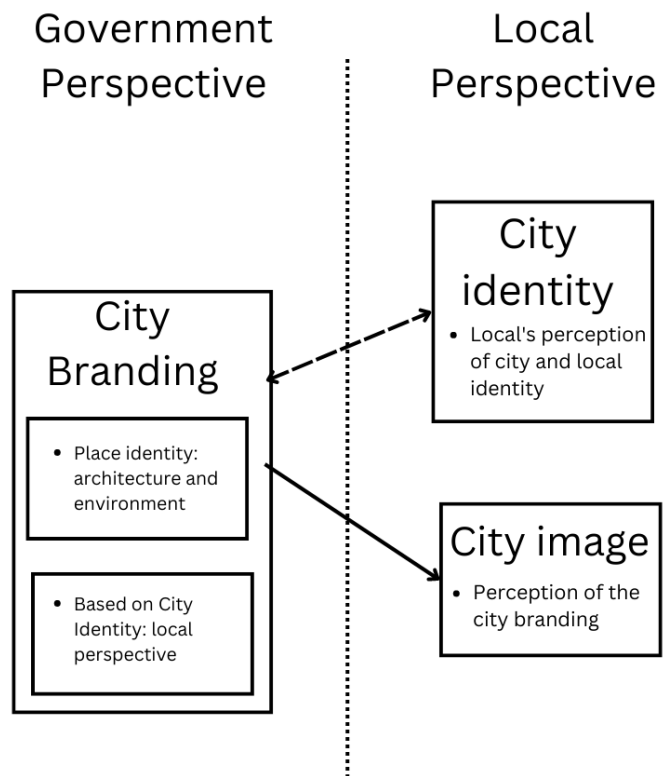Government Perspective | Local Perspective

City Branding
- Place identity: architecture and environment
- Based on City Identity: local perspective

City identity
- Local's perception of city and local identity

City image
- Perception of the city branding

Depiction of theoretical concepts and the correlation between city identity, city branding and city image. Inspired by Karavatzis and Ashworth (2005) product branding concepts.

