



Figure 1: Smart Delta Drechtsteden

# DESCRIBING THE DIFFERENT VALUES OF REGION BRANDING

A case study of Smart Delta Drechtsteden and its regional manufacturing industry.

## SUMMARY

This thesis investigates the values of regional branding from the perspective of the manufacturing industry, using the Drechtsteden region in the Netherlands as a case study. The research explores how companies in regionally influential sectors perceive and value regional brands, specifically focusing on the Smart Delta Drechtsteden region brand. A theoretical framework on place branding and value attribution is developed and applied through a Q-sort analysis to identify different perspectives among local companies.

The analysis reveals two distinct profiles: one that sees the brand as a network enhancer, facilitating regional collaboration, and another that views it as a regional flagship, promoting a unified regional identity. The study highlights the varying degrees of brand value based on the companies' regional orientation.

The findings suggest that region-specific branding is valued by regionally influential sectors as enhancement of regional economic competitiveness, stakeholder engagement, and institutional collaboration. The research concludes with recommendations for further development of regional branding strategies and their theoretical underpinnings, emphasizing the importance of different perspectives on value attribution for companies with different orientations. This study contributes to the understanding of regional branding as a governance tool in supporting regional development and economic growth.

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## 1. Introduction

Everyone is familiar with "I ♥ New York" or, especially since the last Football World Cup in 2022, the Qatar nation brand (see *Figure 2*: place brands on different governance scale levels). These are illustrative examples of state-of-the-art place brands, employed to promote a city or nation as if it were a brand like Coca Cola. This type of branding, however, is not just a marketing approach to sell a location to potential visitors. Over recent decades, place branding has emerged as a governance- and management tool used by governing actors to achieve commonly shared goals, tackle societal challenges, and enhance cross-sectoral collaboration (Ginesta Portet et al., 2020). On a regional scale, place branding can be an important tool to bring actors together in a collective that otherwise might not be present in existing institutions, since local and national scale level organisations often fall either too far in, or too far out of the regional scope (Cleave et al., 2016). Smart Delta Drechtsteden is a fine example of an organisation employing regional branding to fill in the institutional void in the Drechtsteden region of the Netherlands.



*Figure 2: place brands on different governance scale levels*

The Drechtsteden region is situated in the Netherlands, in the province Zuid-Holland, just south of Rotterdam. With around 130.000 residents, Dordrecht is the largest city in the region. Characterised by the multitude of rivers flowing through the area, the region is known for its maritime industry with global front runners such as Boskalis originating from it (Smart Delta Drechtsteden, 2024a). The water is a connecting factor between the region's seven municipalities, even though the towns and cities know many differences. Whereas Dordrecht is a relatively big city for Dutch standards, the other municipalities are more rural and consist of villages and towns. Despite these differences, there are many reasons why regional collaboration has been incentivised by the local governments over the recent decades. Water security and global competition for the maritime industry are among the issues recognised as ignoring municipal borders, and as such an effort has been made to tackle such problems on a regional scale (Smart Delta Drechtsteden, 2022b). With this idea in mind, Smart Delta Drechtsteden was founded as an effort to unite governing- and non-governing actors to act regionally.

When Smart Delta Drechtsteden was founded in 2021, the organisation developed a strategy

to enhance collaboration in tackling regional problems. In this strategy, 'brede welvaart' ('*broad prosperity*') is the central theme (Smart Delta Drechtsteden, 2022a). To achieve broad prosperity, collaboration is necessary: co-creation is key for spatial, economic, and social goals adopted in the strategy (Smart Delta Drechtsteden, 2022b). Especially the economic potential is recognised as quintessential for the region's prosperity, making it the main connecting theme in Smart Delta Drechtsteden's vision. Allowing the maritime industry and other sectors to flourish and simultaneously enhancing multi-helix collaboration is seen as the key to improve the region's broad prosperity targets (Smart Delta Drechtsteden, 2022b). The task for Smart Delta Drechtsteden is thus to connect regional actors, and improve and facilitate collaboration and co-creation, through place branding. Regional place branding such as used by Smart Delta Drechtsteden is a strategic tool to govern/steer region towards goals (Oliveira, 2016). However, regions have intricate networks of actors and stakeholders, and thus this requires thorough management (Ripoll González & Gale, 2020). It is important to get everyone, or at least most, on board, since a place brand should reflect the 'place' and thus the people in it. However, some stakeholders will have opposing ideas, thoughts, or views that might make it hard to develop a place brand everyone can be happy with. For example, a place brand expressing sustainability targets that are incompatible with heavy maritime industry companies can result in low support among said industry for the brand (Cleave et al., 2016; Khardzilov, 2023; Pimonenko et al., 2020). Therefore, understanding the array of ideas, views, and everything else in the complex and dynamic systems of a region helps branding to adapt and play into them as strategy- and management tool. As Cresswell (2004, p. 37) put it: "*Places are never finished but always the result of process and practices.*". Therefore, knowing the needs and desires of stakeholders of a place allows place branding to play into them and tailor brand strategy and management. For Smart Delta Drechtsteden, it is thus of importance to understand the value of the brand for all stakeholders, but specifically for manufacturing industry companies, the most influential industry in the region.

Place branding as a strategic governance tool has value for governing actors, which is extensively researched (e.g. Ripoll González & Gale, 2020; Hereźniak & Anders-Morawska, 2021). As mentioned above, it can be a public governance strategy to bind actors together towards regional goals and position the region to attract desired economic activity, as is the goal of Smart Delta Drechtsteden. However, the value of said brand might be completely different from non-public actors in the region. Understanding the differences in values of place brands for different stakeholders can be crucial for its success. Especially when considering a specific regional industry, there are companies of different size and origin that might have different values for the same region brand. Some companies might be only active in the region, while others act on larger scales. Aspects such as these can thus cause different perspectives on values, and all are important for a region brand.

Of the values of place brands for private actors, especially on a regional scale, significantly less is known. Research has been conducted to assess the perceptions of non-public stakeholders involved in branding processes (e.g. Andersson & Ekman, 2009; Stevens et al., 2020), but hardly on a regional scale level. A better understanding of how companies value region brands is thus welcome, and specifically in regions such as the Drechtsteden where one industry is highly important for regional development, this can have significant influence on region brands.

This research aims to create a greater understanding of the dynamics between region brands and stakeholders of highly influential sectors in the region, for which the manufacturing industry and Smart Delta Drechtsteden act as an exemplary case study. A distinction is made between companies of various regional presence to investigate if differences in perspectives can be caused by the degree of which a company is active on the relevant regional scale. The research questions addressed in this paper is thus:

*"What is the perceived value of a region brand for companies of influential regional industries, and does the value differ for relative regional presence of these companies?"*

In order to answer the research questions, a number of steps are taken. Firstly, relevant theory is used to provide a theoretical and analytical framework on place branding and brand values in the light of the case study Smart Delta Drechtsteden. This is operationalised with the research design and methodology of a Q-sort analysis. At the hand of the designated methods, the collected Q-sort data is then collected and analysed. Through interpretation and discussion of the analysis, a conclusion is drawn and the research questions answered. In the *Appendix*, relevant graphs and tables can be found.

## 2. Theoretical framework

To answer the research question, multiple theories are used. Below, relevant theory on region branding, brand values, and the importance of values given by industry-specific companies is described. Based on the theory, a theoretical framework is provided on which further analysis is based.

### 2.1 Region branding

Place branding is a governance or management strategy used more and more frequently over the last two decades. Branding knows its origins in corporate applications, where it is a tool to promote goods and/or services through certain modes and combinations of visual, verbal, and textual communication that generate a 'gut feeling' (Kotler et al., 2002; Margarisová & Vokáčová, 2017). However, over recent decades the application of branding has become more consistent for the promotion of corporations themselves, destinations as being a product for tourism, and places themselves (McGnally et al., 1999). Considering this, place branding is in essence product branding applied to a place in order to promote it (Messely et al., 2014).

