THE POLITICAL DIMENSION OF PLACE BRANDING
Andrea Lucarelli
The Political Dimension of Place Branding

Andrea Lucarelli
To everybody
Appended papers

This dissertation is based on the following papers,

**Paper I**


**Paper II**


**Paper III**


**Paper IV**

Acknowledgment

The present dissertation should be seen both as the ending point of an incredible, exciting journey as well as the beginning of another, hopefully equally exciting, adventure. A doctoral dissertation is not only a five-year process of research and writing; it is rather a long process of socialization in a particular type of world, the enigmatic world of the Academia, where the written outcome is only one of many dimensions.

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Abstract

Place branding is commonly understood as the application of marketing and commercial ideas, strategies, measurements and logic to the realm of places such as cities, regions and nations. Nevertheless, place branding is also understood as the locus where political activities – imbued with political impact and political effects – appear and affect the soft and hard infrastructures of urban agglomeration and other spatial environments. In this regard, by performing an analysis that helps unpack the multiple characters and impacts of political structures and processes in relation to place branding activities, the present dissertation aims to offer a conceptualization of the political dimension of place branding. By drawing on the critical assessment of the academic literature on place branding and on a series of studies about the branding processes in the region of Romagna and in the Greater Stockholm, the present dissertation further specifies an alternative conceptual framework (i.e. ecological politics) that suggests how place branding should be seen an empirical and theoretical political apparatus that acts, in praxis, based on an emerging, multifaceted and spatio-temporal enfolding of politics. More specifically, the ecological politics of place branding is characterized by four main aspects: the unfolding of a biopolitical ecology around place-branding practices; the ideological appropriation of place-branding processes; the positioning through politicized actions between the interest groups; and finally place-branding as a process of policy intervention. Finally, on more general level, the present dissertation, by recognizing the political activities and efforts of place branding as crucial elements to be analyzed, makes the case for a more explicit, complex and manifold political analysis of the political dimension of place branding, which allows attention to be given to the impact that branding processes, practices and activities have on cities, regions and nations.

Keywords: politics, ecology, place branding, policy, positioning, ideology, biopolitical, complexity, spatio-temporal
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A political dimension of place branding?

Around 2008, the following pamphlet started to appear in different media outlets in the greater Stockholm region in Sweden:

The example, which has been collected from the webpage alarm-sthlm.com, is a travesty of ‘Stockholm Capital of Scandinavia’, the official brand of the city of Stockholm. The webpage and the counter-campaign that the webpage outlines are interesting for three distinct but interrelated reasons: the formation of an ideological interest group, a particular form of power expressed through language, and the overall politicization of the brand-policy process.
The formation of an ideological interest group

The ‘Das Kapital’ campaign is organized and designed in direct ideological opposition to the main ideas behind the official brand for the city of Stockholm as it is outlined in the official webpage and in the brand book. Concerning the structure of the group that has designed and owned the webpage, it is a ‘formed action group committed to the autonomous movement’. Such a group, by following the text, has an explicit intent formulated as: ‘We want, with discussion, campaigns and information dissemination, to confront market bureaucrat metropolitan policy and ultimately contribute to the abolishment of capitalism’¹.

As it can be depicted, the mobilization and organization of interests in the webpage is framed based on certain ideological opposition. Similarly, this particular form of organization, an action group, could be seen as a peculiar form of social movement embedded within a certain ideological stance. The web screenshot could be seen as a way to illustrate how a city brand may serve as a catalyst of ideological interests and counter interests. In addition, based on this brief example, one can go so far to argue, with a risk of overstating, that the interests behind the ‘Das Kapital of Scandinavia Campaign’ could not only be seen as mere opposition based on irony, but indeed as a way of ‘appropriating’ (see Watson, 2011) the official brand for the city of Stockholm, adjusting or translating it based on certain political interests. In the example above, for example, this can be evinced in words such as ‘we launched a campaign...to puncture the alliance’, ‘in our campaign we want to focus’, ‘free for anyone to use’ and ‘take it back’. It is thus possible to see how such activity of ‘appropriation’ can be related to notion of resistance and conflict (Watson, 2011).

¹ From now on this is the author’s own translation from the Swedish version retrieved from alarmsthlm.com.
A particular form of power expressed through language

By further taking into consideration the example of the campaign ‘Das Kapital of Scandinavia’, the way ‘Das Kapital’ is presented in the texts is not merely presented in an ironic manner with the aim to deride and joke about the pompous claim contained in the official slogan ‘The Capital’, but it also shows how the mere activity or reframing of the notion of ‘The capital’ as ‘Das Kapital’ is done in a specific political manner. In fact, a specific political context (i.e. an ideological one) is communicated by the endorsement of particular semantics and a use of language that evokes a certain political action. In this regard, for example, when the group expresses the following statement, a particular political communication is embraced: ‘We have launched the campaign “Stockholm Das Kapital of Scandinavia” to puncture the alliance between the city of Stockholm city and its business community gathered under the pompous slogan “Stockholm the Capital of Scandinavia”. With our campaign, we want to focus on urban politics and what it should really be about. We are fighting to preserve the Common against monoculture and [fighting] for a free city! Help us to bring politics back to the street, parks, squares and your neighbourhood because it is there where they belong, and not on the stock market or in a closed room at the city planning office! The campaign is free for anyone to use. Resist! Take it back!’

By looking more at the details in this section of the text, one can spot some ‘themes’ that merit being identified in relation to the aforementioned political game. Several syntagms and words used in the text refer to a certain type of politics that is much related to what some authors would call ‘power-politics’ (Clegg, 1989; Lukes, 1974). Words such as ‘puncture’, ‘pompous’, ‘want’, ‘preserve’, ‘free city’, ‘free for anyone to use’ and ‘resist! Take it back’. On the other hand, however, another important complementary ‘theme’ can be evinced, which is that this of type of politics is not only institutionalized, but it is also more mundane: not merely related to political games and extraordinary conflictual politics, but tied to common and mundane politics. Words and syntagms such as ‘urban’, ‘commons’, ‘bring...back to street, parks, square and neighbourhood’ and ‘not on the stock market or planning office’,
in fact can be understood as referring to a type of politics that is conflictual but rather than referred to specific events should be performed at an everyday and more mundane level.

The overall politicization of the brand-policy process

An important third and interlinked element that can be depicted in the counter campaign and in the webpage is the use of ideologically and politically loaded language in relation to the policy process of framing and designing the counter-campaign. In fact, the action group via the webpage expresses that ‘Das Kapital of Scandinavia’ should be seen as a ‘counter-campaign’ built in opposition to the official branding campaign for the city of Stockholm and its surroundings. In framing such action as a counter-campaign, alarmsthm.com has not only adopted the term ‘Das Kapital’, which has the obvious ideological reference to the 19th century book written by Marx, but by doing so, the action group has also politicized the entire public arena by attempting to highlight the political dimension of the process of branding in Stockholm and its surroundings. As the above text suggests, the particular use of the syntagm ‘Das Kapital’ is not built with pure irony, but it is a politically communicative action embedded with peculiar political ideology and a certain political level of commitment. In this way, it can serve to ‘politicize’ the public debate about the branding of Stockholm and, at the same time, it attempts to claim how branding can be seen as a ‘political’ action created ‘away’ from where (urban) politics belong, namely among the citizens.

Further, the politicization of the process of branding in the text can be depicted for example in relation to the ‘spatiality’ or ‘communality’ of such processes. In the text, spatial and temporal words and syntagms are used to linguistically create a politicization of the branding process. Examples such as ‘campaign’, ‘urban’, ‘street’, ‘parks’, ‘neighbourhood’ are put in contrast and juxtaposition with others such as ‘stock market’, ‘closed room’, ‘city planning office’, ‘metropolitan’. The same can be observed, for example, with the issue of public collectivism and communality. Words such as

To sum up, this short introductory illustration\(^2\) has attempted to show, by departing from empirical evidence, how a place branding campaign 1) may be appropriated by ideological interests that are not necessarily in line with the overall ideological position of those who have originally produced the brand, 2) can be seen as particular form of power through communicative action, and 3) may lead to, if not ultimately characterized by, a politicization of the brand and of the entire policy process of branding.

Problem formulation: Unpacking the political dimension in place branding research

In academic literature, similar to what was highlighted in the aforementioned empirical illustration the political dimension of place branding is recognized as important. Place branding is not only acknowledged as field embedded in neoliberal ideology (see e.g. Eisenschitz, 2010; Gertner, 2007; Jansen, 2008; Kaneva, 2011), but the literature also suggests that place branding activities, place brands and place branding efforts should be seen as politically laden, given that they are in some cases appropriated by interests and organizations not considered to be the prime targets of the branding efforts (see e.g. Dzenovska, 2005; Graan, 2013; Kavaratzis, 2012; Mayes, 2008). Thus, the place branding process in itself is recognized and characterized as a political process with different political and professional interests involved in attempting

\(^2\) It should be mentioned that the campaign described above is not an isolated example of organized resistance, but it is one example of many similar counter movements, such as the Sei Selbst campaign as a travesty of the Sei Berlin campaign, the ‘Openhagen’ campaign in Copenhagen as a travesty of the official C(open)hagen campaign in 2009.
to control the brand or aim the branding effort in a particular direction (see e.g. Bennett & Savani, 2003; Ward, 2000). Such an understanding holds that the success of a place branding processes, as presented in the literature, is totally dependent on the ability to handle and manage the political structure of interests around the brand (see e.g. Hornskov, 2007; Pedersen, 2004; Stigel & Frimann, 2006) where political stability should be seen as prerequisite for a successful place branding campaign (see e.g. Anholt, 2005; Fan, 2006; Papadopoulos, 2004; Youde, 2009). The current literature on the topic brings to the fore the argument that the process of place branding is recognized as being a powerful broadband instrument of policy with implications on many different policy areas for places, such as cities and regions, spanning from education and business to tourism and social inclusion (see e.g. Ashworth, 2009; Berg & Björner, 2014; Eshuis, Braun, & Klijn, 2013; Eshuis & Edwards, 2012; Hospers, 2006, 2008; Paganoni, 2012; Pasquinelli, 2010). Here, the political dimension of place branding has also been recognized in relation to place branding as the new way of dealing with public diplomacy by pointing out how place branding should be seen as an important activity in an international global context (see e.g. Anholt, 2006; Nimijean, 2006; Szondi, 2008; Van Ham, 2001).

The standing attention towards the political dimension and political impact of place branding might be the results of its multidisciplinary approach as both an empirical and theoretical field of research. In fact, this can be witnessed in how, for example, the interdisciplinary reviews of both Berglund and Olsson (2010), Lucarelli and Brörstrom (2013) and Andersson (2014) have highlighted such an understanding by pointing out how the majority of geographically and sociologically inspired literature, in contrast to the literature inspired by marketing and consumer research, implicitly recognizes and deals with the political implication of place branding, its policy process, and its political effect and impact. Among those studies one should recognize that many embrace the political dimension explicitly as both the unit of analysis and as the main perspective (i.e. on ontological and epistemological levels) in order to analyse, critique or conceptualize the political impact and the political dimension of place branding. Such
studies are based on different views (i.e. understandings) of how a political dimension, and subsequently the concept of politics, can be conceptualized in relation to place branding. There are some studies that, for example, equate the political dimension to propaganda (e.g. Jansen, 2008; O’Shaughnessy & O’Shaughnessy, 2000; Sevin, 2011); others that conceptualize politics as ideology or an ideological apparatus (e.g. Harvey, 1989; Johansson, 2012; Varga, 2013). Others, by moving between the thin academically constructed demarcation between business administration and international relations, adopt the concept ‘soft power’ and offer an understanding of the politics of place branding as activities of public diplomacy (see e.g. Hayden & Sevin, 2012; Van Ham, 2001; Wang, 2006). Finally, by adopting a more instrumental and procedural view, others understand the political dimension of place branding to be depicted as an institutional and legal policy process (see e.g. Eshuis et al., 2013; Eshuis & Edwards, 2012; Klijn, Eshuis, & Braun, 2012).

Despite those differences, previous studies, by adopting a view that sees place branding and its political dimension as substantially a neoliberalist phenomenon based on hegemonic, dominant and historical forms of ideology linked to global capitalism (i.e. for a more detailed debate, see chapter 2), all share a common conceptualization of a structuralist view of politics, which is inherently understood as social, human-centric and a product of the capitalist superstructure. I will argue that such an understanding falls short of being ‘open’ to a spatiotemporal assembling, contextual, contingent yet critically informed analysis of the political dimension of place branding. In fact, even if previous studies have been instrumental in highlighting the necessity of an analysis of the political dimension, they have fallen short in either reducing the analysis of the critical dimension (i.e. power politics, ideology, propaganda) or instrumental dimension (i.e. issue of legitimacy and policy-process) to the historical materialist condition of capitalism (see e.g. Browning, 2013, 2014; Eisenschitz, 2010; Harvey, 1989; Johansson, 2012; Varga, 2013) or, have performed an analysis of politics that focuses on the pure procedural and instrumental dimensions (i.e. issue of legitimacy and policy-process) without linking such an analysis to the critical dimension in which place brand-
ing unfolds when understood as a branding-management philosophy that applied to the territorial realm (see e.g. Eshuis et al., 2013; Eshuis & Edwards, 2012; Klijn, Eshuis, & Braun, 2012).

In other words, previous studies have followed two paths which have nevertheless led to similar conclusions, namely that the primacy of global capitalism is the main determining systemic factor in structuring place branding as a neoliberal phenomenon. In fact, by embracing an hegemonic, (post) Marxist political economic view of place branding, on one hand studies have assumed the primacy of the global capitalist ‘superstructure’ over the different parts that constitute the ‘base’ (such as culture, politics, etc.) as the main explanatory dimension of the emergence of place branding as dominant neoliberal ideology (see e.g. Browning, 2013, 2014; Eissenschitz, 2010; Harvey, 1989; Johansson, 2012; Varga, 2013). On the other hand other studies have further suggested, by embracing a more historical-institutional and juridical account, that place branding as a neoliberal form of governance (see e.g. Eshuis et al., 2013; Eshuis & Edwards, 2012; Klijn, Eshuis, & Braun, 2012) is a process in which humans as the main political actors and the sphere of the social as the main locus where politics enfolds is based on the structuring condition of the economic and socio-legal relations of capitalism. By doing so, previous studies tend to offer a limited analysis of the political dimensions as social, human-centric, inherently determined by a view that has at its core the assumption of the primacy of global capitalism seen as an hegemonic ideology and an historical-institutional framework, thus rendering an analysis of the political dimension of place branding as ‘only one of many’ contexts where place branding activities, based on cultural, social and political contexts unfolds.

This means that previous studies have given primacy to a certain type of *a priori* understanding of the political dimension of place branding precluding an analysis that is attentive to the different possible configurations of politics. This also precludes a type of analysis that is open enough to 1) acknowledge the coalescence of different understandings of the political dimension of place branding and 2) acknowledge the different configurations of the ‘political’ dimensions of place branding understood as locus where the
‘politics’ of place branding unfold and 3) deal with a more detailed spatio-temporal contextualized analysis and conceptualization of ‘politics’ in relation the political dimension of place branding.

Aim of the study and research questions

By performing an analysis that helps unpack the multiple characters and impacts of political structures and processes in relation to place branding activities, the aim of the present dissertation is to offer a conceptualization of the political dimension of place branding. In this regard, one should see the vignette at the beginning of the present chapter about ‘Das Kapital of Scandinavia’ as an empirical illustration of what both in academic and popular terms is known as ‘place branding’, namely the application of branding strategies and activities, efforts and policies to the realm of places. Based on the present aim, the main research question that informs the present thesis can be framed as – How does place branding emerge as politics?

This main research question, purposefully broad in its nature, is specifically operationalized in detail in the following text by four sub-questions that address different aspects tackled both in the first two chapters as well as in the four articles included in the appendix. Although a further specification of the links of each sub-question is presented in the methodology chapter, for the sake of exposition, the four sub-questions are also presented below:

1. How do place-branding practices constitute political impacts?
2. What are the key political features in place-branding processes?
3. Which kind of political actions feature place-branding processes?
4. How are place-branding activities characterized as political instruments?
Contributions of the thesis

The present thesis suggests how place branding should be seen an empirical and theoretical phenomena that acts not merely on a systemic level. Instead, place branding should be understood as an inherently political apparatus that acts, in praxis, according to multifold dimensions. More specifically, the contribution of the present thesis can be seen situated on both conceptual and practical levels.

On a more conceptual level, the present thesis helps lay the foundation for an alternative approach to the political analysis of place branding. This is done by connecting previous studies regarding the political dimension of place branding with the four articles included in the present dissertation. In so doing, the present dissertation first problematizes the common view of place branding as substantially a neoliberal phenomenon based on a hegemonic, dominant and institutionalized form of ideology linked to global capitalism. It instead proposes to analyze place branding as a biopolitical apparatus. Here, this means mainly 1) to bring to the fore the ‘political’ as the analytical dimension and 2) to avoid using neoliberalism as empty catch-all term that loses analytical validity and instead attempts to analyze neoliberalism in its ‘praxis’. Second, by embracing an ecological approach to the political dimension of place branding, and by drawing from the insights from the four articles included in the dissertation, it offers a conceptual framework that suggests how place branding emerges based on a multifaceted, complex spatio-temporal biopolitical apparatus which is characterized by the unfolding of a biopolitical ecology around place-branding practices, by the ideological appropriation of place-branding processes, by positioning through politicized actions between the interest groups, and finally by place branding as a process of policy intervention.