Source: Author Own

Figure 4 – Simplified version contrast of themes of city branding and city identity
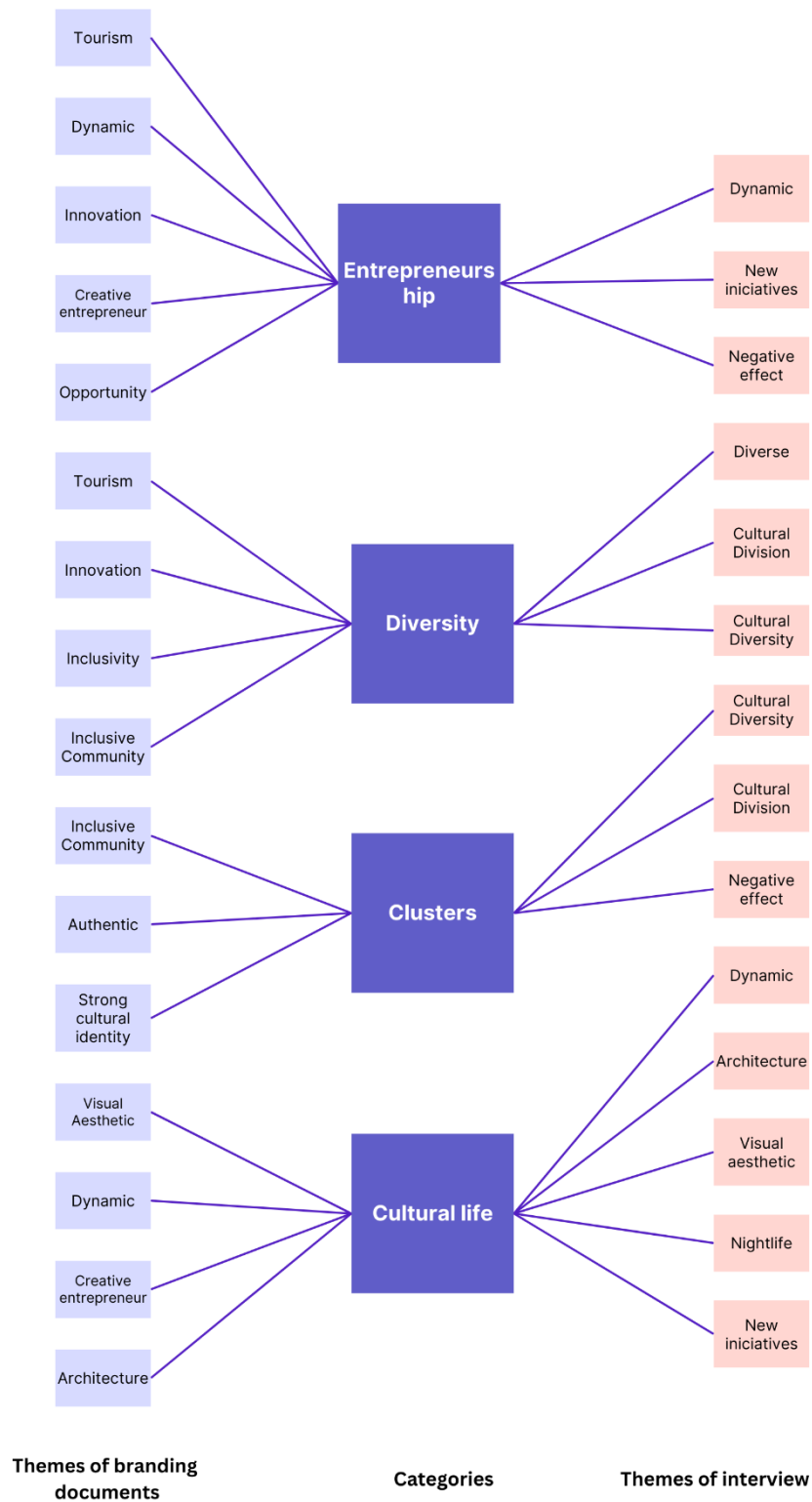

Figure contrasting the difference themes between branding documents (*Rotterdamse Cultuurvisie 2018, DNA Rotterdam* and *Make it happen mentality*) and themes of the interviews in order to establish 3 main categories.
Source: Author Own