The promotion of places goes hand in hand with governance, and has occurred ever since places were governed (Ashworth, 2006). Presently, it is considered a staple tool to generate local competitiveness (Boisen et al., 2011). With the emergence of 'New Public Management' in the 1990's as a response to fiscal state crises across the globe, national and local governments adopted business practices in the process of becoming competitive actors (Cerny, 1997; Harvey, 2007). Consequently, along the evolution of public governance, participatory network approaches to governance have played an increasingly important role in place branding (Ripoll González & Gale, 2020). As such, the application of place brands has become more subject to network- and scale-level specific circumstances, as has its management (Ayres & Stafford, 2012). These developments have resulted in place branding becoming a governance tool used to support regional development, stakeholder and citizen engagement, and improving regional economic competitiveness (Ginesta Portet et al., 2020).

A specific perspective on place branding is required when considering branding of regions. Whereas governance networks of all scales are of a complex nature, with governance complexity being a field of study on its own, regional networks tend to be even more complex than local or national ones (Albrecht et al., 2014). Situated in between existing local, provincial, and national governing institutions, the boundaries of regional networks tend to be abstract and multi-dimensional. They tend not to be defined by hard borders, but can be of different natures; cultural, linguistical, natural, social, etc. (Paasi, 2002). Consequently, governance practices in regions require intense cross-scale collaboration between involved actors to overcome such differences, since it might not occur naturally in the desired way.

To overcome the region-specific challenges as mentioned above, regional organisations adopt region branding as a governance strategy for various reasons. To start, region branding can institutionalise unity through creating a common denominator for stakeholders in the region. In the design of a region brand, regional attributes that are deemed important by the target audience are adopted, leading to a recognisable and relatable brand that reflects values place-specific cultural or locational aspects such as identity and values (Ashworth, 2008). This enables the brand to position itself in such a way that it contributes to regional strategic goals, such as reputation management, generating advocacy among stakeholders, or network engagement to stimulate stakeholder collaboration (Ashworth, 2008; Ahmadi & Ataei, 2022; Stevens et al., 2020). Through this process, the brand has a binding effect on regional networks, meaning that stakeholders are bound to regional processes and cooperative behaviour is generated (Rinaldi & Cavicchi, 2016).

The process as described above is mostly used by regional public organisations to improve economic competitiveness in the region (Boisen et al., 2011; Ginesta Portet et al., 2020). For public organisations initiating the region brand, place branding thus has value as a governance tool. However, the stakeholders in the region are crucial in this process. As such, it is not only important to understand how region branding has value for public organisations. Just as important is understanding how stakeholders value region branding, since without their engagement the benefits of region branding as described above are most likely not experienced.

## 2.2 Brand equity and influential industries

As described above, considering the value of the brand to the target audience is crucial. Brand equity refers to these values and is as such a crucial factor in creating and managing an effective place brand (Eshuis & Klijn, 2012). In other words, a perfectly equitable brand fully reflects all the values of all involved stakeholders of the brand. Brand attributes, such as specific spatial references and reflected regional identity, are one of two aspects of brand equity. The second aspect refers to brand benefits, or how the brand generates value for all involved (Eshuis & Klijn, 2012).

Brand benefits can be split into three types: 1) *functional* benefits e.g. generation of financial support, 2) *experiential* benefits i.e. sensory experiences that the brand evokes, and 3) *symbolic* benefits i.e. enabling (self-) expression of brand users (Heding et al., 2009). These benefits, together with the attitudes, fuel the construction of a brand. What they exactly are is determined by the actors involved in brand development, which can differ greatly. In some processes, such as corporate branding, it is usually determined by one company itself. Considering place branding as a governance process, a much larger number of actors want to have a say in brand construction. Consequently, the level of stakeholder participation in this process is usually higher, up to the point of co-creation of a brand (Edelenbos & Klijn, 2005). Additionally, properly reflecting identity (i.e. *symbolic* benefits) is

much more important for place branding, since places already have a strong identity associated with by inhabitants or other stakeholders in an area. This results in brand equity, or values of a brand, being of higher importance in place branding. Simultaneously, it makes identifying brand equity more difficult due to the higher number of stakeholders involved, with the same region-specific challenges as discussed previously.

For region branding as a governance process, properly considering the range of values the region brand has, is thus essential for it to be a successful governance- and/or management strategy (Margarisová & Vokáčová, 2017). The differences in values are caused by a number of factors. Different types of stakeholders involved in and affected by the region brand have a different perspective on what is, or how the brand generates, value. For public actors in a region, such as municipalities, it is maybe the most obvious that the region brand has value, since they choose to adopt it as a strategy. For private actors such as companies or other organisations, however, what those values are can vary significantly, if there are any. These discrepancies in values make region branding as a governance approach an intricate process, especially if the region brand is aimed to improve economic competitiveness through stakeholder- and/or network engagement in a region (De San Eugenio Vela et al., 2019).

On a regional scale, it is common that economic activity is clustered by industry. As such, it frequently occurs that one industry is highly influential in a region (Cleave et al., 2016). For region branding in such situations where one industry makes up for a large portion of economic activity, it can thus be highly important to understand how companies from this specific industry value the region brand (De San Eugenio Vela et al., 2019). Including their perspectives on brand values as a stakeholder group in the branding process is thus highly important for reaching the strategic goals of the brand. As such, the scope of this research focuses on region brands in situations where one industry is highly influential on region brands aimed at improving regional economic competitiveness.

### 2.3 Region brand relation with influential industries

In branding, the interaction between 'customer' and the organisation managing the brand is what holds value. It is therefore up to the organisation to know the needs and desires of the 'customers' as to make a brand that is sufficiently tailored to the target audience (see *Figure 3* (Iglesias et al., 2017)). Whereas this lesson from corporate literature is focused on the 'customer', and not 'stakeholder' as would be the case in place branding, the same relationship applies: one (or a group of) organisations aim to use place branding as a strategic governance tool that move stakeholders in the area to certain actions or directions. If this interaction is not well-tailored, the desired effects of the brand will not occur. A crucial difference, however, is that with corporate branding the organisation that manages the brand is usually not in other ways related to the customer than through the brand and its product.

With place branding, public organisations are established institutions that have far more responsibilities than just selling a product. They are mandated to govern and organise the area, and as such are known for much more than just a brand (Boisen et al., 2018). Therefore, the organisation behind the place brand should not just consider the interactions between the brand and stakeholders, but also on the interactions between the organisation itself and its network of stakeholders. Similarly to branding, these interactions generate value through stakeholder relations, tight networks and enhanced collaboration between various actors (Andersson & Ekman, 2009). Considering this relationship specifically for highly influential regional industries allows for region branding to be adapted correctly to regional circumstances.

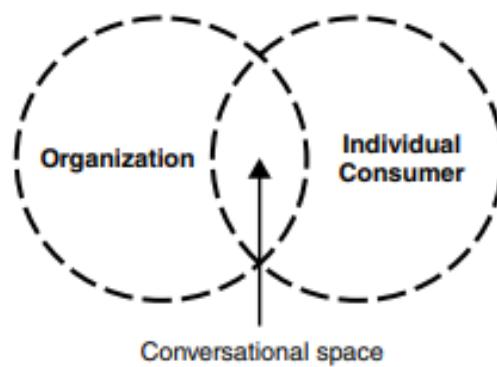


Figure 3: the interrelation between brand managers and consumers

Because of the relationship between a region brand and the organisation behind it, it is essential to consider both when describing the values a specific stakeholder group gives to the region brand. Since 'places' are physical, place brands tend not to be just a logo on websites or banners, but have a 'physical' side through their organisation being present in the respective place (Ashworth, 2009). This can mean organising or being present at events under the banner of the place brand, but similarly the organisation is present through everything they do in a place. A municipality using a place brand, for example, is not just known for its logo, but also for all they do in the city: from maintaining the street to tackling socio-economic issues or lobbying for regional stakes in national politics. These are just as much an aspect of a place brand as the logo itself. However, whereas the logo is similar to everyone looking at it, the perception of the associated organisation behind can vary greatly, and with it the perception of value can differ. Thus, when considering place brand value, it is important to consider the target audience of the brand (Zenker & Beckmann, 2013). For an industry that is highly influential in a region, this is even more important. Since companies from such an industry have a significant role in public issues in the region (e.g. job availability, spatial planning etc.), they are likely to have an already established relation with public actors in the region. Therefore, the values of a region brand

for companies from a specific influential regional industry should not just be considered for the region brand itself, but also for the organisation behind the brand itself.