On a more practical and analytical level instead, the present thesis, by embracing ecological politics as conceptual tool to unpack the political dimension of place branding, further specifies the different type of analysis that can be performed, the different aspects
that should be taken into consideration, and the way to approach the political analysis of place branding. In fact, the offered framework can help both researchers and practitioners in understanding 1) what is at work and what is not at work in place-branding processes, as the political dimension is considered to be so important in the current literature 2) how to compare different place branding processes with respect to the political structures and processes and 3) how to depict the use of place branding as a policy instrument given the link between place brands.

The overall outline of the thesis

Apart from the present chapter, the present thesis is composed of two following chapters (i.e. Chapter 2 and 3) that aim to lay out the foundation of the approach of the whole study. Another chapter (i.e. Chapter 4) presents the methodology, and a concluding chapter (i.e. Chapter 5) offers the conceptualization of the political dimension of place branding. Further, the present thesis comprises four articles included in the appendix: one article based on a comprehensive review of the existing literature (Article 1) and three empirical based articles, two of which are related to the branding of Stockholm (Article 3 and Article 4), and one is related to branding of an Italian region, Romagna (Article 2).

Chapter 2

Chapter 2 offers a critical assessment of place branding as academic and empirical field. The chapter brings to the fore the needs for a more refined political analysis by critically assessing the problematic aspects that hinder the emergence of a comprehensive political analysis of place branding in which politics is the main analytical lens. Furthermore, in presenting a more detailed critique of previous research in regards to the political dimension of place branding, chapter 2 lays the basis for an alternative perspective on how the political dimension of place branding should be re-
searched, understood and analyzed. This is done by moving from the common way of underrating place branding as neoliberal phenomenon embedded in certain hegemonic ideology linked to global capitalism towards a different view, namely as biopolitical apparatus, a view that recognizes and allows the analysis of the political dimension of place branding in all of its manifestations.

Chapter 3

In chapter 3, the perspective of place branding as biopolitical apparatus is further explained and developed into a more specific and contextualized approach to place branding. The chapter determines the critical treatment of the research about the political dimension of place branding as well as specifies what type of political analysis should be performed in order to analyze place branding as biopolitical apparatus. This is done by ‘ecologizing’ biopolitics and by building an approach (i.e. an ecological approach) which is both about political thinking and thinking about politics. This can be seen having a double function: it offers solutions to political problems and strives to offer a persuasive account of what the world of politics is like and how it relates to other dimensions (economics, culture, etc); through its radical approach it is also able to offer a way to think about politics and its relation to the political as constituting both its ground and its reverse side.

Chapter 4

In chapter 4 presents more details of the research design, the singularly applied methods as well the approach endorsed in dealing with the research. By presenting a methodological approach (i.e. ecological methodology) that allows an operationalization of the theoretical approach outlined in chapter 3, chapter 4 more specifically outlines the links between different methods, analytical strategies, research questions and aim of the dissertation. This is done in the first part of the chapter by presenting the research design for the entire dissertation, and the rationale and logic behind different categories of data collection. The second section of chapter 4 pre-
sents different practical forms of how the material collection of data was executed, as well the practical treatment of data collection

Chapter 5

In chapter 5, the conceptualization of the political dimension of place branding is offered. In chapter 5, through the presentation of a conceptual framework, the dissertation outlines how place branding emerges as politics by drawing from insights from the articles included in the appendix and by its links with the previous chapters. In so doing, the present chapter unpacks the main underpinning of an ecological approach to place branding (i.e. ecological politics) by suggesting, in more general terms, how place branding emerges as a political apparatus that acts, in praxis, based on the multifaceted, spatio-temporal and emerging enfolding of politics. Further, in more details, the constituting aspect of such framework are explained: namely 1) the unfolding of a biopolitical ecology around place-branding practices, 2) the ideological appropriation of place-branding processes, 3) power battles through politicized actions, and 4) place-branding as a process of policy-intervention. The chapter concludes by presenting a reflection on the implication of such conceptualization in relation to the exiting political research in place branding.

Summary of articles

Article 1 Unraveling the complexity of ‘city brand equity’- A three-dimensional framework

The article ‘Unraveling the complexity of ‘city brand equity’- A three-dimensional framework’, published in the Journal of Place Management and Development in 2012 (see Lucarelli, 2012), is a conceptual, literature-based article that lays out a framework for the analysis and evaluation of city brand equity that is firmly anchored in the interdisciplinary characteristics of city branding research. Based on a contemporary and concise ‘state-of-the-art’ review of the research domain from the period 1988 to 2009, the
article points outs that the literature on city brand equity is framed by different scholars as being characterized by both intangible and tangible elements and is researched by adopting a mixture of different methods and certain types of outcomes that concern both the more directly related image and identity of the city and, to a larger extent, the socio-political and economical aspects. Based on those more explicit findings, the article also helps to unpack the theoretical structure of the research domain which contains three main perspectives: a production perspective, a perspective based on branding as appropriation and finally a critical perspective on city brands and city branding. Furthermore, the article concludes by framing a tri-dimensional framework that offers a tool for analysis that is attentive to the multidimensional, inter-disciplinary features of places which are different from corporations, services and products and which require a more critical approach that focuses not only on economic and communicative (i.e. image, identity) implications, but also on social, political and ethical implications. The article thus led into a reflection on the underlying forces behind branding in the realm of places, helping address some very fundamental questions on place branding. These questions include how places, (dis)similar to other type of brands, can be seen as having certain ‘equity’ with ‘explicit’ political and social implications. The article, in the broader horizon of the present dissertation, is the first step in recognizing the political impact of place branding since it recognizes that cities and brands mutually constitute and shape each other (see article 3), how place brands shape the soft and hard infrastructure of urban spaces (see article 3 and 4), and to what extent brands are new semiotic spaces that re-organize the urban experience (see article 2 and 3).

Article 2 The political nature of brand governance: a discourse analysis approach to a regional brand building process

The reflections on the extensive literature-based research upon which article 1 is based, together with the insights gathered during pre-doctoral field research, has helped recognize the importance of the analysis of the political processes in place branding, especially in relation to those actors involved in the production and appropriation of branding activities. This was explored and analysed in the
second article comprising the empirical part of the dissertation. The article ‘The political nature of brand governance: a discourse analysis approach to a regional brand building process’, published in 2014 in the *Journal of Public Affairs* (see Lucarelli & Giovanardi, 2014), is principally an empirical-based analysis of the communicative process of brand governance in the realm of the public. The empirical foundation of the study is an in-depth investigation of the communicative and linguistic relationships that various organizations have with the institutional branding policies produced by the main regional tourist organization in the Italian region of Romagna. The outcome of this study clearly illustrates the discursive political nature of branded public governance. In particular, the analysis explores the modalities through which brand governance emerges as a negotiated and contested mechanism activated by and reproduced through language. The article develops, in the broader horizon of the present dissertation, the recognition of the political dimension of place branding by focusing on its policy aspects and extends the analysis performed by other empirical studies (article 3 and 4), endorsing a discursive and narrative approach.

Article 3  Brand transformation: a performative approach to brand regeneration

The third article, titled ‘Brand transformation: a performative approach to brand regeneration’, published in 2014 in the *Journal of Marketing Management* (see Lucarelli & Hallin, 2015), is an analysis of the multiple, complex and political dimensions of the branding process for the city of Stockholm. The article, by endorsing a performative approach that was based on 5 years of field research, offers an analysis of the process in which ‘Stockholm Capital of Scandinavia’ (the official city-brand of Stockholm) is transformed over time and space in interaction with different stakeholders’ *interessement*. Further the analysis helps to unpack the main features of the process of brand regeneration, understood as processual, multiple and political. Contrary to an apolitical view held by the traditional brand management approach, the performative view suggests that the process of brand regeneration is always a matter of topographical power-politics since the process is charac-
terised by different types of relationships between various stakeholders from different economic and sociocultural levels and in different time–space frames. Associations are based on a type of power that is constitutive because they render the ability to enrol others on terms that allow key actors to represent others through claims and counter-claims, as well as agreements and coalitions that were the product of negotiation and changing intersectional dynamics. Additionally, in the broader horizon of the present dissertation, the article suggests how those associations are politically enacted through the complex relational construction of other actors’ *interessesments*, identities and relationships (see article 4).

### Article 4 Ecologizing the co-creation of brand and stakeholder identity in the virtual realm: an analysis of the practices of virtual brand co-creation

The fourth and last article titled ‘Ecologizing the co-creation of brand and stakeholder identity in the virtual realm: an analysis of the practices of virtual brand co-creation’, submitted (at desk) to the *Journal of Business Research* in 2015, is an analysis of the political practices of visualization and materialization that constitute the process of co-creating brand and stakeholder identity in the digital realm. The article, based on the empirical research of the branding of Stockholm, endorses a critical visual analysis of a series of webpages belonging to stakeholders involved in the process of brand co-creation, representing different stakeholder’s strategies. The article offers an analysis of different practices (i.e. contributing, esteeming, opposing and using) whereby each practice can be related to different levels of political engagement. Further, by endorsing previous critical research on informational technology and immaterial labour, the article points out how, contrary to traditional mainstream branding, the process of brand co-creation in the realm of the digital should be regarded as more complex, less manageable and less democratic than expected. Further, the article develops, in the broader horizon of the present dissertation, an analysis of the ideological and expressive dimension of the different political practices of visualization and materialization that recognizes the affective labour characterizing the process of brand production and consumption (see also article 1, 2 and 3).
Problematizing the political dimension in place branding

In the present chapter, place branding and the political dimension of place branding is problematized. The chapter is divided into four sub-chapters. The first sub-chapter offers how a contextualized view of how place branding should be seen as a locus where the political dimension can be analyzed; subsequently the rationale behind the need for a more refined political analysis is presented. In the second sub-chapter, departing from the status quo in regard to the political analysis present in the existing literature, a problematization of the common grounding assumptions is presented. More specifically, the second sub-chapter points out the problematic aspects which lead other researchers to avoid performing a political analysis of place branding where politics is the main analytical lens. The third sub-chapter helps to specify the challenges highlighted in the second sub-chapter more specifically linked and explained in relation to previous studies. Therefore, the third sub-chapters presents a more detailed critique of previous research in regard to the political dimension of place branding, a critique that functions as the basis for an alternative way of researching the political dimension of place branding. This is explicated in more detail in the following fourth sub-chapter in which an alternative way of analyzing place branding as biopolitical apparatus is presented as a method to research to the political dimension in all of its manifestations.
Contextualizing the political dimension of place branding

Contrary to the commonly held view in the existing literature of place branding as something very recent, there are studies that argue that practices of branding in relation to places could be traced back to the Ancient Greek and Roman times (see Moor, 2007) or the Italian Reinassance (see Skinner, 1993). Still, the majority of scholars recognize the ‘mere’ fact that cities, regions and nations in the last two decades have increasingly attempted to market and brand themselves as ‘commercial and corporate’ type of brands. Places, as commonly understood in the literature, have been ranked and have adopted ranking as a main instrument to measure efficiency and boost competition and creativity; they have been producing, similar to many corporations, a cacophony of branding efforts and policies which makes each branding effort appear similar to each other.

Place branding as a ‘term’ has been mixed and matched indiscriminately with other terms such as ‘place marketing’, ‘urban marketing’ and ‘place promotion’ (Hanna & Rowley, 2008). Much of this ‘confused identity’ is generated by the lack of consensus among scholars concerning conceptual differences between terms of usage (Skinner, 2008). This current sub-chapter argues that the complexity of the research phenomena and the different readings that scholars have of theories and models related to marketing, branding, communication, space and time is the main reason for this confusion.

The place branding research domain has been developed through constant debate among several contrasting academic disciplines that have studied the empirical phenomena of place branding with different methods, conceptual tools and empirical explanations. The antecedents of the current place branding research domain can be individuated around different seminal academic works (Burgess, 1982; Kotler, Heider, & Irving, 1993; Lynch, 1960; Pearce, 1977; Proshansky, 1978). From those studies, the debate on place branding both as academic and empirical field has been further developed in a series of landmark books by scholars approaching the research domain essentially through different disci-
In a recent book about nation branding, Aronczyk (2013) suggests, for example, how the practices of branding related to nations, framed in a worldwide scale by a series of commercial branding consultants for their national clients (i.e. national governments), have not only created a global market where places are marketed and sold, but also that such practices of branding have become a worldwide professional transnational practice based on hegemonic neoliberal ideology that is understood as a solution to solve perceived contemporary political and economic problems. In such environments, it should not be of surprise that other spatial entities such as regions and cities have been branded following a rationale similar to the one present in corporations (Ashworth & Kavaratzis, 2009) that is in conjunction and collaboration between international consultants, worldwide consulting companies and different local authorities (see Greenberg, 2000, 2003). Similarly, it should not even be of surprise that the particular way to promote and commercialize places could be seen, much of the literature points out, as following a certain type of ‘script’, embedded in a certain neoliberal political and economic view whereby different branding practices should be seen as a ‘product’ of a branding tendency reflecting society at large (Kornberger, 2010) where brands should be seen as the new signs in contemporary consumer culture (Lury, 2004), iconic symbols for community building (Muniz & O’Guinn, 2001), distinction, attachment and ideology (Holt, 2006; Holt, 2004).

Similarly to commercial brands, places have been argued to be attached with commercial (Anholt, 2005; Anholt, 2005) in addition to traditional political and geographical value. Despite that, as Van Ham (2002) has pointed out, even if places still maintain an implicit political and territorial value, by being treated in both academic, popular and practitioners circles as commercial type brands, the way the political value and political dimension of places has been used in international context has profoundly changed. In fact, via the practices of place branding, many cities, regions and nations, have not only attempted to compete in an international marketspace, but more importantly they have started to interact with each other by following the logic of commercial public diplomacy (Van Ham, 2001, 2002).
The interrelation of commercial, ideological, geographical and political values of places, which is held as a main assumption in both academic and popular circles, can be argued to be at the same time the cause and consequence of how the academic literature has evolved across time. In fact, in this light, one can see how the burgeoning academic discourse in the last 15-10 years (see Andersson, 2014; Hankinson, 2010; Lucarelli & Berg, 2011; Skinner, 2011) has been suggested to be parallel, evolving contemporaneously with the application of brand management philosophy and economic rationale to places (see Ashworth & Kavaratzis, 2009).

Problematizing the political analysis of place branding

The ‘broadening’ of brand management and business vocabulary and practices in the realm of places can be seen as the main idea and rationale around which the existing literature on place branding maintains a common view about the increasing commercialization and neoliberalization of cities under the principle of incremental ‘value’ and ‘benefit’. Such a view, I maintain here is grounded in a widespread idea about the economically led imperatives and commercially led interests as fundamentally linked to a peculiar capitalist condition in which the same argumentation of the ‘broadening’ has flourished. This ‘broadening’ can be seen in fact as a push from the school of thought in marketing as exemplified by, for example, Kotler and colleagues (1993). Such ‘broadening’, apart from being an important ‘self-fulfilling’ narrative, has helped maintain the assumption in the existing literature that it is possible, even plausible given the increasing commercialization of places, that an approach to place branding based on managerial and entrepreneurial principles, ‘numbers’, ‘efficiency’ and ‘quantification’ for all stakeholders involved would be the most viable and ‘proper’ approach in performing an analysis of the political dimensions of place branding. In other words, such a view, by embracing a more historic-institutional and juridical account of place branding as a neoliberal phenomenon, has performed an analysis of politics that
examines procedural and instrumental dimensions (e.g. issues of legitimacy and accountability) without linking back such an analysis to the critical dimension in which place branding unfolds when it is understood as a branding management philosophy applied to the territorial realm (see Eshuis et al., 2013; Eshuis & Edwards, 2012; Klijn, Eshuis, & Braun, 2012).

However, from a critical perspective, the ‘broadening’ in relation to places such as cities, regions and nations (i.e. place branding) cannot only be seen as a domain of academic and popular research and literature, or even as some type of activities and practices performed by different cities. It should also be seen as one example of a certain degree of ‘colonization’ of the public realm by managerial ideas and ideologies (see e.g. Habermas, 1985, 1991) and a reflection of a neoliberal type of entrepreneurialism affecting the spatial domain (Harvey, 1989). According to this argument, then, place branding can be seen as an example of how, in a late-capitalistic socio-economic and political environment, the purely ‘private’ logic, activities, ideas and ways of doing that are proper to commercial branding are merging with purely ‘public’ logic, activities, ideas and ways of doing that are proper to local urban governments (see e.g. Brenner & Theodore, 2002; Isin, 1998) and public administrations (see e.g. Geddes, 2005).