Figure 3 – Themes from interviews

Interviews

| Codes | Themes |
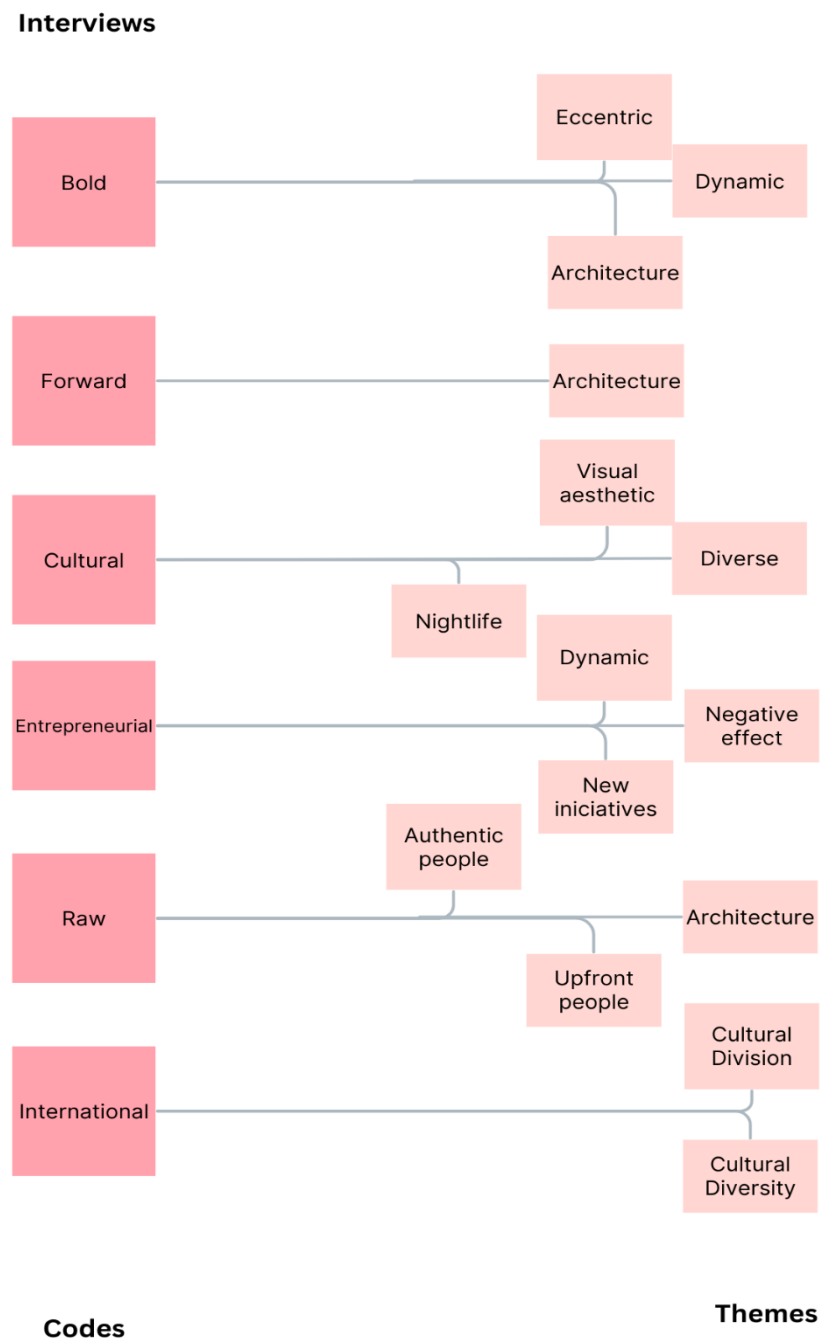
Depiction of themes established from the interviews.

Source: Author Own

Figure 5 – Comparison of City branding and city identity to create categories
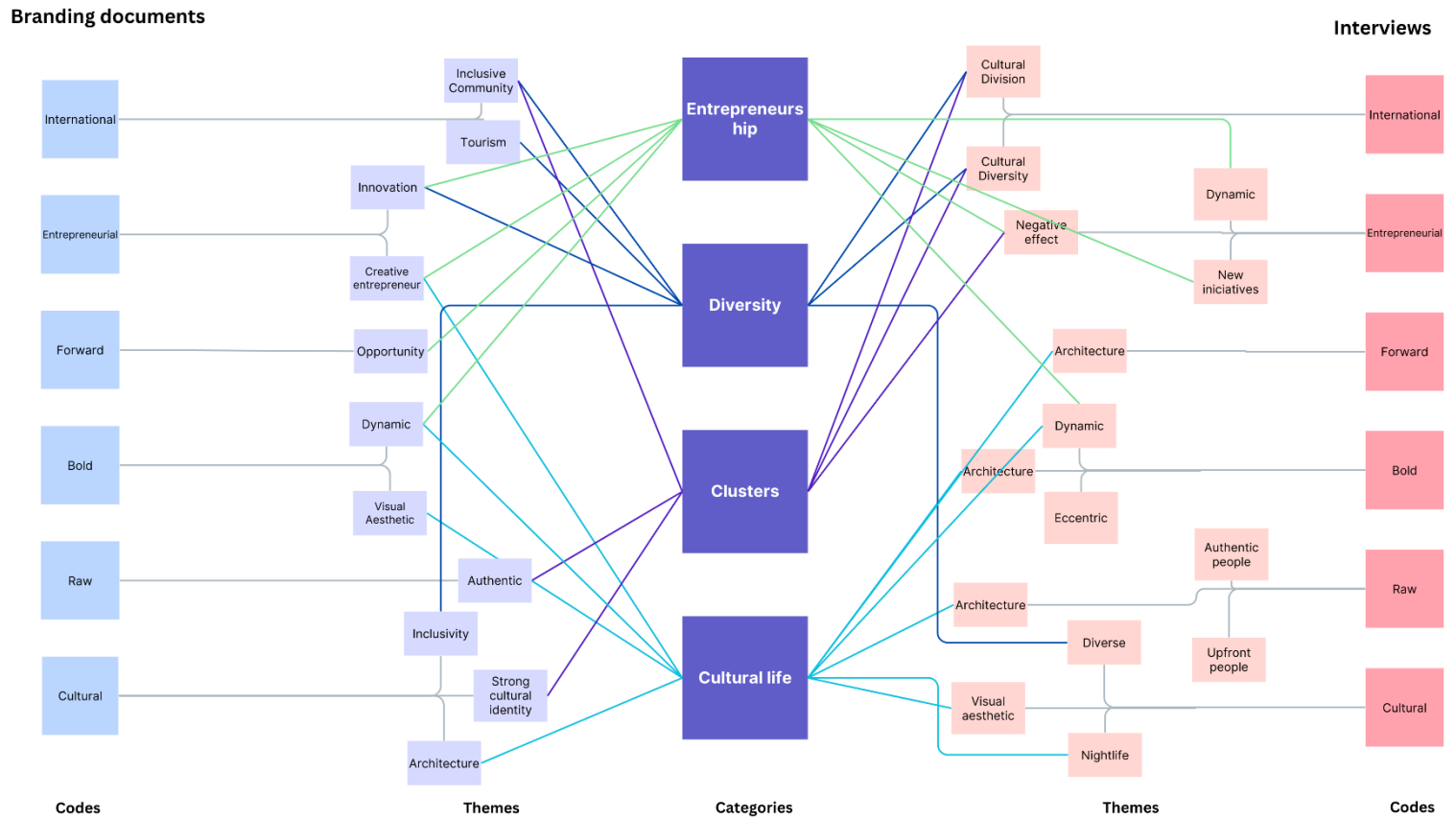
Mind map of the various themes of city branding (branding documents) and themes of city identity (interview) contrasted in order to create categories.