#### 2.4 Region brand values: theoretical framework

When considering region branding values for a specific industry, an array of values can be described based on literature. A number of these values is selected in order to adopt the framework for this research. These are shown and elaborated on in the theoretical framework below (see *Table 1*). A number of values related to the construction of the brand are summarised under the value *Representation*. Here, factors related to brand attributes, such as brand identity, the reflection of regional cultural or site-specific references in the brand are included, since the value for the brand is generated through their representation. Additionally, specific values related to practical implementation of the brand by its organisation, such as lobbying or event organisation are not considered in this research. Whereas they are part of the *Binding* and *Positioning* values, these aspects were not fitting to include separately, since it would describe the value generated by such aspects specifically, and not what the value is of their specific goal.

As derived from the theory above, the value of a region brand for a company from a specific regional industry can be categorised in two different ways. Firstly, the region brand itself as a tool can generate value through its design and implementation. Secondly, the organisation behind the region brand itself can generate value through its activities under the flag of the brand itself. In the theoretical framework, this division is thus used. A set of five values have been identified as important factors in region branding aimed at private sector engagement, addressed below. These values are addressed for both the 'brand' and the 'organisation' perspectives, in order to determine which perspective is considered to generate more or less value.

#### 2.5 Regional presence

When considering the values above for a specific regional industry, it is important to understand there are various differences between companies from such an industry. Factors such as company size, varying end products or services, historical background, etc. are never exactly the same for two companies. Some of these differences can have an influence on how a company views a region brand. If the brand wants to best tailor to the desires needs of their main target audience, in this case a specific industry, it can be of value to understand how these desires and needs vary (Stevens et al., 2020). Considering an important industrial sector on a regional scale, one interesting factor that might cause different perspectives is the proportion of a company active within the region. Whereas some companies are only active in the region itself, others might be larger and have different locations elsewhere. This results in a different degree of dependency on the regional context, be it institutions,

infrastructure, employees from the region, or other region-specific aspects (Johnson, 2021). Considering this dimension is important for brand managers, as all companies can be of high value for regional (industrial) networks and development: companies only active in the region might have stronger ties and have valuable existing networks, and larger companies active elsewhere might have more resources and influence on larger scale levels. Controlling for this difference in a description of value perspectives can thus provide useful insights, generating a better understanding for the brand manager of the governance dynamics of a region brand (Klijn & Koppenjan, 2016).

## 2.6 Research question

In the theory described above and used in the theoretical framework, the relation between region brands and regional stakeholders is recognised as an important factor for generating value with region branding. However, the what perspectives of companies from such industries on those values are, and how the perspectives can differ for companies of varying regional presence, is not described in such a way as of yet. Therefore, the research question as given in the *Introduction* is adopted in order to investigate this. In the next section, the methods used and how the framework is operationalised to answer this question are described below.

Table 1: theoretical framework of values

Values	'Representation'	'Positioning'	'Binding'	'Focus'	'Function'
	This value is picked because of the importance of <i>brand identity</i> and <i>brand equity</i> , meaning that a region brand should represent all stakeholders sufficiently in order to be effective (Ashworth, 2008).	This value covers the fact that value is generated through how the brand enhances the (competitive) <i>position</i> of stakeholders and/or the region as a whole (Ashworth, 2008).	This value relates to how the place brand as a governance strategy <i>binds</i> stakeholders to regional goals, generating cooperative behaviour (Rinaldi & Cavicchi, 2016)	This value includes how branding generates value through different types of orientations, being <i>internal</i> or <i>external</i> from the perspectives of both the industry and the region as a whole (de San Eugenio Vela et al., 2019)	This value indicates how the brand is used strategically to generate value through various approaches (Kavaratzis, 2005)
<b>Region brand</b>	Brand provides opportunity for companies to promote their business as part of a regional organisation they belong with (Fernández-Cavia et al., 2018; Stevens et al., 2020). Additionally, brand provides the opportunity to generate a uniformly expressed brand for companies, helping the region as a whole to become more competitive (Ginesta Portet et al., 2020; Stevens et al., 2020).	Through being part of a region brand, companies can gain a competitive advantage, thereby enhancing their market position in the industry (related to market legitimacy: Singh Rao et al., 2008) and in the region (Ginesta Portet et al., 2020). Additionally, through brand positioning, the reputation of the industry in the region can be strengthened (Govers, 2013).	Region brand binds actors together under a commonly shared institution, enhancing collaboration within the industry (Stevens et al., 2020). Additionally, region brand acts as 'cement' for a regional network for the industry, thereby binding companies to the branding goals (Stevens et al., 2020).	The brand is internally focused towards the industry within the region, enabling the industry to generate regional unity through cohesive elements (de San Eugenio Vela et al., 2019). Additionally, the brand is externally focused towards larger scale levels, enhancing the competitive position of regional industry members (de San Eugenio Vela et al., 2019).	The brand is designed to be used as promotion material by and for companies to promote the regional industry (Cleave et al., 2016). Additionally, the brand is designed to promote the regional industry as a whole by itself (Therkelsen & Halkier, 2008).
<b>Regional Org.</b>	Companies are directly involved in regional development programs/processes through dialogue, allowing for representation of their interests (Stevens et al., 2020). Additionally, companies can provide input to local governments/regional public org. through dialogue, which is considered in regional development programs/processes and branding (Stevens et al., 2020).	Companies' interests are represented in the branding organisation's strategy and activity, enhancing the competitive position of the industry within the region towards other regional actors (Boisen et al., 2011; Ginesta Portet et al., 2020). Additionally, positioning of the branding organisation includes the importance of the regional industry, institutionalising their interests in regional branding processes (Messely et al., 2014).	The organisation behind the brand actively stimulates network formation and collaboration between industry companies (Stevens et al., 2020). Additionally, the organisation behind the brand actively generates network formation and collaboration between the industry and other stakeholders in the region (multi-helix) (Stevens et al., 2020; Bisani et al., 2021).	The organisation behind the brand should be a vassal for the industry towards other regional stakeholders and organisations, strengthening the regional industry (Stevens et al., 2020) Additionally, the organisation should be a vassal for the regional industry towards larger scale levels (Fernández-Cavia et al., 2018).	The organisation behind the brand should facilitate industry development hands-off in the region by enabling a regional context in which the industry can flourish (Cleave & Arku, 2020). Additionally, the organisation behind the brand should initiate industry development hands-on through development plans and strategy integration such as cluster formation (Mauroner & Zorn, 2017).

### 3. Research design and methodology

To answer the research question with the use of the theoretical framework of values, a number of steps are taken to design a research method through operationalisation. For this research, a case study of Smart Delta Drechtsteden provides the context in which the values are explored. The analytical method used is a Q-sort analysis, through which data is collected and processed. With consideration of reliability and validity concerns, the data is interpreted to answer the research question.

#### 3.1 Case study: Smart Delta Drechtsteden

The organisation Smart Delta Drechtsteden is used as a case study to describe the values of region branding for a specific industry, in this case the manufacturing industry. As described in the *Introduction*, Smart Delta Drechtsteden is a region brand mainly focused on generating economic competitiveness in the Drechtsteden region. In this region, the (maritime) manufacturing industry is highly influential due to the strategic location along many rivers resulting in large amount of activity in this sector, with roughly 16.000 jobs (OCD, 2024). As such, the region brand is suitable for examination in this research, since how this specific industry values the brand can be of significant influence in whether or not the brand is a successful governance tool or not.

In relation to the theoretical background used for this research, two additional important aspects of Smart Delta Drechtsteden should be considered. Firstly, Smart Delta Drechtsteden is a regional organisation adopting branding as a governance strategy. The organisation consists of a network of the seven municipalities in the region, with partners from private and education sectors (Smart Delta Drechtsteden, 2022b). Whereas the region brand of Smart Delta Drechtsteden is an important regional strategy to enhance collaboration and competitiveness in the region, the organisation itself is active on many other levels. Among others, lobbying for regional interests, developing regional policy, and actively forming regional networks are practices Smart Delta Drechtsteden participates in or is responsible for. Thus, the perspective on value generation through the organisation behind the brand and not the brand itself is important to consider, as is adopted in the theoretical framework. The second important aspect is the relation between Smart Delta Drechtsteden and the manufacturing industry not being solely in the context of the region brand itself, but also through the activities of the organisation, such as lobbying and policy-making. Thus, making the distinction between value generated as a region brand and as a regional organisation makes Smart Delta Drechtsteden as a case study even more suited for this research.