Such a critical perspective, largely endorsed by geographically and sociologically inspired analyses (see Andersson, 2014; Berglund & Olsson, 2010; Lucarelli & Brorström, 2013), has interrogated the critical condition in which place branding is structured as inherently a neoliberal phenomenon. Despite it has also given its common and widespread understanding of neoliberalism (see for an account Brady, 2014; Flew, 2014) to be the ideological, determining and hegemonic primacy of global capitalism that structures place branding. This is founded on the same assumption upon which it fiercely criticizes a view, both shared by its proponents and its critics, of place branding as an example of capitalist neoliberalism in which an economic capitalistic superstructure is determining how place branding unfolds and conceptualizes the process of neoliberalization as a process that is straightforward and embedded in every other domain of society (see in this regard the next subchapter for clarification). Such a view sees place branding as phenomenon based on a hegemonic, dominant and historical form of ideology linked to global capitalism, inherently social and human-
centric, products of the capitalist superstructure. It follows, then, that several critical studies have been ‘trapped’ in the same structuralist view of neoliberalism they indeed aim to criticize, thereby lingering very close to the view that they try to overcome, namely the more historic-instrumental and juridical view in the literature on place branding. In other words, critical studies in their almost orthodox attitude towards a view based on a hegemonic (post-)Marxist political economy of place branding, assuming the primacy of the global capitalist superstructure as the main explanatory dimension of the emergence of place branding as dominant neoliberal ideology, ironically have ended up being anti-critical (see for critique Davies, 2014) by simply proposing a very similar hegemonic conceptualization in which place branding as an example of the process of neoliberalization that is firmly embedded in the capitalist rationale and calculus, which is ultimately only one of many cases of the colonization of the public sphere of society (see e.g. Broudehoux, 2007; Evans, 2002; Gibson, 2005; Gotham, 2007; Jensen, 2007; Koller, 2008; Marzano & Scott, 2009; Ward, 2000).

To be fair, such critical studies – by offering an insightful debate constructed around the voices that argue for a more globalized view of neoliberalism (see Peck & Tickell, 2002), a more nuanced localized view (see Brenner & Theodore, 2002), or even a more spatially diversified view of neoliberalism (Jessop, 2002) – have been instrumental in offering critical analyses which recognize the different shapes and forms that neo-liberalism can take (i.e. neostatism, neo-corporatism, neo-communitasim). Still those studies, by embracing a normative and structuralist approach to place branding, have not helped to offer an analysis about the ‘everyday’ and mundane processes of place branding as a neo-liberal manifestation. In doing so and by following Castree’s (2006) critique, such critical studies, by being interested in the capitalist nature of neoliberalism and its effect on the territorial realm, have tended to put aside the type of analysis that would have instead helped to dig into the more practical, everyday criticalities of the political practices of place branding.

This current sub-chapter argues that the recognition of the practical, mundane and emergent unfolding of politics (i.e. praxis) is even more crucial in the case of places such as cities and urban agglomerates. This is not simply because, as Brenner and Theodore pointed out, cities are becoming more powerful because of
neoliberalism and neoliberal policies or, as Swyngedouw (2009) shows, cities are more than economic conglomerates. Instead, as noted by several political geographers (see e.g. Agnew, 1999), cities as urban agglomerates have been historically and spatially framed and characterized beyond pure economic (i.e. mercantilist, capitalist or neoliberal) logic and rationale; they have been places where different forms of political praxis emerged and converged. The reason is simple: places such as cities and other urban agglomerates have across history been an important locus where political decisions affecting a particular type of space were taken, debated, contested, executed and legislated (Regardless, such a space is strictly territorially bounded like the Ancient Greek city-states or more loosely unbounded like the old Roman empire and the first mercantilist colonial powers such as the Dutch or the Portuguese). Cities and urban agglomerations are spatial entities that across history have been political entities, political bodies, political institutions that have been seized and re-seized by both low and high politics (i.e. street politics vs council politics), by local and international political decisions (i.e. wars, treaties, revolts and revolutions) that ultimately have also been the places where those particular political decisions (i.e. the main important war and political treaties have been signed in cities and urban agglomeration) were undertaken. At the same time, cities and urban agglomerations as spatial entities have also been, across history, important spaces where commercial, mercantile, capitalist and entrepreneurial sectors have flourished. In market squares, in councils, parliaments, houses, courts, battlefields, arenas and offices not only political decisions, ideas, actions and practices were taken, contested and debated. Also, in different cities and urban agglomerations, private interests of the aristocracy, bourgeoisie and citizens, were merged and were co-developed in parallel with commercial, financial and cooperative interests where technological and commercial inventions could flourish or were banned, stripped away and disregarded.

To sum up, the dominating mainstream approach held by much of the conventional marketing and brand management oriented place branding literature has helped frame a view based on a certain economic and behavioral deterministic rationale over the political (but also the cultural, natural, etc.), a view that puts the notion of the ‘private’ over the ‘public’, and the notion of ‘commercial’ over the ‘non-commercial’. The critical, that is to say mainly Marxist and
post-Marxist views such as the Gramscian approach (1967, 1971), sociological and geographical counterparts have been helpful to ‘flag’ and be ‘alert’ about the problems that an economic deterministic view can provoke. Still, by holding fast to a view that privileges the economic capitalist rationale over the political, it crystallizes the artificial dichotomization that recognizes the superstructure (i.e. economic) as a main determining ‘force’ in the process of the hybridization of the political and economic realm in contemporary neoliberalism. Such a view, as it is held by the majority of the sociological and geographical critical literature in relation to the process and practices of place branding, is rather problematic because, as pointed out by Castree (2006), it can create a necessary illusion leading to an impasse where a political analysis and critique (i.e. rather the critical as the majority of urban studies literature in place branding) of place branding is not possible to perform. It follows that only by ‘crediting’ the political dimension from the economic dimensions and still holding a view that conceptualizes those dimensions as equals – ceteris paribus – (see Davies, 2014), a political analysis in which politics is at the center is possible. In this type of political analysis, in which the ‘political’ dimension becomes the main analytical dimension, place branding – understood as materialization of ‘neoliberalism’ rather than being an empty catch-all term – instead becomes an important element in order to perform a contextualized analysis of neoliberalism in its political ‘praxis’.

A critique of the political dimension in place branding literature

The problems in holding a structuralist approach to place branding as a neoliberal activity in the critical literature can be exemplified by two studies: Browning's (2014) analysis of the relationship between aids and place branding as a device used to legitimize an economic market for the services of branding consultants, and Eisenschitz’s (2010) argument about the process of gentrification not as pragmatic activity, but rather as the principal materialization of neoliberal political activity where the author claims that gentrification does not aim at bringing prosperity to localities; rather, it is an
essentially political activity that demonstrates different class settlements by their impact on cities. Those two analyses, in fact, despite arguing for a political account of place branding, contain still two of the problems inherent to hegemonic (post-) Marxist political economy approach. If we take the claim held by Eisenschitz (2010) as an example, one can recognize that, first when arguing that gentrification is a class settlement, albeit pointing out the political dimension of neoliberalism (see Davies, 2014), the entire analysis is still grounded in an understanding of neoliberalism based a dominant economic rationale. Second by claiming that pragmatic activity is not political, the analysis falls short of showing how pragmatism is embedded in a certain view of politics that has particular political implications and dimensions similar to the political activity (i.e. class politics) that the authors claim to characterize as place branding.

I hope that at this stage it starts to be clearer and is not a surprise that given the main assumption held in the academic and popular circle about the economicist structuring, deterministic nature of place branding, one can witness a relative paucity of research and analyses on place branding where politics is the main dimension to be analyzed (i.e. as a political phenomenon). Even fewer are those studies that not only conceptualize place branding as political phenomenon, but are equally attentive to the political dimension of place branding by endorsing a politically informed theoretical and empirical approach in order to analyze, criticize or conceptualize the political dimension and features of place branding.

The importance of the political dimension, as pointed out already by Therkelsen and Halkier (2008), is crucial for understanding the longevity and penetration of certain place brands compared to others. To do this, it requires an investigation of not just of communicative outcomes and reception in targeted markets, as the majority of place branding literature addresses, but also of the processes through which the brands have been politically created, or what Ooi (2008) labels ‘the politics of place branding’, because a series of several dilemmas present themselves in the context of place branding processes (2008, pag. 200). The paucity of studies dealing with the politics of place branding, Therkelsen and Halkier (2008) suggest, can be a reflection of its highly complex nature, which can only be tackled, as in their study of branding of Aalborg, by embracing an approach that is attentive to the political
process by being composed by three salient elements: inclusion, preferred strategies and commitment.

Despite the laudable attempt and the call for a more complex view of the politics of place branding, the view proposed by Therkelsen and Halkier (2008) and by Ooi (2004, 2010, 2008), in the same manner to Browning (2014) and Eisenschitz (2010), never really goes beyond the economic determinist view in which place branding literature is embedded. In this regard, even if those authors attempt to claim the centrality of the political dimension, they rather suggest a view based on a functionalist and procedural conceptualization of politics – a political economic view (see Anttiroiko, 2014) and neoliberalism as a historical-institutional form; instead of offering an holistic political analysis, this view conceptualizes politics in economic terms (see also in this regards Downs, 1957 and Mill, 1865). Such a view, grounded in an institutionalized and scientist view of politics, such as the one proposed by Therkelsen and Halkier (2008), is a very common view held in the place branding literature that deals with the inherent political dimension. In this regard, in fact, the stream of literature that adopts an instrumental view of the political dimension (e.g. see Anholt, 2008; Mayes, 2008), the stream that adopts a political project view (see e.g. Kemming & Humborg, 2010; Lewis, 2011; Ooi & Pedersen, 2010), but also the stream that adopts a policy view (see e.g. Barr, 2012; Berg & Björner, 2014; Hülsse, 2009; Shwayri, 2013) share a common understanding of the politics of branding as complex policy process that constitute moral economics (see for a critique Browning, 2013; Varga, 2013)

To be fair, even if those studies can be accused of falling back on a historical-institutional and juridical view of capitalism, on the other hand, they should be praised as important forerunners in helping to open the space for a political analysis of place branding. In so doing, in fact, previous studies interested in the political dimension of place branding have helped to acknowledge that if one side place branding is embedded by certain ideological dimension (see e.g. Eisenschitz, 2010; Gertner, 2007; Kaneva, 2011), the other side’s place branding activities, place brands and place branding efforts should be seen as politically-laden given they are in some cases appropriated by interests and organizations not considered the prime-targets of branding efforts (see e.g. Dzenovska, 2005; Graan, 2013; Kavaratzis, 2012; Mayes, 2008). Further, the existing
literature also helps to recognize how the process of place branding in itself is highly powerful and political, with different political and professional interests involved in attempting to control the brand or put the branding effort in a particular direction (see e.g. Bennett & Savani, 2003; Pasquinelli, 2013; Ward, 2000; Youde, 2009).

Such an understanding holds that, for example, the success of a place branding process should be understood as totally dependent on the ability to handle and manage the political structure of interests around the brand (see e.g. Hornskov, 2007; Pedersen, 2004; Stigel & Frimann, 2006), where political stability should be seen as a prerequisite for a successful place branding campaign (see e.g. Anholt, 2005; Fan, 2006; Papadopoulos, 2004). The process of place branding in general, and city branding in particular, is thus represented as a powerful broadband policy-instrument with implications on many different policy areas in a city, spanning from education and business to tourism and social inclusion, etc. (see e.g. Angell & Mordhorst, 2014; Ashworth, 2009; Berg & Björner, 2014; Coaffee & Rogers, 2008; Eshuis et al., 2013; Eshuis & Edwards, 2012; Hospers, 2006; Paganoni, 2012; Pasquinelli, 2010; Ryan, Morgan, Pritchard, & Pride, 2002). Finally the political dimension of place branding as depicted in the existing literature should also be recognized in relation to its link to public diplomacy by pointing out how place branding is an important activity in an international global context (see e.g. Anholt, 2005; Nimijean, 2006; Szondi, 2008; Van Ham, 2001).

Overall, in relation to the present thesis, the existing literature on the political dimension of place branding has helped highlight the micro-dynamic configuration of the politics of place branding by grounding their analyses in empirical research and by embracing an empiricist and behavioral view – and assumptions – about politics and society at large. Those studies, by implying a view of politics as social, human-centric and products of the capitalist structure, are instrumental in offering analyses about the legal, functional, and networked dimension of the politics of place branding. In other words, by being interested in the essential characteristics of the politics of branding, those studies have helped address the instrumental and procedural empirical materialization at the basis of the political practices of place branding seen as a democratic-legal policy process (e.g. Eshuis & Klijn, 2011; Eshuis & Edwards,
Despite pursuing such a focus, those studies have suggested to over concentrate on instrumental and procedural analytical inquiry; in other words, they did not ground the analytical inquiry in relation to the critical conflictual, hegemonic and ideological dynamic of politics. This is what conversely has been pursued by those studies interested in the critical view of politics, a view that involving questions of ‘value’, albeit being still interested in different forms and materializations of politics (i.e. ideological, procedural legal and instrumental, etc.). Such a view, that is at risk of over generalization, can be claimed to be generally grounded in those studies that adopt a view of the politics of place branding as embedded into a neoliberal phenomenon based on a hegemonic, dominant and historical from of ideology linked to global capitalism. These studies can also be further criticized for overlooking an empirical and practical foundation, and for being normative and abstract in its own terms, even when based on empirical research. Finally, studies which adapt this view can be criticized for crossing the fine line in their analyses between theory on the one hand and ideology, ethics and morality on the other (see, for this type of analysis. Habermas, 1985; Marcuse, 2013; 2014).

Despite these shortcomings, the studies that endorse such view in relation to place branding have been very instrumental in offering and understanding and performing an analysis of the macro, hegemonic and ideological levels of dynamics in the politics of place branding as neoliberal phenomenon. For example studies analyzing and conceptualizing the politics of place branding as political propaganda (see e.g. Jansen, 2008; O’Shaughnessy & O’Shaughnessy, 2000; Rose, 2010), or as pure ideology and an ideological apparatus (see e.g. Browning, 2013; Harvey, 1989; Johansson, 2012; Mehta-Karia, 2012; Varga, 2013) all have been in fact very attentive to macro-level dynamics. Those studies in recognize that place branding activities and place brands can be politically appropriated by interests and organizations not considered the prime-targets of branding efforts; they suggest in fact that the politics of place branding cannot easily understood if it is not contextually located without fleshing out how the politics of place branding ‘should be’ or ‘ought to be’ analyzed and conceptualized as ideological, normative and ethical activities co-constructive of its own political environment. In a similar vein, studies that analyze and conceptualize the politics of place branding as public di-
plomacy (see e.g. Browning, 2014; Hayden & Sevin, 2012; Van Ham, 2001; Wang, 2006) have been equally attentive in recognizing a second minor assumption in the literature, namely that the dialectic between soft and hard power in relation to the practices of place branding cannot easily be understood if not contextually located without fleshing out how such a dialectic is framed around different ethical and normative worldviews that are in play. However, and in spite of their insightful analyses, those studies could be criticized in equal terms with their empirical counterparts to push forward a view about politics that is detached of its empirical neoliberal conditions (see Davies, 2014). In other words, they can be criticized for presenting a view that is relying myopically on a certain type of view about politics (i.e. capitalist political economy) seen as the highest order analytical and conceptual token for researching all types of human, social, natural, and cultural apparatuses.

Researching place branding as a biopolitical apparatus

By endorsing a social, human-centric and normative view of politics and equally by being attentive to the capitalist structural, hegemonic, ideological and instrumental conditions in which the politics of place branding unfolds previous studies, both critical and otherwise, have largely dismissed the analysis of a crucial foundation of politics, namely the recognition that politics can be thought at any level of conceptualization and articulation in its finite and infinite possibilities. This means that previous studies have failed to offer a spatiotemporal contextualized view of politics that see politics as both constituent and constitutive (i.e. immanent and transcendent). It follows that where the literature about the political dimension of place branding can be criticized for confusing ‘politics’ – which is the established, institutional means for organizing collective life – with the ‘political’ – which is the eruptive events that reveal ‘politics’ (see Lacan in Stavrakakis, 2007) – the analysis that comes from such literature can be seen as holding a view of politics that claims at the same time neutrality and critical, empirical reflection.
This is a critical point which requires clarification before moving on. What is suggested here is not that the process of branding in relation to places is not peculiar to the contemporary capitalist economic system; rather, what has been argued above is simply a recognition of the fact that that the academic and popular literature on place branding has played a major – if not a key – role in shaping a common understanding that in some way has offered a dominating view on the topic based on systemic capitalist determinism. In other words, the flourishing of place branding literature, it is here argued, has created a view that if on one hand it has annihilated a political informed analysis in favor of an analysis grounded in a view that situates place branding as a neoliberal phenomenon based on hegemonic ideological institutional global capitalist dimension, on the other hand it has produced a political analysis that is either sterile, detached and uncontextualized, or conversely it is ideologically driven, broad in scope and disinterested in an informed political analysis.

What is argued here in this present thesis does not mean that an analysis of the political dimension should be prioritized over other types of analysis such as cultural and social. It rather suggests that the analysis of the political dimension of place branding should be both rightly situated in relation to other dimensions and at the same time be attentive to the political dimension in all of its manifestations (i.e praxis). On the contrary, as it might now be clearer, the view held in the existing literature has created an artificial mental distinction (i.e. a typological one) whereby regardless of the type of research that is performed in relation to place branding, consciously or not, such research holds fast to the inherent assumption that place branding, given its neoliberal features (see Eisenschitz, 2010), is ultimately conducive to an essential ‘economic apparatus’.