Source: Author Own

Figure 6 – Adjectives used by participants to describe Rotterdam

Adjectives used by participants to describe Rotterdam

Exciting/Fun
10.3%

Dynamic
6.9%

Vibrant
6.9%

Raw

Modern

Crowded

Diverse
20.7%

Others
34.5%

Working-class

No-nonsense

Changing

Opportunity/Innovative
10.3%

Physical description of the city
10.3%
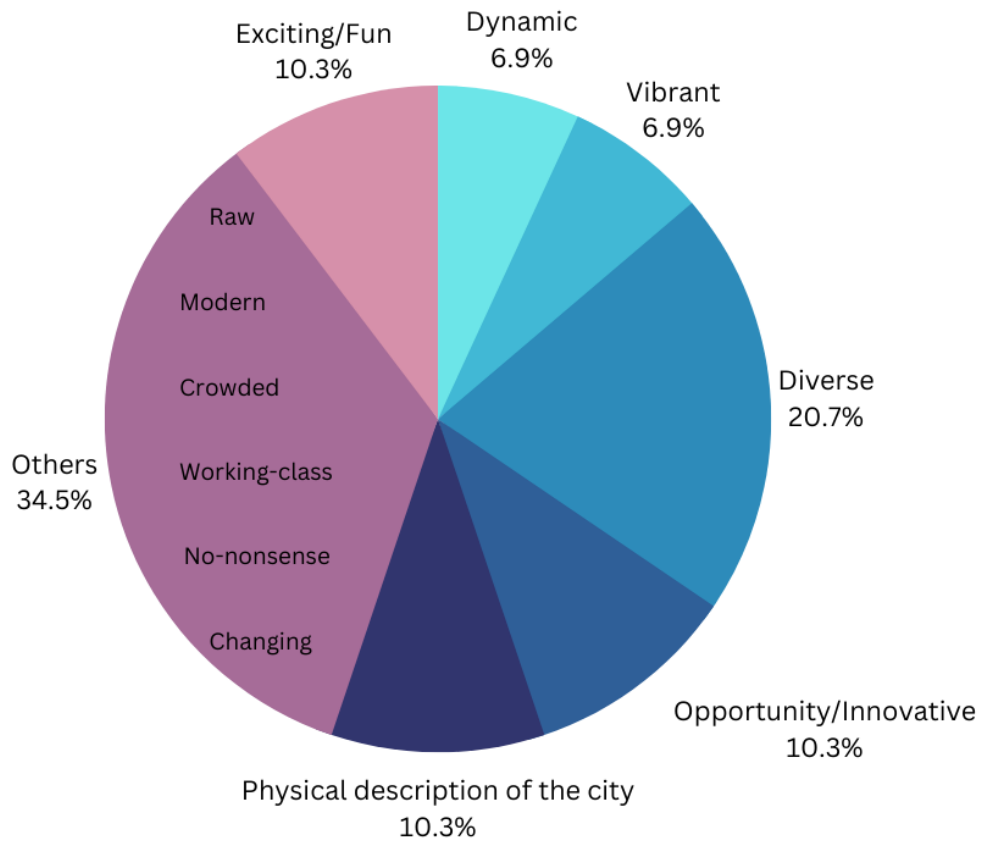
Graph depicting the various adjectives used by interviewees to describe Rotterdam.