The scope of the research concerns the region brand itself and the manufacturing industry in the region. The manufacturing industry is specified as all companies within the region whose main activities revolve around the physical production, assembly, repair, and/or enhancement of materials,

components, and/or end products (Levinson, 2017). In the Drechtsteden, the main type of manufacturing is of maritime nature and revolves around anything related to water. Yacht manufacturers (Oceanco), dredging companies (Boskalis), and shipping vessel manufacturers (Damen Shipyards) are examples of sectors with large global players in the industry originating from the region (Smart Delta Drechtsteden, 2024b). Nevertheless, the maritime manufacturing industry was not the scope for this research, since it excludes other important companies in the region that are similar in terms of needs and desires. Despite not having a maritime focus, companies such as GKN Fokker, an aerospace company from the region, are equally important as maritime industry companies. As such, the scope was broadened to manufacturing companies in general to allow the inclusion of more companies while still having a similar background.

### 3.2 Q-sort analysis

The aim of this research is to describe the values manufacturing industry companies give to Smart Delta Drechtsteden as a region brand, a research method that allows for the description of different perspectives is required. For this, a Q-sort analysis is most fitting and thus picked for this research. With a Q-sort, the mapping of the importance of factors (i.e. values for this research) based on the theoretical framework is possible (Stevens et al., 2020). Q-methodology uses quantitative statistical analysis tools to allow for qualitative interpretation of results through generating commonly shared perspectives among respondents, who are asked to sort statements based on their perceived importance on a pre-determined scale. This provides insights in both individual respondent's perspectives and how those perspectives are shared between multiple respondents.

Within Q-sort methodology, different approaches are present. For this research specifically, a structured Q-sample is used. This means that the statements are designed in a specific set of categories to reflect a pre-assigned meaning (Goldman et al., 1999). In this research, the categories reflect the theoretical framework. This was picked over an unstructured Q-sample, because this holds that categories are designed after conducting the Q-sort. Otherwise, it would not fit describing values with the use of the theoretical framework as discussed in the previous section.

Additionally, for this research a free-sort condition was applied. This means that the respondents were able to sort as many statements into each scale level. In this research, a Likert-scale of -2 (totally disagree) to 2 (totally agree) was used. In a fixed-sort condition, a limited amount of statements can be filled into each scale level. Since this research aims to describe values that have not yet been described before, it is deemed more fitting to use a free-sort condition. This allows for a view on perspectives not forced into a certain structure by the methodology, but as true to the real interpretation of the respondent (Goldman et al., 1999).

In a Q-sort, the 'P-set' (short for participants) refers to the respondents that participated in

the research. They are asked to sort out the statements as developed in the Q-set (*next paragraph*). Depending on the methodology used, the P-set consists of between 12 and 50 participants varying across literature (e.g. Cairns, 2012; Goldman et al., 1999). For this research, a minimum of 15 participants was used as a benchmark based on available time and resources. The P-set should consist of respondents fitting the sampling criteria, which in this research means people working at companies from the manufacturing industry in the Drechtsteden region familiar with Smart Delta Drechtsteden. Since only this select population can effectively participate in the Q-sort analysis, a number of respondents' Q-sorts were not used in analysis because they did not fit these criteria. This led to a total of 16 respondents used in the analysis, out of an initial 19 (see 7.1 P-set: respondents). The respondents were gathered through non-probabilistic purposive sampling, since it was more important that the sample would fit the sample criteria and less important how many respondents were gathered (Campbell et al., 2020). In practice, gathering of respondents thus occurred through events related to the manufacturing industry in the region and directly getting in touch with companies in the region by the researcher.

The other dimension of a Q-sort analysis is the 'Q-set'. In the Q-set, the statements reflecting the theoretical framework are developed. These statements can be derived from various sources but should reflect the theory-based overview of factors (i.e. values in this reviews) (Jeffares & Skelcher, 2011). The Q-sort in this research is developed in the same grid as the theoretical framework, since the statements reflect the different ways value can be generated as determined in the framework (see *Table 2*). This resulted in a 2x5 grid for the values and the perspectives of Smart Delta Drechtsteden as a brand and as an organisation, and the five values. In each of the ten cells, two statements are found that describe the value as given in the theoretical framework. The statements are developed by the researcher to best reflect the different dimensions in the theoretical framework, with a focus on distinction between statements for each value. After their initial development, the statements are revised with input from three colleagues of Smart Delta Drechtsteden to ensure they are best representing the pre-determined values.

The Q-set and the P-set come together through respondents sorting the statements. The Q-sort was developed in Excel, but translated into a Typeform survey to enable respondents to fill it in (see 7.2 *Typeform* survey). Typeform was used over other software tools such as Qualtrics due to the availability of a license and the user-friendly design. Since the free-sort condition applies for this research, the statements could be represented as a Likert-scale in the survey. In the survey, a question was added to indicate the relative amount of employees of the company working in the region. This is used in the analysis as an indicator of company origin, so perspectives could be assessed based on this information to answer the sub-question. The data from the survey was gathered in Excel and

processed as explained in *Empirical analysis & findings*. Before elaborating on this, it is important to consider reliability and validity concerns for this research

Table 2: the Q-set of statements

	Representation	Positioning	Binding	Focus	Function
<i>Het merk Smart Delta Drechtsteden zou...</i>	1. marketing mogelijkheden voor mijn bedrijf moeten bieden	3. de marktpositie van mijn bedrijf binnen de maakindustrie moeten versterken	5. bedrijven in de regio aan elkaar moeten verbinden door samenwerking te stimuleren	7. gericht moeten zijn op de maakindustrie binnen de regio	9. bedoeld moeten zijn als marketingmateriaal voor bedrijven in de Drechtstedelijke maak-industrie
	2. eenheid in de regio moeten uitdragen	4. het imago van de Drechtstedelijke maakindustrie moeten versterken	6. één regionaal netwerk moeten genereren	8. de positie van de regionale maakindustrie buiten de regio moeten versterken	10. bedoeld moeten zijn om regionale ontwikkelingen in de maakindustrie te promoten
<i>Smart Delta Drechtsteden als organisatie zou...</i>	11. vertegenwoordigers uit de maakindustrie in de organisatie moeten betrekken	13. de belangen van de regionale maakindustrie moeten vertegenwoordigen in de regio	15. netwerken en samenwerking tussen bedrijven in de regio moeten stimuleren	17. de maakindustrie in de regio moeten vertegenwoordigen bij andere regionale organisaties	19. een faciliterende rol voor de ontwikkeling van de regionale maakindustrie moeten vervullen
	12. de input uit de maakindustrie moeten verwerken in regionale processen	14. regionale belangen van de maakindustrie moeten vertegenwoordigen naar buiten toe	16. netwerken en samenwerking tussen bedrijven en andere instanties in de regio moeten stimuleren	18. de maakindustrie in de regio moeten naar instanties buiten de regio	20. een initiërende rol in de ontwikkeling van de regionale maakindustrie moeten vervullen

### 3.3 Reliability & validity

With regard to reliability and validity, a number of concerns should be raised for the analysis and interpretation of this research. In general, the limited time and resources available lead to lower values in both the P-set, Q-set, and the analysis. For the P-set, it was hard to find enough respondents willing to participate in the research. Since the sampling criteria were relatively strict, purposive sampling was used. This led to the researcher having to actively spend time looking for respondents, who were not always easy to reach. Almost every suitable company in the region was reached out to,

but hardly anyone responded. It is thought that this is the case because of a relatively high amount of other surveys and researches circling around this time-frame, leading to people not wanting to participate anymore. Another reason for the low P-set is the fact that some approached companies were not familiar with Smart Delta Drechtsteden, and did not know which colleague would. Moreover, many approached companies promised to fill in the survey but did not end up doing so, either opening the survey and not filling it in, not completing it, or ignoring it altogether. The low P-set thus resulted in a small sample, meaning that the chance of non-representativeness is higher and thus both the reliability and external validity are low (Golafshani, 2015; Baldwin, 2018). Nevertheless, the P-set was high enough to proceed with sorting.