By being affected by what I label here ‘the economic rationale’, both the entire literature on place branding, and more particularly those studies interested in the political dimension, have not fully considered how, for example, the ‘commercial’ and ‘non-commercial’, the ‘private’ and the ‘public’, the ‘economic’ and ‘political’ are at stake in the same locus and in same moment. This also means in relation to the political dimension that an alternative, critical but open view (see Cresswell, 2010; Sheller & Urry, 2003)
should be endorsed in approaching place branding. This view should be precisely in contrast to a ‘conformist’ view as framed by the mainstream brand management literature emerging in both academic and popular circles. Here it is argued that such a view should conceptualize place branding as an example of a neoliberal process affecting the territorial realm that is albeit not a pure ‘economic-capitalist’, neoliberal manifestation upon which place branding is a cause of such process. This view should rather see a neoliberal process that is in its manifestation ‘biopolitical’ in which place branding is both the cause and effect of the entanglement of domains such as ‘politics’ and ‘economics’ (see also Davies, 2014). In such process, a biopolitical view helps to see several domains (e.g. politics and economics) in relational emergence, coalescence and becoming, upon which, even if the practices of branding in relation to the territorial and public realm have had longer historical and geographical traditions, still place branding should be conceptualized rather than a political phenomenon (i.e. in Kantian terms) as a political apparatus (i.e. in biopolitical terms) in its actual contemporary form (see a debate about this in chapter 3 and 4).

By endorsing a view of place branding as a fundamentally biopolitical apparatus in the present thesis, the inherent ‘economicism’ within which the majority of critical studies on the political dimension of place branding literature is ‘trapped’ can be solved. By opening the space for a biological (i.e. relational view) on politics, I maintain here that it can lead to building the conditions for an analysis in which politics as a theoretical, empirical and analytical term is central. By so doing, treating place branding as a biopolitical apparatus can allow a consideration of both the contextual neoliberal conditions upon which neoliberalism is shaped (see Davies, 2014), and more importantly it can recognize that the (political) legitimacy upon which the empirical practices of place branding is grounded could be seen as characterized by the wide adoption of marketing and consumer vocabulary which can be traced back, as already pointed for marketing and consumer research, to the political-theological notion of ecclesia (see Schwarzkopf, 2011).

In this sense it follows that place branding should be regarded as a biopolitical apparatus, rather than in a Focauldian sense (see chapter 3), by following the writings of Agamben (2007, 2009) on the theological foundations of the economy (i.e. oekonomia). This is
an ‘apparatus’ namely because it is originally a pure activity of
governance devoid of any foundation or ability to produce its own
subjects, which in late (neoliberal) capitalism, should be seen as
the becoming of a process of desubjectivication leading to the
eclipse of politics (i.e. which presupposes the existence of subject)
and the triumph of oekonomia (i.e. the pure activity of government
aiming to replicate as can be observed by the example of copy-cat
branding campaigns as produced by different cities). Following
such a archeo-geneological theoretical movement, it should be
clear that because place branding can be seen as a contemporary
biopolitical apparatus, which is similar to a sort of parody of theo-
logical oekonomia in aimless motion, instead of offering redemp-
tion (i.e. a sense of citizenship, belonging or ‘true’ higher standard
of living) it rather leads to catastrophe (i.e. gentrification, the waste
of public money, inter-urban conflicts), that it is finally indeed
properly ‘political’. It is political for the simple reason that is be-
coming schizophrenic and ungovernable, being thus simultaneous-
ly at the beginning and vanishing point of politics.

Such an understanding of a biopolitical apparatus requires, if it
does not assume, a different treatment of the political dimension of
place branding, namely a spatiotemporal contextual treatment of
politics which can both prescribe and offer solutions to political
problems as well as to strive to offer a persuasive account of what
the world of politics is like and how it relates to other dimensions
(e.g. the economy). Such a view of politics implies an engagement
with an onto-epistemological approach that sees politics as both
consistent and constitutive. This is a view that is ‘immanence
without reintroducing transcendence’ and helpful to conceptualize
‘the vertigo in which outside and inside, immanence and tran-
scendence, are absolutely indistinguishable’ (Agamben, 2009,
238).
An ecological approach to politics: analyzing place branding as biopolitical apparatus

In the previous chapter, a critical treatment of the research about the political dimension of place branding as well as argumentation about the necessity to understand place branding as a biopolitical apparatus was presented. Such a view of politics – which is both about political thinking and thinking about politics – can have a double function. One function is that it offers solutions to political problems and strives to offer a persuasive account of what the world of politics is like and how it relates to other dimensions (economics, culture, nature, etc.). The other function of this view is, by taking a radical approach, to be able to offer a way to think about politics and the relation to the political as constituting both its ground and its reverse side. In the present chapter, these double functions are elaborated by presenting an ecological-political approach to place branding as biopolitical apparatus.

Contextualizing the ecological approach: place branding and biopolitics.

An ecological-political approach in the present thesis means that rather than a typology of politics, one should understand politics as a way of thinking in which the politics of place branding emerge on a biopolitical horizon. Such a horizon – or as other authors prefer to call it, a ‘condition’ – is what several scholars, following Foucault, call biopolitics.
Biopolitics according to Foucault can be seen as neoliberalism celebrating a new form of depoliticization (see in this regard Flew, 2014) by managing population and bodies in order to regulate life. Foucault (2010) famously, in one of his lectures at the College de France, argued that classical sovereignty (i.e. ‘to take life or let live’) had been replaced or rather completed by a biopolitical sovereignty (i.e. ‘to make live and to let die’). Departing from Foucault’s position, there have been a series of scholars (I mainly refer to the work of Agamben, Negri and Esposito) that have ‘ecologized’ biopolitics by spatiotemporally contextualizing the term in relation to the genealogical interrelation of biology and politics (here I refer mainly to Esposito) as commonly understood in political philosophy. They have also ecologized biopolitics by putting the foundational concepts of bios (i.e. the particular type of political life as framed by Aristotle), zoe (i.e. natural life, the life outside politics, the household or oikos) and techne (i.e. the craft of doing something as framed by Socrates) into acheo-geneological relations. In so doing, these authors, by following different paths that are sometimes even opposite to each other, have offered a series of analyses that help unpack the generative foundation of biopolitics and, thereby positioning the biopolitical analysis in both the contemporary and historical debate about politics.

Regardless of their affirmative (e.g. Esposito, 2008; Negri, 2010) or negative view of biopolitics (e.g. Agamben, 2003), what these analyses have in common is that they help connect two polarities (i.e. life and politics) into a more organic, ecological, complex form. In this regard, they help disentangle the relationship between the sovereign and biopolitical regime, as well as the relationship between modernity and totalitarianism. This is done in a way that instead of outlining a doubtful relationship (see, for example, the Foucauldian notion of “biopolitics” or “biopower”) are explained by the way in which biopolitics lay at the foundation of humanity. This is seen as a state of exception (i.e. Agamben 2003) that can nevertheless contribute to the reconstruction of a revolutionary horizon in the heart of empire (i.e. Hardt & Negri, 2013), or rather, as suggested in the present thesis, it is more a transversal emerging processes of immunization (i.e. Esposito, 2011) that can be traced not only to the concept of sovereignty, property, and liberty, but also to the entire vocabulary of marketing and branding. It follows, then, that recognizing place branding as a biopolitical apparatus is fruitful because it helps identify how the politics of place branding
is biopolitical for the simple reason that it has its contemporary and neoliberal origins in the immunizing features of an economic vocabulary (e.g. branding, competition, marketing, production, consumption, gentrification, sustainability, brand identity, brand elements) on the mundane, practical life of places and territorial agglomeration such as cities and regions.

Ecological politics and place branding: a relational approach

An ecological approach to place branding as biopolitical apparatus in the present dissertation should be understood both as methodologically and theoretically grounded in a relational approach to knowledge (see for a further debate about methodology chapter 4). A relational approach tends to avoid dualism (i.e. epistemology and ontology) commonly present in the traditional view of knowledge production because such a separation is not germane since ‘one makes sense only in the merging with the other’ (Fuenmayor, 1991, 2), and because ‘practices of knowing and being are not isolatable, but rather they are mutually implicated’(Barad, 2003, 828). ‘Relationality’ here highlights the importance of the interactions through which entities emerge out of the environment’s constituent parts that come into being (see Dillon in Tsoukas & Dooley, 2011, 732).

One should recognize that relationality in social science and the humanities has been embraced in different ‘readings’ (Dillon, 2000), and therefore it does not form a coherent theoretical turn (Jacobs, 2012). In the present thesis, a relational view has been ‘operationalized’ by embracing an ecological style which is attentive to place branding not merely as a neoliberal apparatus, but also to neoliberalism and governmental assemblages (see Brady, 2014). This style, especially in relation to politics, rather than being a unitary analytical and theoretical framework should be seen as a way of thinking and doing research that recognizes the multiple connections that contribute to making place branding a mobile, performative, and affective biopolitical apparatus.
Such an approach is particularly suitable to analyze the combination of the coalescence of several constituents which instead of being separated mechanic entities are in actuality mutually composed. This means that ecological approach that conceptualizes politics as both consistent and constitutive (i.e. immanent and transcendent). Similarly, an ecological approach to politics assumes a view that recognizes the political dimensions of consumption and production as not divided as it is commonly understood in the literature on place branding; rather, it recognizes the relations between consumption and production as a falsely constructed dichotomy. This is simply because according to an ecological approach, the process in which place branding as a biopolitical apparatus unfolds should be seen as a circular process of ‘appropriation’ (see Esposito, 2011) whereby the practices of transformation and assimilation should not be understood as the pure power of individuals and collective in the face of a techno-industrial economic system or as a political expression of the ineluctable power of capitalism to subtly insinuate itself to every detail of lived experience. It should rather be understood as a way that those two processes are coalescing spatially and temporally with each other.

Framing an ecological approach: analyzing the political dimension.

An ecological approach to politics (i.e. a way of thinking and doing research) for place branding as the one presented here draws from important acquisitions of knowledge and insights already in place in previous scholarly works which have helped contextualize and construct the conceptual framework of the present thesis.

An ecological approach to politics should be recognized as being about the ecology of practice (Latour, 2005a, 2009; Stengers, 1997, 1999, 2005). An ecological view implies a way to think about how to avoid the major ‘key’ of politics (i.e., institutionalized, formal) in favor of minor keys (i.e. practices, mundane). The ecology of practice according to Stengers is each (always partial) relation between practices as they diverge; those must be celebrated as a ‘cosmic event’, a mutation which does not depend only on
humans, but on humans as belonging. Belonging means that practices and practitioners are obliged and exposed by their obligations, in which such an event based on certain technologies of belongings cannot be produced at will but which work as both fostering and challenging (i.e. empowering and diplomacy). Here, a last point for the framework of the present dissertation is clear: those practices and the belonging via fostering and empowering are part of the way actors are involved in the process of place brand regeneration.

Both Latour and Stengers suggest to reopen politics in a parliament of things (see Latour, 2005, 2009), and in an attempt to recognize emergence without transcendence, they suggest the art of chemistry (Stengers, 1999), which is not based on mechanical reductionism or biological sublimation, as the model of how politics work and appear. Politics, based on the etho-ecological model of alchemists, for Stengers, thus should be seen as an art (i.e. in Machiavellian terms) that is disentangled from any reference to universal human truth (i.e. normativism) and has to create its own conditions of emergence. This view thus, rather than understanding politics being seen as purely ontological (Mol, 1999), brings to the fore a way of thinking about the modes of the being of politics in which the politics of place branding should be seen not merely in the social or human context, but rather as pre-social, and present beyond its merely human and social constitution. An ecological approach implies a more-than-human and material-political-ecological view. Such a view problematizes at its core the human-centric assumption of politics as is held in much of the place-branding literature.

Further, an ecological approach, by following Whatmore and colleagues (see Braun, Whatmore, & Stengers, 20013; Whatmore, 2013; Whatmore, 2006) points towards a type of analysis in which ‘becoming political’ should be analyzed ‘in the making’ of the artificial distinction between zoe, bios and techne. An ecological approach following Whatmore and colleagues implies that politics should be seen as ‘stuff’ where the material, mundane, and performative elements of politics are based on technicity, biology and humanity. Place branding as an apparatus and its political dimension should be seen as a matter of ‘stuff’ and therefore regarded as the coupling for embodiment and technics in human and non-human be-comings (i.e. technicity) and their co-evolution (i.e. technogenesis). In relation to the framework presented here, the
entanglement of tecnicity and technogenesis should be understood as materiality (e.g. information technology) that starts to be an important intermediary in the unfolding of different political practices of visualization and materialization.

An ecological approach argues for a rethinking of the category and dimension of the ‘political’, at least in relation to how it is understood in place branding. It should not merely be understood in terms of social contacts, but since it implies thinking of politics as experimentations and innovativeness, it should rather be viewed as forceful. In other words the ecological approach to the politics of place branding presented here should not be seen as a sort of political social contract where humans come to an agreement about certain social conditions of co-living. It should instead be understood as an epistemic co-evolution among human and non-human agents who does not constitute a social contact, but is an area of political conflict. It follows that the political process, for example the process of place brand and stakeholder identity co-creation in this light, should thus be seen as the political potency of controversies that can be encountered in the experimenting of political practices that are done by different stakeholders and actors.

The ecological approach presented here follows a vitalist view of ecology and politics. In this regard, if Timothy Morton (2010) with his work on ecological thought is just liminal in helping to offer an approach that attempts to build a ‘new onto-story and a *forma mentis* about world and knowledge’ (2010, 4) Jane Bennett is more helpful instead by highlighting the political dimension of such an ecological and vitalist approach. In fact, by following Bennett’s works (Bennett, 2009; Bennett, 2004) the ecological approach developed in the present thesis offers a view that substitutes traditional political concepts with vocabularies and thinking devices that help analyze ‘things which force through’ in political practices (i.e. conatus, actants, assemblage, small forms of agency, operators, disruption, translation). The ecological approach presented here strives for a different type of vocabulary – a vocabulary which does not follow a social, human-centric and structuralist idea of politics such as the one present in the existing literature on place branding. In this regard an ecological approach should think of politics as a way to ‘render manifest’; it is a process that is both receptive and participatory in a shape which is received, and it is manifest though humans, but not entirely because of them. It fol-
lows that an ecological approach thinks of politics as the ‘force of things’ which have the power to move humans – humans that should be thought of as things in themselves that are composed of particular rich and complex collection of materiality. Place branding concepts or ideas (e.g. vision, mission, statements) thus according to this approach should be recognized as forces which have the power to move humans via assemblage.

A vitalist ecological approach to politics inherently aims for a spatio-temporal analysis of the place lived (i.e. oikos) seen as a dynamic flow of matter-energy that settles in various bodies that often join forces, make connections and form alliances. Place branding, via such approach, should been recognized as an ecology of political action because it is a conjunction, transaction and confederation of the affective, bodily, nature of responses coalescing around specific problem in the place branding process (i.e. the use of brand for building imaginary region such as in the case of article 3 or the specific utterances in article 2). According to such an approach, the eventual ‘problem’ rising from the place branding process should be seen as singular collective disruptions and not intentional acts merely performed by humans. The political process of building a brand for a place or a region, for example, should thus be seen as political acts that disrupt and change radically what is at stake and what different stakeholder can and cannot ‘see’ in place branding processes.

An ecological approach as the one framed here recognizes the constructness and networked regimes of natures, society, culture, polity and economy. As Escobar (1996, 1998) helps point out, in such a network ‘politics’ should be seen as defined by the attention that a researcher has to pay to sketching articulations and differences in relation to different political implications. In treating place branding not merely as empirical phenomena but as an academic biopolitical apparatus, the ecological approach presented here helps to unfold the articulations, in the existing place branding literature, of different political impacts and branding dimension at stake, as well as, the different stakeholders’ articulations and its spatio-temporal political implications.

The political implications of place branding according to an ecological approach should both seen as the different unfolding of politics as well as the different strategies and repertoires presented
to different social groups and movements when they encounter particular types of place branding efforts. It follows that an ecological approach to politics, by focusing on the ‘practical and radical’ view of politics, recognizes that the relations of power among different and consequent place branding networks should be represent the principal aim of analysis. In such a ‘radical’ view of politics, an ecological approach is not merely seen as a way to understand and analyze different events and different modalities of politics but, more crucially it is as a way to recognize the role of the researcher that ‘participates’ in the assembling of forces that link the development of place branding and its political and economic transformation.

Thus, the ecological approach presented here is not simply a framework for analyzing to the political dimension of place branding. It is also according to Code (2006) an epistemological project whereby ecology features as the study of the habitats in which people can live well together and the ethos and habitus enacted in the customs, social organizations, and creative-regulative principles by which people strive or fail to achieve this end. In this way, an ecological approach is both spatial and temporal because it looks backward in attempting to understand how certain states of affairs (i.e. processes), situations (i.e. effect and events), and living things (i.e. brands, equity) came to be and how they might be encouraged, nurtured or stopped, while at the same time mapping the existence of such epistemic political terrains to analyze the promises and problems for the life of cities, regions and nations that are branded. It follows that an ecological analysis of place branding should performed as ‘epistemic’ and equally that the political dimension of place branding should be construed as spatio-temporal political practices that are both becoming and locational.
Methodology and Methods

The present chapter presents the research design and the applied methods that have been used in approaching and operationalizing the research questions and aim of the dissertation. The chapter is divided in two main subchapter, the first is concerned with the research design for the entire dissertation, the rationale and logic of different data collection, well as the epistemological approach; the second is instead the presentation of different practical execution of material collection as well as practical treating of material collected performed.