Source: Author Own

Figure 7 – Different sector of cultural life discussed by Participants
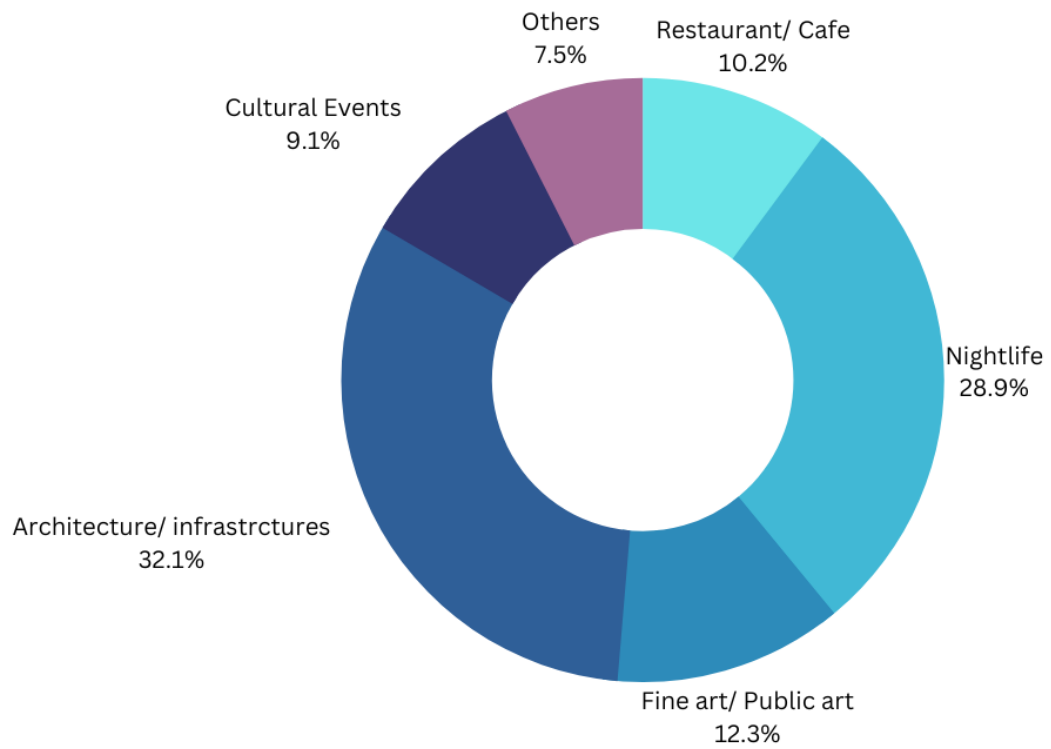
Graph with percentage of cultural sector mentioned by interviewees.