Similarly, a number of concerns should be raised for the Q-set. Since Q-methodology is used to generate shared perspectives on provided factors represented by statements, it is important that the representation of relevant factors is as complete as possible. In this research, this means a representation of possible values as complete as possible. This leads to a Q-set usually consisting of over fifty statements, sometimes even up to a hundred (Goldman et al., 1999). Similar to the P-set, this is smaller for this research due to limited time and resources. Additionally, there were no available respondents for a pre-check of the statements with participants from the target group (Stevens et al., 2020). These factors have led to a Q-set not as representative of the values as possible. Thus, the findings of this research might not be representative of the complete array of values one might consider Smart Delta Drechtsteden to have. As such, the internal validity of this research is lower than could be (Baldwin, 2018).

Lastly, one aspect of the analysis should be mentioned with regard to reliability and validity. As a result of the low P-set, one criterium was not met by a profile derived from the data. This is discussed in detail in the following section. Still, this should be mentioned, as it results in a lower internal validity for this research. Moreover, the low P-set led to only two profiles being derived from the data, whereas a usual Q-sort analysis produces four to five profiles. Other factors were left out of the analysis because they only had one respondent loading into the factor, meaning that a profile derived from it would only represent that single respondent. Thus, it does not provide a perspective shared among participants and cannot be interpreted. Because of the low amount of profiles, only a limited insight in the perspectives was generated with this research, leading to a lower internal and external validity (Baldwin, 2008).

Despite the reliability and validity concerns, enough data was collected to provide interpretable results. Consequently, the research was proceeded, which is described below.

## 4. Empirical analysis & findings

After the Q-sort data was collected as discussed above, a number of steps were followed to process and analyse the statistical data. First off, a general analysis of the data determined the usefulness of the Q-sorts. Following this, the profiles were derived from the data, which were then put into the context of the theoretical background and operationalisation as discussed in the previous chapters to provide information on the most common views on the values of Smart Delta Drechtsteden.

### 4.1 Ken-Q analysis

The sorts of the 16 respondents were subject to an analysis with software called *Ken-Q Analysis* (from here: *Ken-Q* (Basanick, 2023)). This is a program specifically designed to process and analyse all sorts of Q-sort data and a common tool used in Q-method research (e.g. Stevens et al., 2020). This software was chosen over *PQMethod*, another commonly used Q-sort analysis tool (e.g. George et al., 2024) without further reason than it being the first one available to the researcher. The tools are very similar and work in congruence, and as such using either or makes little difference. After filling the survey data as imported from Typeform in a specific Ken-Q Excel-template, Ken-Q was used for the entire analysis.

A factor analysis was conducted to derive specific sorts of the statements that best reflect a set of respondents' sorts. These factors have to fulfil a set of five criteria to be relevant for analysis. The first criterium holds that the *eigenvalue* of a factor has to be 1.00 (Kaiser, 1960; Guttman, 1954). The eigenvalue is the sum of squared factor loadings per factor and is an indicator of the amount of variance explained by a factor. The second criterium insists that the correlation between factors should not be too high, since too much overlap would result in the profiles derived from the factors being too alike. For this, a correlation smaller than 0.53 suffices (Stevens et al., 2020). The third criterium relates to the variance explained by the factors. A minimum of 10% of the variance should be explained by a factor for it to be relevant (Watkins, 2018). The fourth criterium is that a factor should be comprised of Q-sorts that significantly load into the factor, as it should represent their perspectives as determined by the sorts. If this is not the case, there is no significant statistic on which to relate the theoretical framework (Goldman et al., 1999). The fifth and final criterium determines that the composite factor reliability should be 0.95 or higher (Goldman et al., 1999). This is a statistic derived from the number of sorts loading into a factor and the reliability coefficient. With a high enough average relative coefficient of 0.80 and 5 sorts loading into a factor, this will always be 0.95 or higher, and as such these are requirements to fulfil the composite reliability minimum (Goldman et al., 1999).

Considering these five criteria, two factors have been derived from the conducted Q-sort. A

usual Q-sort analysis in funded research delivers around four to five factors, so it can be stated that two factors is relatively low (Stevens et al., 2020; Goldman et al., 1999). The main reason for this is the relatively low P-set as discussed in *Research design* and methodology and

*3.3 Reliability & validity.* Additionally, these two factors were the only factors with a sufficient composite factor reliability of around 0.95. All the other factors scored too low, and even the second factor is on the lower side (i.e. 0.941, see 7.3.2. *Statistical* characteristics of the two profiles). However, the second factor is still used in the analysis because the average relative coefficient is sufficient and the differences between the loadings for factor 2 are high. As such, the composite factor reliability is slightly too low only because of the small P-set leading to just four sorts loaded in this factor. Considering this, it is still worth it to take this factor into account for this analysis. All the other criteria are met by the two factors (see 7.3.2. *Statistical* characteristics of the two profiles), and as such these are the factors that are worked with in further analysis and interpretation. Below, an overview of the profiles and values as derived from the Q-sort analysis are given.

## 4.2 Profiles

In the following sub-sections, the sorts for each profile are shown in a table. The colour coding refers to the Q-set as described in 3.2 *Q-sort* analysis. The scale from -2 to 2 refers to the Likert-scale as addressed in the same section.

### Profile 1: Smart Delta Drechtsteden as a network enhancer

*Profile 1* has an eigenvalue of 4.99 and explains 30% of the variance after rotation. Nine out of sixteen respondents load significantly onto this profile ( $p < .01$ ). These respondents agree that the values are mostly generated by the organisational perspective on Smart Delta Drechtsteden (see *Table 3: Profile 1*). Respondents considered *Binding* to be the most important value, with the emphasis on stimulating network formation and collaboration between companies within the region (15: 2; 16: 1 (from here on;  $x : y$  refers to  $x = \text{statement}$ ,  $y = \text{Likert-scale } -2 \text{ to } 2$ ). Additionally, respondents consider the focus of Smart Delta Drechtsteden towards both within the region towards other stakeholders and outside the region as an important value (17 and 18: 1). The importance of Smart Delta Drechtsteden's influence on network formation on different scales is thus evident, which is equally evident when looking at the branding values. Respondents consider the brand as a *Positioning* tool for the regional manufacturing industry as the most important value generator (4:2), with the function of promoting developments of the regional industry (10: 1). Consequently, a sharp contrast is seen for *Positioning*, as the brand is not considered to generate any value through strengthening the individual position of companies, which indicates that value generated through networks and collaboration is considered more important (3: -2).

The respondents loading into this profile were from companies with an average of 31.25% of employees working within the region (see 7.3.3. Factor matrix with respondents highlighted for regional presence. This is half the amount of the other profile. Considering this, it seems that companies that are less present in the region relative to their entire organisation, value the regional binding aspect of Smart Delta Drechtsteden higher. On the contrary, they consider the regional brand as less important. This can make sense, since these companies are more likely to be larger and have established brands outside of regional context. As such, they value the regional network and collaboration enhancement Smart Delta Drechtsteden provides to the manufacturing industry higher, since they have a stake in their industry practices in the region. What the exact role of Smart Delta Drechtsteden is in this, does not really matter: what matters is the benefits for the manufacturing industry as a whole, of which these companies logically benefit.

Table 3: Profile 1

	-2	-1	0	1	2
3		9	5	16	15
7		20	14	10	4
		1	8	18	
		6	2	17	
			11		
			19		
			12		
			13		

### Profile 2: Smart Delta Drechtsteden as a regional flagship

Profile 2 has an eigenvalue of 2.23 and explains 14% of the variance after rotation. Four out of sixteen respondents load significantly onto this profile ( $p < .01$ ). These respondents agree that the branding of Smart Delta Drechtsteden is most valuable for their companies (see Table 4: Profile 2). The most important factor here is the expressed unity in the region that the brand represents (2: 2). According to the respondents, this strengthens the reputation of the regional manufacturing industry (4: 1), while simultaneously generating a regional network connecting companies with each other to enhance collaboration (6: 1; 5: 2). As such, respondents consider Smart Delta Drechtsteden generates most value through branding as a governance tool. Consequently, respondents think of the region itself as the most important focus for Smart Delta Drechtsteden. Representation of the manufacturing

industry in regional processes are considered the most valuable responsibilities of the organisation (12: 1; 13: 1). On the contrary, they agree that larger scale levels are not as important as the region, so Smart Delta Drechtsteden should stick to improving regional aspects (18: -2; 14: -1). Moreover, the respondents do not consider Smart Delta Drechtsteden as a valuable facet in the development of their industry (19: -2; 20: -1).