Methodology

Methodology is commonly understood as the rationale and logic of different data collection, the combination of different methods as well as the epistemological approach embedded in a particular piece of research. In the present thesis, given that such research embraces a critical and reflexive view about data collection and data production (see Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2009; Denzin, 2001, 2009), a clear line of demarcation between the research design, epistemology and the rationale and logic for the combination of different methods and analysis is difficult to bring to the fore. Nevertheless, the subsequent section specifies the present thesis’s methodological approach and presents the logic behind the data collection process.
The origin of the dissertation: the crucial point of departure

My interest in the topic from which the present thesis takes its point of departure is linked to the very first empirical material collected in 2009 during a field study on the branding process in Romagna, Italy. Such data, employed for a MSc in Business Administration at Stockholm University, is part of the empirical data further developed and used as part of the empirical material employed in the analysis performed in one of the article included in the present thesis (i.e. article 2). Such research has been instrumental for three reasons; first, it has suggested the research potential that analyzing contexts such as the regional branding process can have for marketing research in general and political research in particular; second, such research has functioned as a kind of ‘pilot study’ in which the first ideas had been shaped and research ideas for the future had been engineered; and third, given the complexity and multifaceted dimension of researching place branding, it has allowed me to realize, in relation to a more strict methodological aspect, that even if interviews are important methods for obtaining insightful insights, they should only be used as ‘one of many’ methods of data collection and analysis.

The last point is the most important because it suggests that place branding, whether framed by practitioners as form of campaign, a governance mechanism or as series of activities (i.e. see also article 1 for a reflection), require the adoption of different methods and different types of analysis. This recognition is very similar to what, on conceptual level, can be observed in the first article in the present thesis, namely, the requirement, almost the necessity, to employ different methods for data collection not according to a priori diktat or a posteriori observation. This means, in other words, that the necessity to employ different methods in the present thesis has not been decided merely a priori (i.e. methodology inductivism), but it is also based on a posteriori reflection (i.e. methodology deductivism) from the analysis performed in the Master’s dissertation in conjunction with the posthumous reflections gained from the use of the interviews as part of the material employed in crafting article 2.
Research design for the overall dissertation

Based on the discussion of the origin of the present thesis, the research design endorsed here adopts a methodology based on an abductivist approach to research. Such a research design is rather common in the broader marketing and consumer research, especially in relation to the politico-economic dimension (i.e. see, for example, the debate about a priori and a posteriori in relation to J.S Mill’s empiricism and economic methodology as framed by Hausman, 1994).

More practically, the research design of the present dissertation includes, apart from the introduction chapters (i.e. chapters 1, 2, 3, 4, and 5), conceptual research based on the literature, and three studies – two of which are based on field research and one on library research – were conducted at different stages. These three studies have been further presented in four different articles (i.e. papers), each of them tackling one of the more particular research sub-questions and aspects of the thesis (i.e. political aspect). The table (i.e. Table 1) and the figure (i.e. Figure 1) that follow below present an overview of the papers, the empirical foundation, along with their individual objectives, methods used for data collection, and specific analysis.
Table 1. Overview of the type of research conducted within the scope of the present dissertation.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Specific research objectives</th>
<th>Specific unit of analysis</th>
<th>Data collected-Data collection</th>
<th>(Main) Data analysis</th>
<th>Papers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Map the different features of the political impact of place branding activities</td>
<td>Academic literature</td>
<td>Academic journal articles</td>
<td>Content analysis</td>
<td>Paper I</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Analyze political actors and actor groups’ relations in the branding process</td>
<td>The discourses about the branding process</td>
<td>Interviews, official documents, webpages and promotional materials, archival data</td>
<td>Discourse analysis</td>
<td>Paper II</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Analyze the political network of relations and elements in the branding process</td>
<td>The spatial and historical process of branding</td>
<td>Interviews, official documents, webpages and promotional materials, archival data, tweets, observations</td>
<td>Ethnographic inquiry</td>
<td>Paper III</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Analyze the unfolding of political actions and activities in the virtual realm</td>
<td>The relationship in-between actors in the process of branding</td>
<td>Webpages, official documents, observations</td>
<td>Critical Visual analyses</td>
<td>Paper IV</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Figure 1 Overview of the research sub question, conducted studies and appended papers
Research epistemology

In the present dissertation, a relational methodology is embraced. Although a relational methodology refers in particular mainly to an epistemological stance, here it also refers to an ontological stance (see chapter 3 for clarification). In other words, the present study is in line with those studies, for example in marketing and consumer research, that theoretically adopt a relational ontology both theoretically (e.g. Bettany & Kerrane, 2011; Canniford & Shankar, 2013; Epp & Price, 2010; Giesler, 2012; Hagberg & Kjellberg, 2010; Martin & Schouten, 2014), and methodologically (see Giovanardi, Lucarelli, & Decosta, 2014; Hietanen, Rokka, & Schouten, 2014; Hill et al., 2014). In fact, the present dissertation embraces relationalism by manner of onto-epistemology (for a more detailed account, see Barad, 2003), which is at the same time the study of practices of knowing in being and the way to think about the kind of understandings that is needed to come to terms with how the ‘apparatus’ (i.e. place branding) can be researched and how knowledge is produced. A relational approach to onto-epistemology (see Code, 2006) implies an understanding of the way to pursue research as an entangled process in the way the research process is produced and the research outcome is presented in written, oral or visual form. A relational approach to onto-epistemology supports the study of the practices of knowing in being by performing different methods and different types of data collection, allowing them to be ‘open’ in relation to the ‘thing’ researched because it suggests a way to ‘follow’ the unit of analysis (i.e. branding process) and to generate a continuous in becoming of knowledge and analysis. A relational onto-epistemology offers a way to conceptualize a biopolitical apparatus (i.e. place branding) under research not merely as a mark of the epistemological inseparability of the ‘observer’ and the ‘observed’, but instead as an ontological inseparability of intra-action, residing neither in any super-structure nor in humans, but is situated in the relations between different elements of the cosmos, whether they are human, post-human, hybrid, etc. (see in this regards Barad, 2003; Haraway, 1988; Latour, 1986).

The role of research in such an onto-epistemological approach is therefore rather peculiar. It implies a radical relationship between the production of knowledge and the role of the researcher. In fact,
materials are not simply there to be collected, but they are co-produced by the researchers in their interactions with the 'thing', with informants, and with the context in which the research process is taking place. It implies an attitude towards the entire research process which is highly 'political' because it can be seen, due its creative approach, not only as a way to produce knowledge, but also as a way to both unveil and emancipate. However, given the relational nature of the 'political' aspect of knowledge production, it is not only a matter of researcher and the researched, but it is also a matter of the 'thing', the methods, and type of data collected because they are also producers of knowledge in interaction. Methods and the data collected leave ‘traces’ and are ‘observable’ by the researcher because of how they appear (i.e. data is there because it allows itself to be seen). It is then clear that it is relatively easy to lose critical distance, and equally there is a risk that the researcher loses sight of the entire unit under analysis in spite of an even more important and complicated role. It is therefore important to embrace a reflexive stance that recognizes the limit of such an approach that could be accused of being partial and short-sighted.

Operationalizing relationalism: ecological methodology

Methodology is matter of epistemology and ontology. In this regard, it should pointed out that the methodology of the present thesis, based on relational epistemology, is operationalized via an ethnographic style of inquiry based on the employment of different methods which I label ecological methodology, or what other researchers, in relation to politically-informed studies, call ‘non-ideal standpoint methodology’ (Anderson, 2009) or ‘group relations methodology’ (Schwartzman, 2006), which hold ultimately a methodology that is non-individualist and is orientated towards non-abstraction.

Rather than a methodology, it should be seen as an epistemological approach that implies, in practical terms, more than simply the adoption of different methods for collecting data as individual methods in subsequence. Instead, it recognizes them as a series of interlinked methods constituted in relation among each other. In
other words, it does not imply a mere triangulation, namely the mixture of qualitative and quantitative methods and analysis, but it implies a series of methods fashioned in order to be able to perform research and collect material in multi-faceted and multi-shaped forms. Further, it implies an iterative and itinerant employment of different methods that can be both sequentially and/or contemporarily performed. It follows, for example, that a particular method (i.e. interviewing) can both be employed in different time frames and in different spatial frames, but it also can be ‘standing’ (i.e. continuously used) and thus employed conjointly with other methods (i.e. archival data).

In the present thesis, such approach can be seen as performed by collaborating and drawing from other scholarly research (see articles 1, 2, 3, 4), by first being ‘open’ and starting with a very loose ‘thing’ to follow (i.e. a tagline, or a slogan as in article 2), and finally by treating each ‘bunch’ of materials as a performative situated approach of knowledge production (Haraway, 1988) to create insights for suggesting new avenues of material collection (as in article 3 and 4) and for the employment of new types of methods and analysis (as in article 2).

The rationale for the combinations of different methods and the collection of different materials for an ecological methodology is very similar to the one assumed in an ethnographic Latourian approach (see Austrin, 2005; Latour, 2010) to research, which means being attentive to performativity and mobility in term of processual semiotic materialism. However, and here is the main difference, the centrality of language and the representational way of knowledge production should be, as envisioned in the previous section, complemented by endorsing non-representationalism and performativity methodologically (see Vannini, 2014) in the way that the ‘thing’ under research should not only be followed in a plural unicity of methods (see Hannam, Sheller, & Urry, 2006), but also that the ‘thing’ can be seen as performative because of how it is practiced and can also be seen as results of the analysis since the ‘thing’ can be acting in different forms, shapes, places and time periods. Having such an understanding, it is rather straightforward to see how it is not crucial to present different methods in any particular chronological or spatial order if not for the sake of pedagogical clarity. The reason is simple: an ethnographic approach as the one here framed is open (i.e. see the role of researcher as co-actor
in the process of data production and data collection); it endorses methods that can render insights into the research field (i.e. the place branding) from a different angles – angles that are important in order to finally render an understanding of the entire research process.

The ‘unit of analysis’ and research phenomenon

In this entire manuscript, so far, rather than using common notions such as ‘unit of analysis’ in relation to what is under research, or ‘phenomenon’ in relation to how place branding is understood as a field of research or domain, other terms such as ‘apparatus’ have instead been more often used. This is a purposeful choice following the particular aforementioned approach. However, in order to render an intelligible description about what is under research (i.e. the unit of analysis), some information at this stage is warranted. In fact, whereas from a theoretical level ‘apparatus’ (i.e. chapter 3) has been explained, at this stage it needs to clarified so that ‘apparatus’ is also endorsed methodologically. Namely, this is following Foucault (1980) and Agamben (2009), after Foucault, who outlined a set of strategic practices and mechanisms (both linguistic, non-linguistic, juridical and technical) that aim to face certain needs and obtain an immediate impact. In other words, ‘apparatus’ should be seen methodologically as a bundle of practices and mechanisms of different forms, with different rationale, co-constructing in different ways a system of knowledge.

It is clear then an ‘apparatus’ is something fundamentally different from a ‘phenomenon’ understood in the Kantian sense in the critique of pure reason (see Kant, 1908) as transcendental abstract law defining the possibilities of experience. It follows that place branding, as seen as a (biopolitical) apparatus rather than as a (biopolitical) phenomenon, implies that we should talk about it more as a ‘thing’ to research in action rather than a ‘unit of analysis’ to be researched (i.e. the prescribed observable manifestations of those objects of analysis). A ‘thing’ in the present dissertation should be seen not merely as the materialization of an ‘apparatus’ in concrete real practices and activities, but rather as the other side of the coin whereby ‘apparatus’ should be understood as a theoretical concept.
and ‘thing’ as a methodological concept. It follows that the ‘thing’, is not becoming visual, material and finally ‘analyzable’ via thingification (see Barad, 2003), in other words being the turning of relation into ‘words’ ‘images’ ‘policies’. Rather, the ‘thing’ is in itself an assemblage of different kinds (see Hacking, 1983), analyzable as a relational ‘thing’ in action which is, per se, action (see Latour, 2005).

In the present thesis, all this means is that the ‘thing’ cannot be studied as bounded practices, activities or even as an object. It is in becoming and thus is not only informing, but actively co-creating the way data and materials are collected by the researcher. For this reason, the researcher has to be attentive to everything that is happening around and inside the ‘thing’, whether this is human (e.g. people working/acting inside and around an organization, residents, Twitter users) or non-human (e.g. organizations, material such as fliers) or hybrid (e.g. the screen, the internet). Such view suggests ‘following’ the ‘thing’ by endorsing complementary methods that allow one to render an ‘assembling picture’ of both what, for example as in the case of article 2, different types of people do with the ‘thing’ inside the different organizations, but at the same time what organizations do with the thing (see for example article 2).

It appears now clearer that by holding such a view about the ‘thing’ (i.e. from now on for clarity, I will use the phrase ‘unit of analysis’), the methodology and the research design applied in the present dissertation implies a peculiar relationship between the unit of analysis and the methods. In fact, here methods are not merely employed to ‘naturally’ collect materials, but also to create insights that constitute the unit of analysis. By collecting data by the manner of interviews, for example, data in themselves are not only informative but also creative: they are materials that both ‘add something’ for assembling research accounts, but also are at the same time the unit of analysis to be analyzed per se (see e.g Czarniawska-Joerges, 2007). In other words, taking interviews as an example of the researcher-interviewed unit of analysis, they ultimately should be seen as epistemic and performative (see Moisander, Valtonen, & Hirsto, 2009).
Methods, Data Collection

In the present section, the presentation of different practical forms of material collection as well as practical treatment of collected material is presented. This is also labeled as methods. The present section is divided in several subsections in which different methods and different type of materials are presented.

Secondary data collection

In the present dissertation, secondary data collection refers to externally produced documents and content made available on the web as well as books, pamphlets, videos, newspaper and academic articles (i.e see Table 2 below). Secondary data collection in the present study does not include archival data – presented later on as its own methods and data – and it could be seen as a method in which the researcher is involved at the lowest level of knowledge production. Secondary data can present itself in visual, textual and oral forms. In the present dissertation, secondary data collection is a method recurrently employed because it is able to generate insights that suggests other types of methods. It is also an important ‘bit’ for assembling and constituting both partial data (i.e. articles) and contextualization (i.e. chapter 2). In this regard a special note should be made about academic and popular books; they have been important secondary data because, in the course of data collection, they have able to set and redirect the inquiry. PhD dissertations as the one from Hallin (2009) and Ågren (2011) in the case of Stockholm and the book by Balzani (2001) in the case of Romagna are some examples. They have been not only informative about the research process, but they also have been ‘performative’ in creating knowledge and creating pathways for further investigation. In this regard, many academic and popular books should be seen as hybrid materials allowing certain pathways for research, methods and data collection that resemble more archival data collection rather than secondary data collection.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of data</th>
<th>Time frame</th>
<th>Books</th>
<th>Articles</th>
<th>Flyers/Pamphlets</th>
<th>Pictures</th>
<th>Articles</th>
<th>Note</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total 8 books on Stockholm and Romagna</td>
<td>2010-2014</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Total 8 books on Stockholm</td>
<td>2011-2014</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Total 250 academic articles</td>
<td>2010-2015</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total 30 flyers and pamphlets collected</td>
<td>2011-2014</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Total 30 flyers and pamphlets collected on Stockholm</td>
<td>2011-2014</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Total 35 pictures collected in Stockholm and outside the city</td>
<td>2011-2014</td>
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<tr>
<td>Total 15 film and video clips</td>
<td>2011-2014</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 2: Secondary data**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Specification</th>
<th>Time frame</th>
<th>Note</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>See article 1</td>
<td>2011-2014</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pictures personal from Stockholm the Capital of Sweden, YouTube channel, Sweden's channel, Costa Romagnola YouTube channel, Sweden, Stockholm, Personal pictures collected in Stockholm and outside the city with the capital of Sweden</td>
<td>2011-2014</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stockholm the Capital of Scandinavia YouTube Channel, Costa Romagnola YouTube channel, Sweden, Sweden Hell and Heaven, I am curious - yellow (film, director Scattini), I am curious - yellow (film, director Sjöman)</td>
<td>2011-2014</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Archival data collection

Archival data collection in the present thesis is very similar to secondary data collection (see table 3 below). However, archival data collection follows a more systematically oriented form of collection. In fact, archival data collection is able to suggest different trajectories inside the same methods and collected material because archival data collection can be found in different shapes, forms (i.e. textual and visual materials) and locations (i.e. boxes, shelves, sections, or even time-frames). Archival data collection thus in the present thesis has been used as a ‘method on its own’ since it allows one to follow genealogical, spatial, and temporal patterns and streams of data collection. Such a method is highly complicated for the simple reason that as a researcher one can easily lose orientation in the myriad of details at hand. In this regards, for the present dissertation, as for example in the case of the visit to the Mälardalsrådet archive, it is of paramount importance that the unit of analysis under research is loosely framed with the help of other methods and other data collected either contemporarily or con-spatially. Archival data collection can render insights as consequences of other methods (e.g. participant observation, interview) as well as and as a way to ‘push’ the researcher towards different path to follow.