Source: Author Own

Tables

Table 1 – Primary and Secondary Data

Primary data: Interviews	Secondary data: Branding documents
10 hours of interviews from	*Rotterdamse Cultuurvisie 2018.*: Cultural policy document about Rotterdam's cultural projects and what the municipality wants to achieve in the coming years.
	DNA Rotterdam: Information about Rotterdam's branding and the 6 adjectives used to characterize the city.
	Make it happen mentality: Information about what the slogan of the city means.

Table depicting the different data used for this research.

Source: Author Own

Table 2 – Information Participants

Participant	Gender	Nationality	Age	Occupation	Living in Rotterdam	Neighborhood	From Rotterdam
1	Female	Half-Dutch	24	Work	6 years	North	No
2	Male	Dutch	26	Work	20 years	Kralingen	Yes
3	Male	Dutch	35	Work	13 years	North	No
4	Female	Dutch	21	Student	18 years	Charlos	Yes
5	Female	Dutch	29	Work	10 years	Bleidrop	No
6	Male	Dutch	28	Work	7 years	North	No
7	Female	Dutch	27	Work	9 years	Kralingen	No
8	Female	Half-Dutch	21	Student	5 years	Der Esch	No
9	Female	Dutch	22	Student	22 years	West	Yes

Basic information of participants.

Source: Author Own

Table 3 – Themes of City Branding

Codes	Themes	Main topics
Bold	Visual aesthetic	Culture
	Dynamic	Entrepreneurial
Forward	Opportunity	Entrepreneurial
Entrepreneurial	Creative entrepreneur	Entrepreneurial
	Innovation	Entrepreneurial
Cultural	Architecture	Culture
	Inclusivity	Community
	Strong cultural Identity	Culture
Raw	Authentic	Culture
International	Tourism	Entrepreneurial
	Inclusive community	Community

Depiction of themes from the branding documents (Rotterdamse Cultuurvisie 2018, DNA Rotterdam and Make it happen mentality) as well as a division of those themes into 3 different topics: Culture, Community and Entrepreneurship.

Source: Author Own

Table 4 – Comparison of description of city from city branding and identity

Adjectives describing DNA Rotterdam	Adjectives used to describe Rotterdam
International	Diverse, multi-cultural
Raw	Raw, working-class, concrete
Bold	No-nonsense, vibrant
Forward	Innovative, changing, modern,
Culture	Architecture
Entrepreneurial	Dynamic, opportunity
Others	Water, working-class, crowded, exciting, fun

Table contrasting the adjectives used to describe the DNA of Rotterdam and adjectives sed by interviewees to describe Rotterdam.

Source: Author Own

Table 5 – Information of participants perception of Rotterdam

Interview	Three adjectives to describe the city	Did they know the slogan?	Is Rotterdam a cultural city?	Is Rotterdam a diverse city?	Favourite piece of the city
1	Dynamic, water & architecture	No	Yes	Yes	Williamsbridge
2	Vibrant, dynamic & diverse	No	Yes	Yes	De Hef bridge
3	No nonsense, working class & raw	No	Yes	Yes	*Santa Klaus* by Paul McCarthy
4	Vibrant, Open & Opportunities	Yes	Yes	In some ways	the maas tunnel 'here and there'
5	Diverse, innovative	Yes	Yes	Yes	Erasmus bridge
6	Diverse, concrete & changing	Yes	Yes	Yes	*Santa Klaus* by Paul McCarthy
7	Modern, multi-cultural	Yes	Yes	Yes	Erasmus bridge
8	Crowded, exciting & diverse	Yes	Yes	Yes	Central Station
9	Cultural, raw & bold	Yes	Yes	Yes	*Santa Klaus* by Paul McCarthy

Table depicting how each interviewees described Rotterdam.