The respondents loading into this profile were from companies with an average of 62.5% of employees working within the region (see 7.3.3. Factor matrix with respondents highlighted for regional presence. Relative to the other profile, this is twice as much. As such, it is assumed that these companies have stronger ties with the region since they are more present here. Because of this, their companies have relatively more stakes in regional development, as well as a stronger connection. This might explain the emphasis on the region in the sorts, as well as the lack of importance in the organisational aspects of Smart Delta Drechtsteden. Since these companies are more likely to already be part of strong established networks within the region, they do not consider Smart Delta Drechtsteden to be a valuable aspect in this. The value they attribute to Smart Delta Drechtsteden is mostly considered providing a means for the regional manufacturing industry to express their unity through a commonly shared brand, but not so much generating that unity altogether.

Table 4: Profile 2

	-2	-1	0	1	2
18	18	14	15	6	2
19	19	9	16	4	5
20		20	11	13	
17		17	3	12	
7			7		
10			10		
1			1		
8			8		

### 4.3 Values

When comparing the two profiles as described above, a number of commonalities and differences are noticed for each value. Firstly, an interesting dynamic for the *Binding* value can be seen. Both profiles consider this to be an important value Smart Delta Drechtsteden generates, although from different

perspectives. Whereas *Profile 1* considers this to be valuable through the generation of a regionally collaborating network itself, *Profile 2* attributes this value more to the expression of this through the brand. Considering the differences in regional employees between the profiles, this can be explained by the fact that *Profile 1* respondents are less connected to existing regional networks between companies who are relatively more present in the region such as companies in *Profile 2*. It should be noted that this is not the only explanation, but nevertheless it is interesting to see *Binding* as an important value for both profiles, but with a different approach.

Another insightful comparison can be made considering *Representation*. For this value, *Profile 1* has a neutral view on its importance, with the only note that Smart Delta Drechtsteden is not valuable as a marketing tool for companies in the manufacturing industry (1: -1). *Profile 2*, however, considers this to be more important from an advocacy perspective: the brand helps expressing unity, and the industry's input for regional activity should be considered in Smart Delta Drechtsteden's organisational activities (2: 2; 12: 1). A reasonable explanation for this difference is given through the fact that *Profile 2* is more region-oriented, and as such values their input in the region more as well as having more interest in a uniformly expressed regional brand.

Considering *Positioning*, a number of overlaps and differences can be found between the profiles. Firstly, both profiles agree on Smart Delta Drechtsteden as a region brand being valuable through the strengthening of the reputation of the manufacturing industry in the region (4: 2 and 1). *Profile 1*, however, does not consider the organisation of Smart Delta Drechtsteden to play a large role in this (13 and 14: 0). *Profile 2*, on the contrary, considers the positioning of the organisation important with regard to regional contexts, but not the context outside of the region (13: 1; 14: -1). This can again be explained by the regional focus of *Profile 2*, as the respondents loading into this profile are more dependent on the region and thus value their input in Smart Delta Drechtsteden's organisational practices higher than *Profile 1*. A similar distinction can be seen for how Smart Delta Drechtsteden contributes to a strengthened market position for companies. *Profile 1* does not value this at all (3: -2), which is most likely caused by the fact that the companies here are larger and thus more spread out over a larger scale, with a better market position and therefore less need for a regional brand strengthening it.

The value that differs most between profiles is *Focus*. Here, we see that *Profile 1* considers branding to be of no value through a specified focus towards, or outside the region. However, respondents loading into this profile do value Smart Delta Drechtsteden representing the regional manufacturing industry to institutions both within and outside the region (17 and 18: 1). On the contrary, *Profile 2* thinks this is not important at all (17: -1; 18: -2). This difference can be explained when looking at the differences in respondents, since *Profile 2* is more regionally oriented. They might

thus not value the role Smart Delta Drechtsteden can play for this, since they are already well-established in existing regional manufacturing industry networks. *Profile 1*, however, might value this more because of the fact that they are part of a larger network outside of the region, and thus values the representation of the industry more on different scale levels.

Lastly, *Function* is the value for which most overlap was seen between the two profiles. Both profiles mostly disagreed with the importance of how Smart Delta Drechtsteden generates value through specific functions the brand and organisation might have for manufacturing industry companies. Both profiles did not consider the brand to be valuable as promotion material for their companies (9: -1 and -1). Additionally, they both were neutral towards the brand being supposed to promote developments in the regional manufacturing industry. The organisation was considered to be of no value through initiating or facilitating development in the regional manufacturing sector (19; 0 and -2; 20: -1 and -1). As such, it can be stated that there is no difference in value generation for manufacturing industry companies through these specific functions of Smart delta Drechtsteden.

#### 4.4 Interpretation

From the findings described above, a number of interpretations can be distilled when considering the theoretical and contextual background. It appears that, according to the respondents, Smart Delta Drechtsteden can generate value both through the application of region branding and through the organisation itself. Whereas the region brand is a valuable asset for the manufacturing industry in Drechtsteden through strengthening the industry's reputation and offering a unified brand for companies to be a part of, the organisation is important in generating networks for the industry to be a part of with each other and other stakeholders. This is in line with the theoretical background used in this research, since the values are derived from existing theory. The data confirms most of these values to be present in Smart Delta Drechtsteden, although the acknowledged values differ per profile.

An interesting dynamic can be seen for the differences in regional presence. Whereas companies with less regional presence value the networking aspect of Smart Delta Drechtsteden more, companies with more regional presence value the brand as a reputation manager more. Considering the fact that companies who are relatively more present in the region are more likely to be a part of stronger existing local networks, this makes sense. Such companies do not necessarily value Smart Delta Drechtsteden's activities in this, since they feel it is already there. Therefore, they feel that Smart Delta Drechtsteden's role is more about positioning through the brand, and thereby enhancing the reputation of the companies and the industry in general. On the contrary, the companies with lower regional presence are likely to be larger, and as such might have a better established brand on larger scales themselves. However, they might not be a member of the regional existing networks as the other companies are, and therefore see Smart Delta Drechtsteden has value

by connecting them with other regional companies and stakeholders.

Considering the regional context and Smart Delta Drechtsteden, there are a number of explanatory factors for these results. Firstly, Smart Delta Drechtsteden puts in effort to lobby for the regional manufacturing industry in provincial and national politics. As such, the organisation is visible on a larger scale than just the region. Whereas this can be valuable for companies of both types, it makes sense that companies who are not just active in the region, but also on a larger scale and in different places, attribute even higher value to this aspect of Smart Delta Drechtsteden. Since the organisation lobbies for all companies in the region (and sometimes specific companies), the companies who are more spread out not only find benefit of this in the region itself, but for the company as a whole. Companies who are relatively more active in the region also reap these benefits, but they might have less benefit of it outside the region. This confirms the fact that *Profile 1* values the organisation Smart Delta Drechtsteden more than the brand.

In a similar manner, the preference of *Profile 2* for values generated through Smart Delta Drechtsteden's branding can be explained. Since the brand is catered to the regional manufacturing industry, companies from this profile attribute more value to it. When a company is more region-oriented, the brand and the company have more commonalities in aspects such as identity, location-specific references, and institutional overlaps. For such companies, it might thus be easier to adopt the brand than for companies who are less so region-oriented. A nation-wide active company does not have any value for a region brand of a different region in a location elsewhere in the country, and as such the region brand is only valuable for the specific location within the Drechtsteden.