Table 3. Archival data collection

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Data Collected</th>
<th>Timeframe/Location</th>
<th>Specification (sources )</th>
<th>Note</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Written material (pamphlets, folders)</td>
<td>Spring 2012 (Rimini)</td>
<td>Regional Tourism Agency APT archive</td>
<td>Total 15 printed material collected</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Spring 2013(Stockholm)</td>
<td>Mälardalsrådet archive</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Fall 2014 (Stockholm)</td>
<td>Stadshuset archive</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Visual (pictures, signs, video)</td>
<td>Spring 2012 (Rimini)</td>
<td>Tourism Agency APT archive</td>
<td>Total 25 pictures taken under the visit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Spring 2013(Stockholm)</td>
<td>Mälardalsrådet archive</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Fall 2014 (Stockholm)</td>
<td>Stadshuset archive</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Informative interviewing

To gain first-hand exposure, interviews (i.e. informative) have been largely adopted, both in the case of Stockholm and in the case of Romagna. Interviews in the present dissertation have been performed in Swedish, English and Italian, type recoded and transcribed; this has produced a series of transcripts which have been complemented by notes taken during the interview process (see Table 3 below). Informative interviewing is a method that relies on interviews done with specific actors in order to obtain general or specific information. Informative interviews have been analyzed as singular items or in groups. Informative interviewing in the present dissertation have followed in a semi-structured and open-ended fashion. Informative interviewing allows obtaining some general and basic knowledge about the particular research at hand, but they can also create interesting insights in suggesting further methods and types of data. In the present dissertation, informative interviewing has been mainly used more in the initial phase of the entire research process as a complement of secondary data, or for example in the case of the interview with Julian Stubbs. In the case with Stubbs, informative interviewing has been useful not only in suggesting other methods, but also in rendering insights on what is happening in areas and spaces where the researcher for physical reasons does not have access or is not able to be at that moment. In relation to other methods and collected materials, informative interviewing function as exploratory types of interviews (i.e. see difference with ethnographic interview). Those types of interviews have been performed mainly in the first part of the research process in the case of Stockholm. In the case of Romagna, interviews have been performed via a snow-ball system with the most ‘active’ actors being interviewed.
Table 3. Informative interviews

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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ewert M. and Zetteberg O.</td>
<td>English</td>
<td>70 min</td>
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<tr>
<td>Stubbs J.</td>
<td>English</td>
<td>60 min</td>
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<tr>
<td>Filipsson K.</td>
<td>Swedish</td>
<td>45 min</td>
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<tr>
<td>Helleday M.</td>
<td>Swedish</td>
<td>30 min</td>
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<tr>
<td>Karlsson A. M.</td>
<td>Swedish</td>
<td>40 min</td>
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<tr>
<td>Johansson M. O.</td>
<td>Swedish</td>
<td>60 min</td>
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<tr>
<td>Hoglund R.</td>
<td>Swedish</td>
<td>60 min</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sandrup M.</td>
<td>English</td>
<td>70 min</td>
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<tr>
<td>Bringfors Dahlgren C.</td>
<td>Swedish</td>
<td>60 min</td>
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<tr>
<td>Börjesson A.</td>
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<td>60 min</td>
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<tr>
<td>Marra U.</td>
<td>Italian</td>
<td>50 min</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sarti S.</td>
<td>Italian</td>
<td>70 min</td>
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<tr>
<td>Bondoni M.</td>
<td>Italian</td>
<td>70 min</td>
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<tr>
<td>Rossi A.</td>
<td>Italian</td>
<td>60 min</td>
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<tr>
<td>Buda S.</td>
<td>Italian</td>
<td>60 min</td>
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<tr>
<td>Babbi S.</td>
<td>Italian</td>
<td>60 min</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time Frame</th>
<th>Language</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fall 2010</td>
<td>English</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fall 2011</td>
<td>English</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fall 2011</td>
<td>Swedish</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spring 2011</td>
<td>Swedish</td>
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<td>Fall 2010</td>
<td>Swedish</td>
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<td>Fall 2010</td>
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<td>Spring 2011</td>
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<td>Fall 2011</td>
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<td>Fall 2010</td>
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<td>Spring 2011</td>
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<td>Spring 2009</td>
<td>Italian</td>
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<td>Spring 2009</td>
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<td>Spring 2009</td>
<td>Italian</td>
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<tr>
<td>Spring 2009</td>
<td>Italian</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Web-data collection

Whereas web-data collection would require an entire chapter in its own right, for the sake of clarity and space in the present section, web-data collection is defined as a method in relation to web-data as webpages (i.e. textual, visual and sonic elements). With webpages, it is here understood as everything on the web whether it is part of newspapers, articles, company webpages, blogs, and Facebook pages. Such type of method (see Table 4 below for an example) has largely been adopted merely in the case of Stockholm (i.e. spring 2011 to spring 2012, fall 2014 for a total of 180 webpages) and to a lesser extent in the case of Romagna (i.e. spring 2012 for a total of 40 webpages). As a method, it does not refer to Twitter (i.e. see next section) because the realm of Twitter represents a proper method and collected material. The main difference lies in relation to the dimension of knowledge production and insights for further methods and types of material collected. In more specific terms, this does not mean that web-data collection should be seen as ‘neutral’ (i.e. on the contrary, it is the opposite, see article 4); instead, web-data collection is a method that ‘allows’ for further research pathways. Web-data collection in the present dissertation has been performed in different moments from different entry points (i.e. computers) and in different locations (i.e. in Stockholm for the most part but also in Italy). The type of collected data collected – webpages – can be seen as spatial-temporal imprints of what is ‘happening’ in the digital sphere. The epistemic feature of the digital sphere (see article 4) is an important element to take into consideration when endorsing web-data collection as methods and webpages as data. In relation to the unit of analysis, web-data collection opens up the possibility to deal with issues of spatial and temporal frequency and recurrence by rendering to the researcher a valuable tool to decide which type of organizations, or other types of stakeholders, to study more in-depth.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 4. Web-data collection (example)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Språkvverkstad</td>
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<tr>
<td>Association</td>
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<tr>
<td>Company</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Webhost</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Owner</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal (photo page)</td>
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<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Twitter data collection

Twitter is commonly known as a digital and technological type of social media that, like Facebook, Instagram and LinkedIn, has become very popular in the recent decade. However, in the case of present dissertation, Twitter can be intended as a method and a typology of collected data. As a method, as opposed to web-data collection, it is not infinite. It features a peculiar space, it allows one to collect only a certain type of data (i.e. texts), and it is indeed an interactive method because it can allow the full immersion of the researcher (e.g. Netnography). As a typology of collected data it can be seen as a different type because it presents itself as very short texts with no visual and oral dimension, which unlike other digital social media (e.g. Facebook and YouTube). Other social media such as YouTube, Instagram and Facebook are very different for composition and for rationale related to research (see Smith, Fischer, & Yongjian, 2012). For the present dissertation, this method had been continuously employed along the entire research process (2010-2014); tweets (i.e. 370 unique locations) have been collected with the help of a software program which orders data into Excel spreadsheets for the sake of illustration (i.e. see Table 5 below for an example), and it has been only employed in the case of Stockholm. What is more peculiar with Twitter is the higher level of epistemic characteristics of material collected which changing every minute, every second. Twitter as a method and type of collected data (i.e tweets) is highly relevant in creating insights for further data collection in juxtaposition with other methods in allowing research interactions in the form of netnography (Kozinets, 2002; Kozinets, 2010). Despite this possibility in the present dissertation, a netnography is not performed (i.e. see the analysis subsection for further debate). Twitter data collection can be seen as a rather ‘stand-alone’ method in the present thesis. Tweets can be very insightful data to have a broader look at what is happening around the ‘thing’ under research.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>User</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Tweet</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>TheUppsalaKoala</td>
<td>Stockholm, Sweden</td>
<td>RT @TheUppsalaKoala: The best view of #Stockholm, the capital of #Scandinavia.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Butterviking</td>
<td>Finlad, Finland</td>
<td>RT @Butterviking: Stuckup, the capital of scandinavia!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TheUppsalaKoala</td>
<td>Stockholm, Sweden</td>
<td>RT @Butterviking: Stuckup, the capital of scandinavia!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sannakeiju</td>
<td>Oulu, Finland</td>
<td>RT @sannakeiju: Näin kirjasto #oulu ss. Kumpi teistä kuvaavampi: &quot;Villi voima - oulu on.&quot; Vai &quot;Capital of northern Scandinavia&quot; <a href="http://t.co/ersSqJbE">http://t.co/ersSqJbE</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RobForceOne</td>
<td>Stockholm, Sweden</td>
<td>RT @RobForceOne: Vilken stad kallar sig Capital of Scandinavia och &quot;en stad i världsklass&quot;, men klarar inte ens av att skotta sina trottoarer? #Stockholm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brandoholic</td>
<td>Oslo, Norway</td>
<td>RT @Brandoholic: Mannen bakom The Capital of Scandinavia utvecklar Oslos varumärke (Pressrelease) <a href="http://t.co/XMBClkCu">http://t.co/XMBClkCu</a> #Oslo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DillePille</td>
<td>Oulu, Finland</td>
<td>RT @DillePille: @RozaKhalid THE CAPITAL OF SCANDINAVIA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EspenAntonsen</td>
<td>Trondheim, Norway</td>
<td>@streng1 hva skal vi med en fyr som kom opp med patfiske &quot;Stockholm - capital of Scandinavia&quot;?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>leavyr</td>
<td>Nyssethorg, Norway</td>
<td>&quot;Nyssethorg fra user location original user - original location&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Noterad</td>
<td>Malmö, Sweden</td>
<td>&quot;Malmö får Eurovision&quot; <a href="http://t.co/7l0A7z87">http://t.co/7l0A7z87</a> <a href="http://t.co/q26FO3z0">http://t.co/q26FO3z0</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>petterohrn</td>
<td>Stockholm, Sweden</td>
<td>&quot;Malmö får Eurovision&quot; <a href="http://t.co/7l0A7z87">http://t.co/7l0A7z87</a> <a href="http://t.co/q26FO3z0">http://t.co/q26FO3z0</a></td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 5. Twitter data collection (example)**
Ethnographic interviewing

There is a crucial difference between informative interviewing, as pointed in the previous section and ethnographic interviewing. Ethnographic interviewing can be humanistic, phenomenological, naturalist and post-structuralist, as well as static and mobile (see table below). Whereas the first difference is related to ontology and epistemology, the second is related in the way the interview is technically performed. Despite those differences, in the present thesis what is crucially different between ethnographic and informative interviewing is the way interviewing as a method is applied. The interviews as collected material are analyzed, and the analysis of the interviews is approached. Ethnographic interviews, as suggested in very informative manner by Spradey (1979), imply developing a relationship with the informants, attaining meaningful information based on systematic tours of grand questions followed by exemplifying and experiencing questions in which the informant at the end begins to act as a teacher. In the present thesis, the majority of ethnographic interviews were performed as ‘static’, with the exception of one interview with Julian Stubbs, thereby following a traditional manner of interactive face-to-face interviewing in close proximity. Ethnographic interviewing is very powerful because it can render very rich insights on further paths to follow in data collection, and it helps go beyond the actual topic of the interview into the personal or organizational life in which the informant is embedded. Ethnographic interviewing in the present dissertation was performed with some exception in the later stage of the research process, both in relation to Stockholm and Romagna (i.e. from 2011 onward, see Table 6 below). The reason is rather simple: given the possibility to go in-depth, the employment of ethnographic interviews should be seen as building up from the informative interviews, secondary data, and web-data analysis.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Informants</th>
<th>Timeframe/location</th>
<th>Language/note</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Stenberg H., Project Development Head, Destination Sigtuna AB</td>
<td>Fall 2011 (Sigtuna)</td>
<td>Swedish</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>William Y., Head Stockholm Science City</td>
<td>Spring 2012 (Stockholm)</td>
<td>Swedish</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Buda S., Communication Officer Head, Marketing Agency of the Rimini Province</td>
<td>Spring 2012 (Rimini)</td>
<td>Italian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guarini A., Head, National Association Hotels, Rimini Office</td>
<td>Spring 2012 (Rimini)</td>
<td>Italian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stanis J., Consultant and CEO UP THERE, EVERYWHERE</td>
<td>Spring 2013 (Stockholm)</td>
<td>English</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asplund C., Consultant and CEO at Placeconsulting</td>
<td>Spring 2013 (Stockholm)</td>
<td>Swedish</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nässert, M., Head Destination Gävle AB, Gävle Municipality</td>
<td>Spring 2013 (Stockholm)</td>
<td>Swedish</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thoren K., Retired, Former Head Stockholm Bostadsmälan and Stockholm Beredning</td>
<td>Spring 2013 (Stockholm)</td>
<td>Swedish</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strand C., Deputy Head Business Development Office, Solna Municipality</td>
<td>Spring 2013 (Solna)</td>
<td>Swedish</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Roos M., Head Eskilstuna Marknads AB</td>
<td>Spring 2013 (Eskilstuna)</td>
<td>Swedish</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gladnikoff S., Coordinator Stockholm Nordost, Täby Municipality</td>
<td>Fall 2014 (Täby)</td>
<td>Swedish</td>
</tr>
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</table>

<table>
<thead>
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<table>
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<tr>
<td>English</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Swedish</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>Swedish</td>
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<tr>
<td>Swedish</td>
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<tr>
<td>Swedish</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Observation

Observations as method and typology of collected material vary very much depending on the context, the role of researcher and the observed unit of analysis. In the present thesis, although observations were following both the participatory and non-participatory approach, they are discussed as only one method. This is because at first no undercover observations (i.e. both physical and non-physical) have been pursued. Secondly, giving the co-creative action of the researcher in knowledge production, a ‘perfect’ non-intrusion cannot be performed because of the researcher’s physical presence (see Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2009). Here observations both in participant and non-participant forms are linked to a multitude of forms of collected material (i.e. texts, notes, auscultations, pictures) and spaces of data collection (i.e. offices, streets, councils, squares). In the present thesis, observations should be seen as a method that implies the intense physical presence of the researcher that is embedded in the context of a varying level of research participation – from active, to shadowing, to simple observation (Czarniawska-Joerges, 2007). For the present thesis, all those modalities have been employed, but this has been so mainly in the case of Stockholm (see table 7 below). Active participation, for example, has been performed during the meeting with the management of the ‘Stockholm the Capital of Scandinavia’ campaign, where I was sitting in a meeting with several other researchers. There was shadowing not in its extensive form as Czarniawska-Joerges (2007) suggests, but in a specific location as it was adopted at Mälartinget, 2012, where I was both observing and interacting with other participants while being attentive to the movement of bodies inside the entire room. There were diverse types of non-participant observation, for example participation at the ‘City I Samverkan’ meeting where I was physically present without active interaction, or at the Vinnova Conference where I interacted with some other participants. Observations are a very insightful method where the researcher should be active with all senses. Because of such multimodality, observations are a powerful generator of insights for partial analysis and to further research pathways. In the present thesis, observations had been important generators of insights for adopting other methods, but they had also been producers of knowledge because they help form partial analysis that is attentive to linguistic, gestural, olfactory and visual dimensions (see article 3). Finally, as article 3 points out, observations in the form of empirical material are important ‘crucial events’ to back up partial analysis performed by different types of data collected as interviews and secondary data.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Events</th>
<th>Timeframe location</th>
<th>Type of data</th>
<th>Type of Observation</th>
<th>Settings</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Group Meeting at Stockholm Communication Office</td>
<td>Fall 2010 (Stockholm)</td>
<td>Notes, drawings,</td>
<td>Participatory (active)</td>
<td>Collaboration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vinnova Year Conference 2010</td>
<td>Fall 2010 (Stockholm)</td>
<td>Notes, drawings, pictures, chats</td>
<td>Participatory (non-intrusive)</td>
<td>Alone</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pink Night festival</td>
<td>Spring 2011 (Romagna Riviera Coastal area)</td>
<td>Notes, drawings, pictures, chats, video</td>
<td>Participatory (active)</td>
<td>Collaboration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seminar ‘Place branding in Sweden’</td>
<td>Spring 2011 (Stockholm)</td>
<td>Presentation, notes</td>
<td>Participatory (active)</td>
<td>Alone</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seminar ‘Capitals of Scandinavia’ (City I Samverkan)</td>
<td>Spring 2012 (Stockholm)</td>
<td>Notes, drawings, pictures, chats</td>
<td>Non-participatory (non-intrusive)</td>
<td>Alone</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mälartinget 2012</td>
<td>Spring 2012 (Stockholm)</td>
<td>Notes, drawings, pictures, chats, video</td>
<td>Participatory (active)</td>
<td>Alone</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>China Symposium 2012 (Stockholm University)</td>
<td>Fall 2012 (Stockholm)</td>
<td>Presentation, notes, chats</td>
<td>Participatory (active)</td>
<td>Alone</td>
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<tr>
<td>Pink Night festival</td>
<td>Spring 2012 (Romagna Riviera Coastal area)</td>
<td>Notes, drawings, pictures, chats, video</td>
<td>Participatory (active)</td>
<td>Collaboration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seminar ‘Attractive City Centre’ (City I Samverkan)</td>
<td>Fall 2013 (Stockholm)</td>
<td>Notes, drawings, pictures</td>
<td>Non-participatory (non-intrusive)</td>
<td>Alone</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mälartinget 2013</td>
<td>Spring 2013 (Uppsala)</td>
<td>Notes, drawings, pictures, chats</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
The ecological politics of place branding: towards a conceptual framework

The present final chapter, by drawing from the observations obtained from the four articles as presented in the appendix, aims to offer a conceptual framework based on an ecological approach to politics (i.e. ecological politics) as outlined in chapter 3. More in details the offered framework points out four interlinked aspects: 1) the unfolding of a biopolitical ecology around place-branding practices; 2) the ideological appropriation of place-branding processes by different interest groups; 3) the positioning through politicized actions between and among the interest groups; and finally 4) place branding as a process of policy intervention. The four aspects in relationship to an ecological approach to politics are brought together in regards to the implications on the political research in place branding at the end of the present chapter.