Source: Author Own

Table 6 – Participants discussion of specific cultural sectors

Inter view	Restaurant/cafe	Nightlife	Fine art/ public art	Architecture/ infrastructure	Cultural events
1	Brunch places, nice restaurants, independent cafes and restaurant	Bird, some nice bars, so many bars, party scene, festivals, techno scene	Art, Exhibition	Cube houses, Markethall, Williamsbridge, Architecture, old buildings, different architecture, beautiful buildings, architecture, tall buildings, a lot of buildings, united architecture	Food festival, Marathon, events organised, beer festival
2	Café, restaurants	Small clubs, disco	Art gallery, art, small scale art galleries, art galleries	Random buildings, buildings pop-up, buildings that attract attention, lot in architecture, industrial architecture, high-end residential buildings, new skyscrapers	-
3	Noordplein market	The techno scene, good club	Rotterdam Art fair	Feyenoord football stadium, the architecture, the design	Stuff on the rooftops of building
4	Food stalls, Markethall	Bars, Bird, Worm, Villa Thalia, Annabelle, Angel's festival, Row town, going to clubs, coolest club ever, bars	Museum, going to museums Braid of hair, Quotes in light, Mosaic chairs, Yellow frame	Different architecture Skyline, central station, Maas tunnel	-
5	Gastronomy, new restaurants, nice restaurants	beer garden, new things going out, new bars, clubs and festivals, clubbing scene, festivals	Boijmans, Depot	Markethall, Skyline, Coolsingel bridge, Airbridge, central station,, Hotel New	-

				York,Erasmus Bridge, great architecture, unique architecture, modern city, looks unique, the skyline, awkward architecture, innovative architecture	
6	Nice cafes	Beer garden, Wilde, quite nice clubs, nightlife, clubs and places	Santa Klaus by Paul McCarthy, art week	Cube Houses, skyline, concrete, buildings, its not beautiful, high buildings, skyscrapers	Markets, Music festivals
7	Keilecafe, go out to dinner, restaurants, café	Beer garden, Dezzi, containerbar, karaoke bar, going out places, student parties, jazz evening, tropicana	Modern art, Boijmans, Depot,art, Keilewerk	Modern buildings, Old building, weird architecture, building	Eurekaweek, Marathon, film festival, carnival
8	Restaurants, more restaurants	Peron, Annabelle, Munch, Bird, Toffler, Mycelium, clubbing, festivals, nightlife, bar street, different genre of bars, actual clubs, techo clubs, reggaeton nights	the BMW building	Colorful staircase, Williamsbridge, Euromass, Markethall, Erasmus bridge, City Hall, police station, Central Station, architecture, big buildings, the design and buildings, architecture	Pride Month, nice projects, interesting projects, Kingsday, good events, rooftop walk, International film festival
9	Restaurants, more restaurants	Bars, Bird, Worm, Villa Thalia, Annabelle, Angel's festival, Row town, going to clubs, coolest club ever, bars	Santa Klaus by Paul McCarthy, art week	Modern buildings, Old building, weird architecture, buildings	-

Table depicting the specific sector of the cultural industry mentioned by each interviewee.

Source: Author Own

Appendix D – Codebook

Codebook Branding Documents

Code	Themes	Quotes
Culture	Architecture	'Architecturally characteristic buildings', 'city of architecture', 'versatility and appeal of the city'
	Inclusive	'All Rotterdammers must have the opportunity and be challenged to experience, practice and experience art and culture', 'inclusive cultural sector', 'visitors from inside and outside the city', 'foundation for inclusivity'
	Strong cultural Identity	'position of the Rotterdam cultural sector', 'Rotterdammers derive their identity from the city ', 'a cultural anchor point', 'inseparable part of society', 'culture bring people in the neighbourhoods together'
Entrepreneurial	Creative entrepreneur	'Creative talent', 'creative entrepreneur', 'strong and dynamic cultural climate', 'opportunities for cultural and economic development'
	Innovative	'Architecturally characteristic buildings', 'ground-breaking' fertile ground for innovation', 'city as a laboratory and nursery', 'New breeding grounds', 'laboratory for innovation and experimentation'
International	Tourism	'visitors outside the city', 'more tourists', 'worldly', 'space for international offerings in the city', 'national and international cultural hotspot'
	Inclusive Community	'inclusivity, innovation and interconnectivity', 'visitors inside of the city', 'diversity', 'a more diverse audience', 'majority-minority city', 'culture lays the foundation for inclusivity'
Bold	Visual Aesthetic	'Architecturally characteristic buildings', 'Unpolished character of the city'
	Dynamic	'room for innovation and experimentation in the cultural' 'laboratory for innovation and experimentation', 'culture is an engine for change'
Forward	Opportunities	'open attitude towards new and unknown' 'engine for change', 'New initiatives', 'outward-looking'
Raw	Authentic	'all Rotterdammers recognize themselves', 'Real Rotterdammers', 'informal culture', 'authenticity'