Lastly, an explanation for the different ideas about the binding aspect between profiles gives some insights. Both perspectives consider the network Smart Delta Drechtsteden generates of importance, but from different approaches. *Profile 2* does not value the network of the organisation itself, but does value the brand creating unified expression among companies in the regional industry. In the region, there are many existing collaborations between multiple manufacturing companies, especially in the maritime sector. As such, the network of Smart Delta Drechtsteden is not a novel asset for them, as they are already member of strong regional networks. Additionally, they are likely to have a stronger bond with existing regional institutions on a more personal level. As such, Smart Delta Drechtsteden might not be seen as separate from the public organisations that founded it. Since the companies also collaborate with (and are subject to) the municipalities, they might not consider Smart Delta Drechtsteden as such an important organisation. The other profile, however, thought branding has less value, but the networking aspect of the organisation was more important. As opposed to *Profile 2*, these companies might not have as strong ties to regional public organisations, and might not be member of the regional networks that already exist. Thus, they have more value for

Smart Delta Drechtsteden actively involving them in regional multi-helix networks and collaboration programs.

Considering the interpretation of the results derived from the analysis, while keeping in mind the remarks on reliability and validity, a conclusion can be drawn and the research question can be answered. In the following section, this is elaborated on. The conclusion is then discussed, followed by recommendations on how this research can lead to further development of the theory and contextual research at Smart Delta Drechtsteden.

## 5. Conclusion, discussion, and recommendations

### 5.1 Conclusion

This research aimed to describe how manufacturing industry companies value region brands, and how this might differ depending on the extent of which the companies are present in the region. From relevant theory on place branding and values, a theoretical framework was developed. This framework was operationalised to be used in a Q-sort analysis, providing insights in different perspectives on the values companies from the Drechtsteden region's manufacturing industry attributed to Smart Delta Drechtsteden. From the Q-sort, two profiles reflecting a perspective on the values were derived, both reflecting the importance of a different set of values. Smart Delta Drechtsteden was considered a valuable factor in regional network formation, with the region brand strengthening the reputation of the regional manufacturing industry. Companies with a relatively high presence in the region thought of the region brand as a valuable tool for the industry to express unity and generate a network by binding companies together under a shared brand. On the contrary, companies with a relatively low presence in the region considered the contribution of Smart Delta Drechtsteden as an organisation to the generation of networks between the industry and other sectors or organisations as valuable, while attributing little value to the region brand itself.

All in all, it can be concluded that region brands are of value for regional industries that have a high influence on the region and the brand. As expected, what these values exactly are varies depending on what companies are considered. Nevertheless, region branding as a governance tool was deemed to be a valuable asset, as well as being an important factor in reputation management for the respective companies. Thus, the positioning of a region brand, as well as how the organisation binds actors and stakeholders together and generates a network, are considered the most valuable factors for companies in the manufacturing industry in the Drechtsteden, depending on the degree in which the company is situated in the region. Despite being a tool originating from marketing approaches, it therefore seems that place branding as a governance tool does not just generate value for public organisations adopting it. Depending on regional presence, companies value the region brand just as much, albeit in different ways.

### 5.2 Discussion

When reflecting back on the theory used in this research, a number of discussion points arise. Firstly, it is interesting to see that whereas existing literature considers the specific function assigned to a region brand and its organisation as an important factor in generating value, the respondents do not consider this important. This might be caused because of the focus in literature on the value for public organisations as brand initiators, for whom this can be of more importance as they adopt region

branding as a strategic tool (Kavaratzis, 2005). It is their responsibility in making a choice on how the brand should function to generate value, and as such this is considered of importance. However, if companies from a specific industry are not part of this process, it appears that this factor is not of importance for their perspective on how the brand generates value.

On the contrary, this research shows that *Positioning* and *Binding* both are valuable factors in region branding are considered important by the respondents, as was described in the theory. For these values, there is less discrepancy between the goal of public organisations and the respondents. Since the specific industry is influential in the region, the brand is likely to adopt positioning that benefits said industry, thereby generating value both for companies from the industry and the region as a whole. For cases where this regional dynamic between an industry and a brand is present, this research confirms the importance of brand positioning as a valuable aspect of region branding (Ashworth, 2008; Ginesta Portet et al., 2020).

One significantly different approach from existing literature in the description of value generated by region brands adopted by this research, is the distinction between value generated through region branding and the value generated by the organisation adopting it as a strategy. Whereas existing literature identifies the organisation as an important component in region branding, there was as of now no research that adopted this distinction between values in its methodology. Organisational factors tend to be included as brand attributes to be considered in brand design (Eshuis & Klijn, 2012). This does not reflect the interrelation between the brand and organisation as separate components in value generation for region brands, but limits the role of the organisation to a contextual factor. Through the adopted methodology for this research, a comparison of value generation between the brand and the organisation was made possible with the theoretical framework and the Q-sort analysis. From the results showed that there are indeed different perspectives on whether value is generated by the brand or the organisation. In combination with the controlling variable of regional presence, this showed how companies differ in these perspectives. As such, this research shows that making a distinction in brand value research can prove worthwhile.

Another interesting point of discussion is the difference in perspectives for companies with varying regional presence. The two profiles indicated varying values for this variable, which confirms the existing assumption that dependency on regional context affects how companies value region branding (Johnson, 2021). With the dynamics between region brands and influential regional industries being recognised as an important factor in region brand management and implementation, including these differences in value assessment proves to be important in generating a full view of perspectives. As such, a better understanding of these differences indeed solidifies the value of region branding as a governance tool (Klijn & Koppenjan, 2006).

Considering the body of literature on region branding, the above mentioned dynamics with influential regional industries lack significant presence in research as of yet. Whereas differences in perspectives on region brand values are commonly addressed (e.g. Stevens et al., 2020; Messely et al., 2014; Ripoll González & Gale, 2020), these perspectives are rarely controlled for company- or industry-specific variables. Further exploration of this can thus help generate a better understanding of such values, and with it a better understanding of brand equity, ultimately leading to a more robust theoretical background of region branding in general. This research has shown that such variables can indeed be of significance for perspectives on region brand values, despite the occurring limitations.

The conclusions drawn from this research, and the discussion that arises from them, should be put in perspective by considering limitations before any follow-up suggestions can be provided. As discussed in

*3.3 Reliability & validity*, the small P-set used in this research lead to low internal validity and reliability. As such, it is unsure whether conducting the same research again provides the exact same outcomes as derived here. Nevertheless, a considerable portion of variance in the responses was statistically significant, resulting in two distinct describable perspectives on the values. Thus, the profiles provide relevant insights in different value attribution to region branding, and thereby in their differences for regional presence. It should be noted that the regional presence of the companies is not absolute, since the P-set was so small that the average for the profiles might experience too much influence from statistical outliers for this variable in the profile. Nevertheless, the difference between the two profiles was so large that the different perspectives could be compared with consideration of the difference in regional presence, leading to the interpretations as elaborated on.

Considering the theoretical framework, a limitation should be considered. Whereas the values used in this research are derived from various academic sources, and all relevant in their own way, they are not exclusionary of other values. Since the Q-set was based on the theoretical framework, this consequently leads to a non-exclusionary Q-set. Therefore, the statements might not have fully reflected the values respondents might feel Smart Delta Drechtsteden has for them. Through the implementation of free sorting, however, this did not necessarily result in skewed interpretations. Since the respondents were free to give any value on the Likert-scale to each statement, there was no consequence of giving a value to one statement for the other. Thus, the values as given by the respondents is the value they directly give to the represented factor of the theoretical framework.

The final limitation concerns the external validity of the research. Smart Delta Drechtsteden was used as a case study for the analysis, since it is an organisation that adapts region branding as a governance tool. Among others, the goal of this is to strengthen competitiveness of the regional manufacturing industry. Therefore, it was a fitting case study to describe the values of region branding

in the specific theoretical context. However, only insights on this specific context and scope can be derived. In other words, the case study is only representative for regions with similar dynamics between a region brand and an influential industry.

All in all, the results as derived from the research and the answer to the research question provide useful insights into the values of a region brand for specific industries of significant regional influence. Despite the limitations, interesting insights were gained, which can be built upon in further research. A number of recommendations for such adaptations are given below, as well as some suggestions for follow-up research.