The unfolding of a biopolitical ecology around branding practices

The first aspect coming from the present research is the recognition of how place branding is characterized as the unfolding of a biopolitical ecology around branding practices. In this regard, the outcomes of the present research point out how place branding both empirically and theoretically, can be understood as an inherently political apparatus that acts, in praxis, according to the coalescence of complex, multifold political dimensions. In fact, as pointed out in both chapters 2 and in article 1, the research on place branding has been to this point characterized by a mixture of different theoretical perspectives and methods applied to the production as well as the appropriation of place branding. Equally what can be evinced is that place-branding practices are both constituting and constituent. This means that, for example, re-
gional branding processes, as in the case of the ‘imaginary’ region of Romagna and the Greater Stockholm, are both at the same time the product and the results of a bundle of intersecting branding activities, efforts and impacts. For example, when both in article 3 and 4 the brand for the city of Stockholm ‘Stockholm the Capital of Scandinavia’ is being marketed, the emergence of the ‘brand’ in itself, can be seen as both product and the result of a series of practices of translation (i.e. article 3) and visualization (i.e. article 4) which are reflections of a complex and multiple branding process for the entire Stockholm Region. Equally, in the case of Romagna, the discourses around the region of ‘Romagna’ can be seen, as article 2 points out, in the interrelation between representational (i.e. discourses) and non-representational dimensions (i.e. territory) dimensions, and in the unfolding of regional branding process; those dimensions are understood as both the results and the products of politically ‘assembling’ different and contrasting spatio-temporal understandings of Romagna.

It follows that what emerges from the present research is a dynamic view of place branding (see e.g. Kavaratzis & Hatch, 2013; Giovanardi, Lucarelli & Pasquinelli, 2013; Warnaby & Medway, 2013) in which branding practices are both constituted and constituting places as ‘brands’ in complex political constructs that materialize in conflictual, dispersive and multiple forms (see Giovanardi, et al. 2013). Place branding as an empirical and theoretical apparatus is thus emerging as complex, assembling symbiosis of actions that are related not only to commercial effects but also, more crucially, to socio-political effects; this symbiosis has continuous socio-political impacts, and it creates socio-political realities. These include how places can be seen as having certain ‘equity’ with ‘explicit’ socio-political implications. Places such as cities and regions are assigned ‘equity’ which is not merely financial or image-related, but it also political. The political dimension of equity (i.e. political equity) for places, as article 1 points out, compared with other types of brands is less latent and implicit; instead it is more visible and explicit. Some of these dimensions are – as evinced from the mapping of different branding impacts that are maintained as important in the academic literature – activities such as gentrification in urban and rural areas, social unrest due to branding interventions, and labeling of spaces and areas. Especially the last activity, namely labeling of spaces and areas, can be seen easily in the case of the Greater Stockholm where on the one hand important districts and urban areas such as Kista and Hammarby Sjöstad, embedded in their successful stories, are leveraging important political gravitas to the process of marketing of ‘Stockholm the Capital of Scandinavia’. But on the other hand, this embedding is also according to the geo-cultural
connotation of Scandinavia (e.g. an example is the patchwork of definitions of Scandinavia in the official ‘Stockholm The Capital of Scandinavia’ brand-book) that is mobilized in order to politically detonate the reality and actuality of the claims of ‘Capital’ concerning the brand ‘Stockholm The Capital of Scandinavia’.

In addition, what is more crucial in a biopolitical ecology is that the political equity, understood both as a way to leverage and extract political importance and political actuality from different branding practices around places, can be seen in the first instance as emerging in different arenas (i.e. on the web, newspaper, pictures, street) and in different modalities (i.e. discourses, signs, gestures); in the second instance, it can be seen as the process by which those modalities are materializing in a complex modulation in the very same spatio-temporal process under analysis (as in article 3 which shows the process of brand transformation whereby different brand elements via different practices reflect the equity of ‘Mälarregion’ vis-a-vis ‘Stockholm The Capital of Scandinavia’). Equally important, political equity for places refer not only to the equity of place brands (see article 1) but also to the political equity of the entire process (see article 2 and 3), and it also refers to the way the equity that is reflected and accrues to political interests and stakes (see article 4). In regards to the first, the political equity of the entire process can be evinced in the case of Romagna when the regional branding process is reflecting the different political understanding of the value (i.e. interpretative repertoire) of the branding the region of Romagna. In article 3, it can be seen when the importance given to the brand transformation process is a reflection of political valorization (i.e. from ‘Stockholm Beauty on the Water’ and ‘Mälarregion’ towards ‘Stockholm the Capital of Scandinavia’ and ‘Stockholm Business Alliance’). Concerning the second, in article 4, the political stakes that are reflected via different practices suggests divergent approaches to the value given to the political connotation of the ‘Stockholm the Capital of Scandinavia’ slogan as expressed by those webpages opposing or esteeming the brand.

Equity in relation to biopolitical ecology implies thus that equity can be seen as materializing differently via branding practices that become ‘immediate’ as they appear temporally and spatially. These practices are at the same time what forms and are the formations of place branding which emerge as biopolitical apparatus via an agglomeration of interest groups in an explicit manner. The agglomeration of interest groups appear explicit as pointed out in article 2, for example when different linguistics repertoires display the political fixation of the branding process according to certain interests related to time and
space (i.e. the analysis performed in article 2 helps highlight the agglomeration of such interests on the surface). But it also appears explicitly firstly in article 3 where the brand ‘Stockholm the Capital of Scandinavia’, the regional assembly ‘Mälartinget’ and different municipalities around the Greater Stockholm via the Stockholm Business Alliance mutually constitute and shape each other. This agglomeration appears secondly in article 3 and 4 which point out how place brands are able to shape the soft and hard infrastructure of urban spaces (i.e. buildings, regional assemblies, political decisions, and infrastructure). Thirdly, it appears for example in both article 2 and 3 in regard to what extent place brands can be understood as acting as new semiotic spaces that assemble, or even re-organize, the imaginary versions, experiences and meanings of places.

In this regard, one of the main conclusions that can be observed by the present research is that place-branding practices do not only appear in spatio-political contexts as the reflection of a peculiar socio-political dimension. Instead, more crucially, those branding practices activate, create and emerge in a biopolitical ecology in which they unfold in such actions as emergence, in which the conditions for the emergence of place brand governance are set, (as shown in the study of Romagna in article 2,) or in which the condition for the emergence of assembling process are possible (as shown in the study of Stockholm in article 2 and 3). More in practical terms, and formulated in another way, one could argue that biopolitical ecology, being both an apparatus that sets things in motion and an apparatus that is per se in motion, recognizes that the launching of a branding program for a place could at the same time mobilize and activate ideological interest groups that may previously have been dormant. But also on the same terms, the launching of a branding program for a place can make dormant ideological interest groups a part of an expanding branding program. This, as explained in article 4, could be observed in the way in which the agglomerations of political interest groups, materialized in different modes (i.e. practices), are expressing different appropriated interests (i.e. here with the word appropriated I mean both ‘proper interests’ and ‘interest made proper’) in relation to ‘Stockholm the Capital of Scandinavia’. Similarly, this is also displayed in the case of the branding of Romagna (article 2) as well as in study of the Stockholm Greater Region (article 3), where the political interests that were evoked and activated into the branding process have not been necessarily in line with the overall ideological position as expressed and conceived by the managerial originators of the brand.
Seeing through an ecological approach branding practices reflects synergies that create and allow a flourishing of the socio-cultural conditions that make sets of political actions possible, attractive and legitimate. In this sense, then, one could argue that a biopolitical ecology with multiple interest groups around which place branding practices unfolds can be understood as the political “market(ing)zation” of the territorial realm in which rather than an example of market-driven politics (see Leys 2001) where the global economic capitalist system produces a privatization of the territorial realm, place branding should be seen as a politics-driven market, where market based intervention (i.e. branding) in the territorial realm is a production of political activities and practices. Here, those practices and activities are understood as ‘political’ in the sense that politics can be seen as both the activity around which certain market or brand actors (i.e. article 2 and 4), are acting and in which politics is both facilitating, activating and legitimizing certain market actions (i.e. article 3). In this way, similar to other marketing and consumer research phenomena and their inherent politico-theological dimensions (Schwarzkopf, 2011), one can argue that a biopolitical ecology suggests, in relation to place branding, the first aspect of a framework for the analysis of the centrality of politics, its political constitution, and the political constitution of the commercial metamorphosis of a non-commercially born apparatus.

The ideological appropriation of place-branding processes

The second aspect coming from present research is the ideological appropriation of the place-branding processes of its elements (i.e. brands, meanings) and the political ideologies reflecting different interest groups action. In this regard, the outcomes of the present research point out how, seen from a political perspective, the mere fact of a relationship with the place brand, the involvement in the process of place branding as well as the performance of different place-branding activities by various interest groups is more inherently and explicitly ideological, rather than commercial. This reflects how place branding process could be seen more as a process of political ‘ideologization’ rather than a process based on political ideologies; this means that a place branding process is per se embedded in ideological stances in which political ideologies are only seen as its spatio-temporal ‘material expression’ rather than a process which is per se
the production of different political ideologies. This as can be seen both in article 2 in the case of the regional-branding process in Romagna (i.e. the strong political culture of ‘campanilismo’ present in the regional context) and in article 4 in the case of the online debate about ‘Stockholm the Capital of Scandinavia’ (i.e. as the political technoculture of the web); both examples suggest that place branding process are not only political but that are also politicized in different modalities.

It follows that the practices of visualization and materialization in article 4, the different interpretative repertoires in article 2, but also the way the entire brand transformation process in article 3 can in this light be seen both as the expression of political ideologies by interest groups and also the way in which those political ideologies are the foundation for creating a political debate. Although ideology in relation to politics has different meanings (see for a debate Eagleton, 1979, 2006), political ideologies are typically understood as common, patterned forms of thinking about politics; thus, it should be seen as clusters of ideas, beliefs, opinions, and values usually held by groups that provide directives, for public policy to justify, the social and political arrangements of a community. The most clear example of this is in article 4 when different stakeholder online, via their practices, which can be seen as expressing a common forms of thinking about the political impact of the brand ‘Stockholm the Capital of Scandinavia’, are mobilizing and acting out different opinions and ideas to justify or counteract the political arrangements that have been spread online by brand managers in primis and other stakeholders in secundis (see also Holt, 2004 in this regards). Somehow in a different manner but in the same direction, in article 3, political ideology, as common patterns of thinking about politics, can be seen in the process of translation from a regional assemblage to a brand assemblage. Despite this, something else in article 3 can be observed, namely the other function of political ideologies which an ecological perspective helps highlight. In fact, ideologies can be understood also as as knowledge apparatuses that serve the interests of those in power. In this regard, in the brand transformation process as suggested in article 3, political ideologies of the entire process (i.e. functionalism, regional development, commercialization of the territorial realm) are coming along with political ideologies of different agents (i.e. political parties, business companies, public organizations). This second facet of political ideology is also more specifically reflected for example in article 2 in which different actors via discourses are mobilizing a certain political view about the very possibility of branding the region of Romagna, and by so doing, are creating a political reality in which the regional branding
process in Romagna is presented and portrayed as based on a com-
monly and widespread unified version to the outsiders of the process.

It follows that the discursive political production of an ideological
branding process as the reflection of political antagonism in the case
of Romagna, and the translation process at the center of the rebranding
of Stockholm in the case of Stockholm, rather than pure ideological
research on choices, beliefs, and identity formation, instead suggests
the analysis of the ideological contextualization around place branding
processes. In this regard, the ideological dimension of the politics of
place-branding processes could be linked to the activation of the ide-
ological landscape in which stakeholders are engaged and in which they
express a series of ‘politicized identifications’ as can be evinced in
both in article 4, where different practices of virtual brand co-creation
express different modalities towards the ‘Stockholm the Capital of
Scandinavia’, and in article 2 where the discursive action of different
stakeholders is an expression of political engagement in the regional
process. Politicized identifications, or in other words the way different
stakeholders politicize their associations in the place-branding pro-
cess, is an expression of the political action upon which different
stakeholders are gathering, and it can be a sort of radical, political
resistance (Izberk-Bilgin, 2010) which can take both explicit (Cova &
Dalli, 2009; Lee, Fernandez, Hyman, & Cherrier, 2009; Thompson &
Arsel, 2004) or implicit forms (Ulver-Sneistrup, Askegaard, & Kris-
tensen, 2011).

Further, one of the main conclusions from the present research is that
the political-ideological dimension of the place-branding process en-
tails that both the entire branding process but also the relationships
between different actors have with the brands is not ‘consumed’, but
rather ‘appropriated’. This means that rather than being a one-
directional, ended activity, it is a circular, multidirectional activity
which more importantly also implies understanding it as a two-fold
action: the one of taking possession of the process, the other sharing
the possession of the process (see also Esposito, 2008). This is for two
reasons: firstly, as pointed in the present research, the viability of a
particular political ideology (i.e. neoliberalism) could be assessed not
only in the entire complex branding process (i.e. article 4 in the analy-
sis the different political expression as anarchism expressed in ‘Das
Kapital’ in relation to Stockholm the Capital of Scandinavia). It can
also be assessed in the complex environments (i.e. biopolitical) in
which a peculiar branding process, as explained both in the case of
Romagna (i.e. article 2) and the Greater Stockholm (i.e. article 3),
create and are the creators of their own marketplace. Secondly, in line
with those studies that recognize the act of consumption as appropriation (see Watson, 2011), the present research can recognize that appropriation is the locus of ideological political actions which are based on the association between power and agency in way that such association should not only be understood as utterly mediated by consumers seen as political actors (Cova, Dalli & Zwick, 2011), but rather as a the circle of translation (i.e. in article 3, the brand regeneration is a complex emergence of different realities such as ‘Stockholm the Capital of Scandinavia’ vis-à-vis the Mälaren Region, all being the locus of political actions) or fixation (i.e. in article 2, the different linguistic strategies are the locus through which the imaginary version of Romagna is produced as a territorial brand). In this regard, both are exemplary in that the analysis of both the regional branding process in Romagna and the brand transformation process in the case of the Greater Stockholm clearly displays that the appropriation process, despite materializing in different modalities (i.e. discourses, practices, gesture), is a way to express difference and similarities (i.e. see the practices of co-creation). Especially in the in the case of the Greater Stockholm, the different interest groups mobilized by political ideologies (for example, ‘opposing’ as an instructive example in article 4) that reflect, inside the same practices of co-creation, similarity in terms of socio-economical cleavages (e.g. archaism, Marxism, environmentalism) or differences in terms of syntactical appearance (e.g. carelessness, agony, irritation) which can be thus seen as an ultimate expression of a sense of participatory collective activity in which each participant appropriates it, takes ownership over it, and becomes a co-proprietor of its associations with others. In fact, those practices of ideological appropriation, as pointed out in articles 3 and 4, do not end up as simple acts of pure one-handed resistance. Instead, they are put further back into the circle of ideologically assembled appropriation, leading to formation of different strategies (i.e. practices as in article 4 or translation as in article 3) in relation to the “use” of the brand in different spatiotemporal contexts (i.e. online). This final observation implies an understating of the complex and multiple process of politically expressed brand appropriation, which features as a complement to more common analyses of politically motivated brand rejection (Sandicki and Ekici 2009) and normative political ideology of consumerism (Crockett and Wallendorf 2004).
Positioning through politicized actions

The third aspect coming from the present research is the positioning between interest groups that use politicized action as means of power displacement in the complex place-branding process which is analyzed. In this regard, the outcomes of the present research point towards different series of actions (i.e. discourses such as in article 2 or practices such as in article 4) expressing a political camp based on power (im)balances. In the case of the branding process in Romagna, in fact the interpretative repertoires mobilized by different stakeholders express the spatio-temporal displacement of other actors’ roles, gravitas, importance and position in the regional process by highlighting the negotiated and contested mechanism activated by, and reproduced through, language. Positioning, and the way power is displaced, is also expressed, for example, via the practices of materialization and visualization in the case of ‘Stockholm The Capital of Scandinavia’ (i.e. article 4) when different practices (i.e. contributing, esteeming, opposing and using) become the outcome of different levels of political engagement and positioning in the brand co-creation process. Further, in the present research, the politicized actions of different modalities of positioning (i.e. linguistic, expressive, gestural) is expressed in the way both discourses and practices are simultaneously constraining and allowing the ability of political action of different stakeholders to affect and to be affected, and to form assemblages or consistencies during place branding process. In this regard, in fact, both in article 2, by highlighting the political dimension of power at a pure linguistic level, and in article 3 by highlighting the political dimension of power at a pure digital level, the present research highlights how different political positioning via politicized action can happen in arenas not traditionally devoted to such action. In addition to parliaments, city councils, roads, and newspapers as highlighted in article 4, political positioning happens on the virtual realm of personal blogs, remote Twitter accounts, local firms, or as in article 3 and 2, in business conferences, the daily working of organizations and more mundane events such as daily tweeting or even specific festivals and events (e.g. ‘Stockholm Love’ and ‘Pink Nights’).