Codebook of branding documents (*Rotterdamse Cultuurvisie 2018, DNA Rotterdam* and *Make it happen mentality*)

Source: Author Own

Codebook Interviews

Code	Themes	Quotes
Culture	Diverse	'very specific identities', 'loads of independent cafes and restaurants', 'so many different cultures', 'united architecture', 'multicultural', 'so many cultures', black artists', 'lot of different genres'
	Visual aesthetic	'really beautiful buildings', 'high end residential buildings', 'emphasis on design and art', 'stuff on the rooftops of building', 'architecture, designs, buildings and everything'
	Nightlife	'coolest club ever', 'students parties', 'going out to places', 'there's definitely a nightlife', 'actual clubs', 'techno clubs', 'very good reggaeton nights'
Entrepreneurial	Dynamic	'so vibrant and open and possibility', 'inspires me', 'here's always some new tower popping out of nowhere', 'new things every time', 'renovating and building things', 'innovative', 'always new things going on', 'experimental nature of the city'
	Gentrification/negative effect	'it's very expensive', 'changed so much', 'can no longer afford', 'too business focus', 'I feel it is average', 'gentrification', 'neighbourhood has changed a lot'
	New initiatives	'most changed probably in a short time', 'opportunity', 'there's so much space, and there's so much to offer', 'sense of possibilities'
International	Cultural Diversity	'nobody was Dutch', 'a city built by immigrants for immigrants', 'diverse', 'everyone was an immigrant so you can quite easily feel like accustomed', 'it's a really diverse neighbourhoods', 'more international people', 'international background'
	Cultural Division	'minorities have quite a big social housing issue', 'international bubble', 'But diverse. I wouldn't say so', 'international side', 'it's integrated in a lot of ways. But also in some ways, it's not', 'they're not culturally diverse', 'everybody was very Dutch and rich'
Bold	Eccentric	'a bit more like eccentric', 'more edgy', 'I like the vibrance', 'fierce things'
	Architecture	'weird city', 'a lot of different architecture', 'never seen something quite like it before', 'experimental nature of the city'
	Authentic	'not taking any bullshit', 'people that are more of themselves', 'straightforward and sort of the harbour mentality', 'extremely straightforward', 'really true to themselves', 'no words but action'

Forward	Architecture	'quite modern', 'A very, very modern', 'an international looking city', 'innovative entrepreneurial architecture', 'forward when they want'
Raw	Authentic people	'More themselves', 'eccentric, expressing themselves', 'more edgy', 'weird guests', 'really weird', 'original people', 'true to themselves', 'much more raw', 'just do your thing'
	Architecture	'Different architecture', 'contrast with other cities', 'looks a bit different', 'contrasting aesthetic', 'two different side', 'united architecture', 'new looking city', 'unique combination of architecture', 'very modern looking', 'awkward architecture', 'a lot of concrete', 'unique', 'really ugly'
	Upfront people	'Prostitute live there', 'don't fall in the norm', 'a bit industrial', 'harbour mentality', 'inequalities that persist', 'not taking any BS', 'not pretentious', 'without beating around the bush', 'honest', 'easy going, no-nonsense', 'we don't have this arrogance', 'different from someone from Amsterdam', 'not trying to be fancy', 'more grounded', 'quite straight forward', 'you see what you get mentality', 'they don't make things more interesting', 'no-nonsense people', 'people bring the rawness'

Codebook of interviews.

Source: Author Own