### 5.3 Recommendations

From the conclusion of this research, some interesting follow-up suggestions can be made for future research. From the analysis, it became evident that, even with a small P- and Q-set, a difference in perspectives on how a region brand can generate value exists between companies of varying regional presence. This is an indicator that directly shows the relative amount of employees working within the region, and through that indirectly indicates company size and orientation. Since the indirect indications of this variable cannot be assessed directly through this research without assumptions, it can be interesting to conduct similar research while controlling for more indicators. This can provide more detailed insights in how the perspectives differ across companies, leading to an even better understanding of the governance dynamics of region brands. The same holds for the distinction between value generated through the region brand and the organisation, as discussed in *Discussion*. Not only is this applicable for research on region brand values: similarly, this provides additional tools for region brand managers to adopt to region-specific circumstances and potential target audiences of influential industries. Thus, further exploration of perspectives on region brand values along company differences would provide a valuable extension of both region branding literature, and implementation.

Another recommendation is provided for the Q-sort methodology used. Since the Q-set and the theoretical framework was non-exclusionary because of time and resource limitations, the conclusions drawn from this research do not provide a complete picture of perspectives on values. With more time and resources, however, the theoretical framework can be expanded to include more values, as well as split used values into different ones. For example, the value *Representation* covers the theoretical background of identity, equity, and other aspects from place branding recognised as valuable assets for companies. Thus, further expanding the theoretical framework and the set of statements along with it might provide more detailed insights in the valuable dynamics between region brand and influential industries. Moreover, including triangulation in both the creation of the Q-set and the interpretation of results can contribute to more thoroughly formulated perspectives.

This is common practice in Q-methodology research (e.g. Stevens et al., 2020), so with sufficient time and resources available, follow-up research on this topic should definitely use triangulation as an improvement over this research.

For Smart Delta Drechtsteden, and region brands in general, a recommendation can be provided as well. It appears that the adaptation of region branding as a governance tool is valuable for the regional manufacturing industry. Representation of their interest, as well as reputation management, are important aspects that could be further focused on in future networking and branding activities. In this process, it could be valuable for Smart Delta Drechtsteden to keep the differences between the profiles in consideration. Perhaps one company might be happier with just a shared brand to express their unity with the regional manufacturing industry, while the other values more direct contact and being involved in activities within the Drechtsteden region's multi-helix network. In organisational activities as well as their branding, Smart Delta Drechtsteden could take into account these differences and cater to them where possible. Through this, brand equity can be strengthened, and thus the region brand as a governance strategy more effective. Nevertheless, it is confirmed that Smart Delta Drechtsteden is already well-established as a valuable regional asset for manufacturing industry companies.

## 6. References

### 6.1 Literature

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## 6.2 Figures

Figure 1: Smart Delta Drechtsteden

[www.smartdeltadrechtsteden.nl](http://www.smartdeltadrechtsteden.nl)

Figure 2: place brands on different governance scale levels

<https://freebiesupply.com/logos/i-love-new-york-logo/>

[www.smartdeltadrechtsteden.nl](http://www.smartdeltadrechtsteden.nl)

<https://logowik.com/qatar-national-tourism-council-vector-logo-10631.html>

Figure 3: the interrelation between brand managers and consumers

Iglesias, O., Ind, N., & Alfaro, M. (2017). The Organic View of the Brand: A Brand Value Co-creation Model. In *Palgrave Macmillan UK eBooks* (pp. 148–174). [https://doi.org/10.1057/978-1-352-00008-5\\_9](https://doi.org/10.1057/978-1-352-00008-5_9)

## 6.3 Tables

Table 1: theoretical framework of values

Luut Schneider, 2024.

Table 2: the Q-set of statements

Luut Schneider, 2024.

Table 3: Profile 1

Luut Schneider, 2024.

Table 4: Profile 2

Luut Schneider, 2024.

## 7. Appendix

### 7.1 P-set: respondents

#### 7.1.1. Relevant descriptives of survey respondents

#	Maritime vs non-maritime manufacturing industry companies	Relative number of employees situated in the Drechtsteden
p1	Non-maritime	76-100%
p2	Maritime	0-25%
p3	Maritime	0-25%
p4	Maritime	76-100%
p5	Non-maritime	51-75%
p6	Maritime	26-50%
p7	Non-maritime	76-100%
p8	Non-maritime	51-75%
p9	Non-maritime	51-75%
p10	Maritime	0-25%
p11	Non-maritime	0-25%
p12	Non-maritime	51-75%
p13	Maritime	0-25%
p14	Non-maritime	76-100%
p15	Non-maritime	76-100%
p16	Maritime	51-75%
	Total: 56.25% non-maritime 43,75% maritime	Average: 65.62% (upper value)

### 7.2 Typeform survey

The survey as was used in this research can be found through this link:

<https://smartdeltadrechtsteden.typeform.com/AppendixSurvey>

### 7.3 Q-sort analysis tables

#### 7.3.1. Unrotated factor matrix

Participant	Factor 1	Factor 2	Factor 3	Factor 4	Factor 5	Factor 6	Factor 7	Factor 8
P1	0,1444	0,105	0,0503	0,7197	0,4359	0,4139	0,1172	0,0717
P2	0,1311	0,8511	0,1651	-0,0959	0,0925	0,1523	-0,3225	-0,1062
P3	0,5738	-0,1277	-0,1177	-0,4875	0,1282	0,5407	0,203	-0,1408
P4	0,1794	0,1903	-0,4959	0,5884	-0,3981	0,2636	0,0806	0,0184
P5	0,0534	0,7788	-0,3601	-0,1148	0,2255	-0,104	-0,1578	-0,2829
P6	0,7217	-0,0704	-0,324	0,313	0,2776	-0,0273	-0,138	-0,0095
P7	-0,6194	-0,2392	-0,1444	-0,2205	0,4866	0,2639	-0,1287	0,3405
P8	0,8179	-0,3738	0,1259	0,1526	0,0184	-0,073	-0,0559	-0,1074
P9	0,3489	0,3655	0,6938	-0,2208	0,0917	0,0081	0,0048	0,3008
P10	0,6126	-0,0583	0,0574	0,0459	0,5121	-0,4249	0,2033	-0,1325
P11	0,4982	-0,519	-0,203	-0,4207	-0,0108	0,232	-0,2994	-0,2273
P12	0,8219	-0,036	-0,3348	-0,0683	0,032	-0,2314	0,1929	0,2334
P13	0,7843	0,121	0,1621	-0,0041	-0,1143	0,1494	-0,218	0,188
P14	0,3889	-0,0035	0,7767	0,1304	-0,1209	0,1794	0,2875	-0,2285
P15	0,8398	0,03	-0,0062	0,0143	-0,23	-0,0792	-0,3388	0,2285
P16	0,3445	0,4554	-0,3965	-0,4157	-0,1164	0,0661	0,5125	0,1422

#### 7.3.2. Statistical characteristics of the two profiles

Factor Characteristics		
	Factor 1	Factor 2
No. of defining variables	9	4
Average reliability coefficient	0,8	0,8
Composite reliability	0,973	0,941
Standard Error of Factor Z-scores	0,164	0,243
Eigenvalue	4,9869	2,227
% explained variance	31	14

Factor score correlations		
	Factor 1	Factor 2
Factor 1	1	0,0324
Factor 2	0,0324	1

7.3.3. Factor matrix with respondents highlighted for regional presence

Nm	Q sort	Factor 1		Factor 2	
1	P1	0,1062		0,1435	
2	P2	-0,1305		0,8512	Flagged
3	P3	0,5857	Flagged	0,0505	
4	P4	0,114		0,2354	
5	P5	-0,1829		0,7589	Flagged
6	P6	0,7096	Flagged	0,1495	
7	P7	-0,519	Flagged	-0,4142	
8	P8	0,8924	Flagged	-0,111	
9	P9	0,223		0,4534	Flagged
10	P10	0,6019	Flagged	0,1283	
11	P11	0,6311	Flagged	-0,3455	
12	P12	0,7948	Flagged	0,2124	
13	P13	0,7118	Flagged	0,3508	
14	P14	0,372		0,1134	
15	P15	0,7921	Flagged	0,2807	
16	P16	0,1918		0,5379	Flagged

Legend:

	Factor 1	Factor 2
0-25%	4	1
26-50%	1	
51-75%	2	3
76-100%	2	
Avg.	31.25%	62.5%