It follows that positioning between the interest groups that are using politicized action as means of power displacement also entails, as can be evinced in article 2 and 3, the relationship between political structures and political subjects, to ‘[reconcile] questions of structure and agency’ (Early 2013, 13), and to politically contextualize the taken for granted construct of place-branding research. In this regard, if on one hand the analysis performed in article 1 and reflected on in chapter 2
concerning the academic literature of place branding, its elements, and its equity, can be seen as a political positioning (i.e. read contextualization) of the taken-for-granted overly economic and commercial oriented literature, on the other hand, article 2 and article 3 both show the analysis of political structures and political questions more clearly emerging. In article 2, for example, language is not only recognized as the medium through which actors build political negotiations and conflicts of their own and of others, but it is also the nexus in which the regional branding process is constructed as ‘text’ in continuous emergence. In article 4, similarly, it is further suggested how informational technology as important political actors on the one hand and practices in the realm of the digital on the other hand assemble more complex, less manageable and less democratic process of place brand co-creation at sites where the ‘politics of power’ rather than ‘the power of politics’ – or in other words the practical, positional displacement of powerful actions in the way which political actions are meant as powerful – is expressed in the immaterial labor of different stakeholders.

Especially those two examples and the idea of ‘the politics of power’ lead to a further observation about the diffuseness of political positioning activities and the transformative modalities of politicized actions. In fact, the present research recognizes how political positioning is characterized as a multifold, spatiotemporal constitutive materialization of politics, such as in the case of article 2 with the interpretative repertoires reflecting politics of space and time. It is similarly evinced in article 4, showing how political actions are emerging in ways that deviate, or not, markedly from the vocabulary and the practical articulations often taken for granted in constructs of place branding which can be seen in relation to the differently transforming meanings of how ‘Stockholm of the Capital of Scandinavia’ appears on the web. Power positioning though diffuse political actions and transformative modalities can further very well be observed into article 3 when the entire analysis of the process of brand transformation reflects a diffuse political camp, through political action, both as a means of positioning the Greater Stockholm Region in a differently transforming political context (from Mälardalen to Scandinavia) but also as actions of organizing a loose territorial assemblage into a more consolidate brand (i.e. Stockholm of the Capital of Scandinavia) and even further into a moving assemblage which opens for further possibilities (e.g. ‘Stockholm West- later on ‘Fyra Mälarstäder’) or re-invigorates older imaginaries (e.g. ‘Stockholm the Venice of the North’). In this process of transformation, the power of associations that are reflected by different actions point out the complex, multiple emergences of political conditions that can be observed in article 3 in which positioning is both
practiced via political actions (i.e. the branding of Stockholm is positioned by some of its opponents as a political rather than merely commercial act) and is put into action actionized via political positioning (i.e. the process of the emergence of ‘Stockholm The Capital of Scandinavia’ from a vacuum of administrative and national legislation).

Further, the diffuseness of political positioning activities and the transformative modalities of politicized actions, as can be seen in article 3, also suggest how those actions can be forming associations which are politically enacted through the complex relational construction of other actors’ intereselements. The political actions that are emerging via the complex place branding process, as in the case of the Greater Stockholm, are the reflection of multiple, political and contested series of the ‘being’ of different actors in relation with each other. Those different forms of ‘being’ – or in a more concrete sense, shifting actions – in relation to the brand transformation process can be in fact observed in how different actors mutate their political actions in relation to different scenarios and realities. Thus, for example, if the Stockholm Municipality acts as an outsider in reference to the process of creating the Mälaren Region, in a different spatio-temporal association, namely in relationship to the brand ‘Stockholm the Capital of Scandinavia’, the Stockholm Municipality acts instead as a sort of prima donna, and equally, if Mälartinget is acting with the political aim to foster a functional region in one spatio-temporal association in another, it acts as followers of another regional assemblage (i.e. the Stockholm Business Alliance) which is acting per se, to reorganize the regional and urban soft and hard infrastructures in rather different, antagonistic ways (e.g. ‘transportation’ is one of the main prerogatives for Mälartinget and ‘corporate and business relationship’ is one of the one main prerogatives for the Stockholm Business Alliance).

It thus follows that in article 3, the process in which ‘Stockholm Capital of Scandinavia’ (i.e. the official city-brand of Stockholm) is transformed over time and space in interaction with different stakeholders’ interessement suggests that the type of political actions in the regional power camp can be seen as topographical power politics in which associations are based on a type of power that is constitutive because it renders the ability to enroll others on terms that allow key actors to represent others through claims and counter claims, as well as constituent because it allows to build agreements and coalitions that are the product of negotiation and changing intersectional dynamics. Such view of power in relation to politics is in line with analyses of the governmentality characteristics of branding and marketing phenome-
na (Zwick, Bonsu, & Darmody, 2008), along with the entire field of marketing (Fougere & Skalen, 2012; Skålén, Fellesson, & Fougère, 2006), the practices of advertising (Hackley, 2002) and of branding (Kravets, 2012) in pointing out that activities of political positioning and the transformative modalities forming place branding processes are emerging conjointly from a complex ecology where political ideology and the politics of power are characterized by a peculiar form of knowledge reproduction that ultimately should be understood as biopolitical apparatus.

**Place-branding as a process of policy-intervention**

The fourth aspect that comes from present research is the processual dimension of place-branding which is a reflection of different modalities of policy intervention. In this regard, the outcomes of the present research point out how place branding is not merely an economic and commercial process, but it is also a political process which is materializing as policy intervention. This aspect is both already clear from article 1 in which the analysis of the literature shows that the mere recognition of an ‘equity’ for places implies that different policies are directed toward hard and soft parts of places (e.g. events, artifacts, residents) as well as that such policies imply not only economic (e.g. tourist turnout) but also socio-political interventions (e.g. gentrification). Nevertheless, it is in other articles where such an aspect is easier to observe. For example, as both presented in article 3, which analyzes the transformation from a functional to a branded region in the case of the Greater Stockholm, and in article 2, which analyzes the context in which the regional branding process in Romagna attempts to fixate a particular discourse about the imaginary version of the region, the necessity to think of place branding as an intervention is outlined. A political intervention which is structured around a series of institutional and practical procedures (i.e. as displayed in the archival material collected at the Mälartinget Office) points out the different type of interventions happening in the same spatio-temporal context. In this regard, pictures, documents, meetings and assemblies on one hand and discourses and practices on the other hand show how place branding is a process which has the possibility to shape new spaces (i.e. article 3, about the ‘Stockholm the Capital of Scandinavia’ as intervention that shapes the regional status quo as fixed by national legislation and common political procedure), and it can open new opportunity (i.e.
article 4, via the practices of co-creation where those practices are allowing the recreation of the meaning of brand in different arenas), or it can even attempt to fixate the place-branding process in relation to certain spatio-temporal dimensions of the place (i.e. article 2, via an interpretative repertoire in which language is used to intervene in the ‘ancient’ imaginary around the region of Romagna’).

The observation about the multifold direction of policy intervention implies also not only that place branding should be seen as a process, but that such a process is ‘performative’ in nature and that different policies are series of interventions that are assembling with different outcomes and aims according to specific spatio-temporal contexts. In this regard, both article 3 and 4, display different outcomes and aims concerning the creation of a new regional semiotic space with the emergence of the brand ‘Stockholm the Capital of Scandinavia’. In article 3, for example, the brand transformation process points out an emerging process which is assembling different policies that in different time and space are directed to provoke different outcomes (i.e. the vision of ‘Mälarregion’ aims to change the national legislation for regional policies, whereas the aim of ‘Stockholm of Capital of Scandinavia’ is to market the Greater Stockholm Great, and the Stockholm Business Alliance aims to group different Municipalities under certain collaborative scheme). In article 4, the same policies suggest a complex assembling of practices (i.e. ecology of practices) that are producing and reproducing, via affective engagement, interventions online. For example, this can be observed in the spread of the ‘halo’ of ‘Stockholm the Capital of Scandinavia’ or with the spread of counter-campaign ‘Das Kapital of Scandinavia’. These observations concerning the performativity of policies characterized by affective engagement is in line with what other researchers refer to when analyzing process of policy co-creation and different forms of politics based on representing, reforming, and incorporating (Kjellberg & Helgesson, 2010). Article 4, in which the practices of brand co-creation can be seen as a reflection of policy intervention, is a clear example of the performative feature of place branding based on affective engagement. Further, as also pointed out in article 2, especially in regard to the way interpretative repertories are seen as generators of the regional branding process, these practices do not only spatially and temporally displace other actors, but they are also performing, by manner of forming a series of interpretations which are negotiated, the imaginary version of the Romagna region. Similarly, engagement can also be evinced in article 3 when, for example, the process of translation and the different obligatory points of passage (OPP) suggest an understanding of place branding as political policy process which is both co-created
based on the ideas of collaborative labor (see also in this regard Etceverri and Skålen 2011), but it is also performing as a bundle of collaborative interventions that shape the regional (i.e. non-branding) policies.

Further, at a micro level the present research points out how the processual dimension of place branding is also a matter of contrasting political practices. In fact, the performative and affective engagement of different modalities of interventions does not only occur, as pointed in article 3, by scalar, topographical, and historical policies (i.e. regional and metropolitan; rural and urban; current as ‘Stockholm the Capital of Scandinavia’ and ancient as ‘Venice of the North’), but it also occurs as pointed in article 3 and 2 respectively, through different modalities included in the same type of policies as expressed, for example, by the four different yet contemporary practices of materialization and visualization (i.e. contributing, esteeming, opposing and using) and by its materialization in the same ‘script’ of the two interpretative repertoires: one regarding space and one regarding time. It follows thus that place branding is a process of policy intervention not merely because it is based on contrasting practices, as shown also by the work of Rodner and Preece (2015) concerning the interrelation of state politics and the contemporary market, but also because is based on contrasting political policies which are both constituent and constitutive of the complex interrelation between spatial politics (i.e. regionalism) and marketing politics (i.e. branding).

Finally, on the more macro level, the recognition of place branding as a process of policy intervention identifies a more complex notion of ‘legitimacy’. In fact, as the analyses performed in both articles 2 and 3 show, the notion of legitimacy that the present research advances is linked to the recognition that the displacement of place branding as neoliberal politics is emerging from a complex bio-ecology where different type of agents (i.e. human, information technology, documents, pamphlets, organizations) are both legitimizing and legitimated into the policy of shaping branding around places such as cities and regions. In this regard if, for example, article 4 points out that information technology are both agents of legitimization and as legitimators of ‘Stockholm The Capital of Scandinavia’ that are creating the space for the legitimization of the process of becoming a ‘political’ legitimate brand for Stockholm, in article 2 and 3 the policies that emerge from the process of brand transformation and regional brand(ification) point out the conjoined emergence of a policy process that is characterized by a peculiar form of neoliberal knowledge reproduction. Thus, according to an ecological approach, the process
of policy intervention and its legitimacy has not only to do with the division between territorial, cognitive, normative and regulative political (buy-in) process – as it was already shown in the work of Humphreys (2010a, 2010b) and more recently of Humphreys and Thompson (2014) – but rather as an ecology of all those dimensions in which legitimacy is forming around neoliberal branding practices.

Implications for political research in place branding

By unpacking the main underpinning of an ecological politics of place branding, the present final chapter has offered a conceptual framework that has both theoretical and practical implications for political research in place branding. The presented framework, in fact, by laying the foundation for an ecological approach to politics, recognizes how place branding is emerging as a political apparatus that acts, in praxis, based on the multifaceted, spatio-temporal and emerging bundles of politics which are at the same time both constituent and constitutive of the political dimension of place branding. By unpacking different aspects within place branding as politics emerge, namely the unfolding of a biopolitical ecology, the ideological appropriation the branding process, the positioning through publicized actions and the process of policy-intervention, the suggested framework points out that the analysis of the political dimension of place branding have to take into consideration the empirical consequences, the theoretical conditions, and the contextual dimension of place branding as an example of the market(ing)zation of the territorial realm.

Such a conceptual framework, from an analytical point of view, by recognizing the biopolitical features of place branding, suggests that the place branding process could be better analyzed as a transforming process, translating process, materializing process, affective process and modular process. The political dimension of place branding, via an ecological politics, would thus entail attention to how the practices around place branding are transforming and are transformed into different political ideological constellations, are translating into and are translated across spatio-temporal power contexts and political positioning; they are furthermore materialized through and are materializing into several instruments and policies, they are affected by and are affecting through a series of political interventions, and they are emerging as and emerging into several political modalities.
In this regard, the presented framework is both recognizing the political impact of place branding as crucial elements to be analyzed, and the explicit political impact and effect of place-branding process can only be analyzed in the broader complex conditions in which place-branding practices are constituted and have an effect on cities. In fact, ecological politics reflects a way to analyze the ‘explicit’ political impact of place branding. This is done not only because as suggested in chapter 2, it helps to put ‘politics back in’, but also because as all the articles included in the present dissertation suggest that the political dimension of place branding is both empirically and theoretically embedded into a symbiotic relationship with other dimensions (i.e. economy, culture, etc.).

The conceptual framework recognizes that the analysis of the ideological opposition or resistance can be performed through taking political communicative actions (i.e. linguistics as it is highlighted in article 2 in relation to interpretative repertoires, or rather as precognitive actions as demonstrated in article 4 in relation to the ecological practices of visualization and materialization) that are crucial elements – elements that should be analyzed since it could help perform an analysis of the politicization of the place brand as well as of the entire policy process of branding. It follows that such a framework allows bringing to surface the link between the complexity of the place-branding processes without losing track of the ideological contextualized dimension of the emerging place-branding processes. The recognition of two facets of the political ideologization of the place-branding process is based on an ecological approach to politics which recognizes and allows an analysis of the constituting and constituent dimension of political ideology – or in other words, the political and politicizing dimension of ideology.

Further, such a framework helps analyze the multifold political dimension of place-branding processes by allowing different analyses of the political positioning, both active and inactive, in several place-branding processes; those processes are understood either as a regional discursive political process, such as in the case of Romagna (i.e. article 2) or, as presented for example in article 1 as politically shaped, emerging in multifaceted forms and endowed with multi-shaped characteristics. In this regard, such a framework contemplates a radical view of power as praxis (i.e. a practical power) and thus realizes power battles as both practiced via actions (i.e. article 2) and taken into action actionized via power battles (i.e. article 3), which comes along with an emancipatory view of power and political action which has at
its premise an understanding of place branding as emerging and becoming.

It follows that this framework offers a way to unpack issues linked to the question of how place branding is constituted, not only as a ‘political’ research domain, but also as a ‘political’ phenomenon per se. The issues in question here are what the political elements at play in the process of place branding are; the way in which place brands are politically framed; the different way branding activities and efforts emerge as policy instruments, as shown in both the empirical case of Romagna and the Greater Stockholm. In this regard, the framework suggests an understanding of place branding as an ecology of branding practices in which the analysis of those practices is of paramount importance in order to analyze not only how the series of emerging combination can be constituted as complex dynamic constructs (see e.g. Kavaratzis & Hatch, 2013; Giovanardi et al. 2013; and Warnaby & Medway, 2013) but more crucially, according to an ecological approach to politics, as ‘biopolitical’ combinations, which entails a re-location of the inquiry of politics where knowledge is politically made, negotiated and circulated (i.e. around their ‘branding practices’). This is achieved by seeing place branding as a proxy of neoliberalism in its emerging ‘praxis’, but also, in retrospection, by seeing those dimensions as the formation of emergent unities that despite the heterogeneity of their components (i.e. signs, slogan, stakeholder, discourses) reflect a process of coalescence, as explained in article 3 in relation to brand transformation, in article 4 in relation to visualization and materialization practices, and in article 2 in relation to the actors’ linguistic creation of the branding process.

Further, this conceptual framework allows on a more methodological perspective, being embedded in relational onto-epistemology, performing an analysis which is contextualized and open at the same time to the different materializations of place branding processes with respect to political structures and processes; its main task being the tackling of methodological and analytical difficulties with the depiction of place branding as a policy instrument, positioning, and ideological appropriation, given the link between place brands, the process of branding and its political impacts. In fact, this conceptual framework does not only help to conceptually analyze both the ‘bio’ and the ‘political’ dimension of biopolitical apparatus in emergence, thus allowing a contextualization of the way place branding is commonly understood as based on multiple brand elements and having several politically related impacts on specific economic and socio-cultural structures and processes in cities, regions, and nations. It also helps to
methodologically perform a research design that can be seen as an alternative understanding to more traditional research performed in the existing literature on place branding because it outlines the importance of a comprehensive approach (i.e. production-consumption) in regard to the complex dimension of politics. Equally, it points out a different form of methodological inquiry where the political dimension of place branding is researched in its emerging, transient, transformative, and affective materialization.

Ultimately, in more practical terms the present framework suggests that rather than attempting to analyze place branding as ‘neoliberalism’ in its ‘system’, it could be analyzed in its ‘praxis’. This could namely be done to show how, where, when and why diverse types of stakeholders (e.g. institutions, organizations and individuals) and repetitive, multimodal, and multiple activities unfold and how, when and why such activities have a ‘position’ in the circuit of consumption-production in the moment in which place brands, images, efforts and policies are being made. By doing such analyses, it is then possible to shed light on different political practices, actions, reasons and modalities by diverse types of stakeholders by putting those in the context of emergence. In this way, the framework for analyzing the political dimension of place branding suggested here could help both researchers and practitioners in understanding 1) what is at work and what is not at work in place-branding processes, for example the political dimension; it can help understand 2) comparisons between different place-branding processes with respect to the political structures and processes; finally it can help understand 3) depictions of the use of place branding as a policy instrument given the link between place brands.
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