The death of the city centers

A qualitative study of the use to brand city centers

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This thesis explored how the place branding components could be applied to city centers and required a qualitative approach with semi-structured interviews. We would therefore like to address a certain thank you to all the respondents that took their time and participated in our thesis and provided valuable information.

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____________________________________
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Abstract

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Title: The death of the city centers. A qualitative case study of the use to brand city centers.

Background: Place branding originates from the original term branding and attempts to brand a place instead of a product. Current place branding theories are blurry and many theories have occurred, which has caused confusion among the research community. Place branding theories have mainly focused on branding tourism destinations, countries, cities and places and not on branding city centers. This study aims to explore the place branding components that are essential when branding city centers and create an adapted model for city centers.

Purpose: The purpose is to explore how the place branding components can be applied to city centers.

Research questions: RQ1: How can place branding be used in order to brand city centers? RQ2: What components of place branding are essential when branding a city center?

Methodology: Qualitative approach, cross-sectional study, semi-structured interviews.

Conclusion: The new model suitable to apply on city centers is named City center branding model and includes the following components: City center people, City center identity, City center infrastructure, City center stakeholders and supply, City center communication, City center experience and City center evaluation.

Key words: Place branding, city center branding, City center people, City center identity, City center infrastructure, City center stakeholders and supply, City center communication, City center experience and City center evaluation.
**Prologue**

The idea to this bachelor thesis started to be developed when the authors got the knowledge that city centers in Sweden have difficulties attracting visitors. It is however important to be clear that this problem is not general for all city centers in Sweden, rather the phenomenon is generally more applicable on smaller cities. Furthermore, since the authors are based in Växjö, this city influenced this thesis and was the starting point when determining the empirical problem. Below, some empirical evidence is outlined, showing the problem in both words and numbers.

Economic difficulties are not a unique phenomenon. Many places are dying and have difficulties recovering a loss of visitors. Several local and national newspapers in Sweden have frequently reported on the diminishing profits and closures of shops in towns throughout the country and the phenomenon has caused anxiousness among the community. Shops moving from city centers to large-scale shopping malls with low rent are seen as a dangerous development and could lead to a decrease of shops and visitors in city centers (SMP, 2011; Barometern, 2012; SVT, 2013; Expressen, 2014 and Aftonbladet, 2015).

SVT (2013) reported on Tillväxtanaly’s numbers on how the closure of shops has been developed. They reported a 10 % decrease of shops in Jönköping, whereas Växjö faced a 32 % decrease since 1996. It is not only smaller cities facing this problem, Malmö, which is the third largest city in Sweden and one of the fastest growing cities in Europe also has the same problem, which shows how deep and widespread this problem is for the city centers (SVT, 2013 and Expressen, 2014).
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1.0 Introduction

1.1 Background

Branding has been around for centuries with the purpose of distinguishing a product from another and was developed when the ancient Egyptians put labels on their products in order to differentiate themselves from competitors and to ensure high quality (Kotler & Keller, 2011). The concept has had an increasing importance in a time when nearly everything is branded, from salt to automobile parts. Branding is intended to help both producers to differentiate themselves and consumers to identify products. Furthermore, branding can build a story, segment markets and gain legal protection for the product (Kotler & Gertner, 2002 and Kotler & Armstrong, 2013). Numerous theories have emerged from branding, one of them is how branding can be applied to a specific place, called place branding (Parkerson & Saunders, 2004; Hanna & Rowley, 2008; Kemp et al, 2012 and Sahin & Baloglu, 2014).

Place branding, also known as location branding, is a concept similar to the original theory of branding. Place branding has emerged from the theory of place marketing, which is a concept including four main strategies for how to market a place. These strategies focus on improving a place’s attractiveness out of four perspectives, design (place as a character), infrastructure (place as a fixed environment), basic services (place as a service provider) and attractions (place as entertainment and recreation). Ever since the introduction of place branding, how to market a place has been widely debated and theories have occurred (Kotler et al, 1999 and Kemp et al, 2012).

The main point with place branding is to brand a place instead of a product (Kemp et al, 2012). However, as mentioned above, multiple theories have been introduced, which has caused confusion as to what place branding is and how it can be used. The purpose with place branding is to differentiate one place from another and to communicate its competitiveness in terms of trade, population, wealth, prestige and power (Kavaratzis, 2005a). Place branding applies branding strategies to economic, political and cultural aspects of a place and tries to create expectations and images of the place prior to consumption (Kemp et al, 2012). Furthermore, place branding focuses on creating a system, which should highlight the identity and the distinctive and definite characteristics of the place in question (Sevin, 2014). This can be performed on a national scale or on a local scale (Anholt, 2005), although the current theories have mainly focused on the area of travel tourism where the concept is most
developed (Hanna & Rowley, 2007). As a result, many sub theories have been created, such as destination branding and city branding.

Destination branding has emerged from place branding and focuses on how to communicate a destination’s uniqueness and differentiate it compared to its competitors with the aim to attract more tourists to a particular place (Qu et al, 2011). Hanna and Rowley (2007) agree with Qu et al. (2011) and explain destination branding as a name, symbol, logo, word or other graphic that both identifies and differentiates the destination. This is in order to convey a promise of having a memorable experience of the visited destination. The long-term purpose of doing this is to increase visits and spending (Hanna & Rowley, 2007). City branding is another concept of branding a place, similar to the ones previously discussed and involves attracting tourists, workers and inhabitants to a city (Parkerson & Saunders, 2004). The important aspect to take into consideration using this concept is to involve the local stakeholders, i.e. local politicians, local citizens, local businesses and local visitors in order to be able to both please and attract visitors as well as provide an exciting atmosphere for the locals (Sahin & Baloglu, 2014).

1.2 Problem discussion

Branding is a concept that has grown enormously since its conception, and now spans every type of market, locations being no exception (Freire, 2005). Places can be branded to a similar extent as products can (Caldwell & Freire, 2004), however, aspects of the concept vary and skeptics, such as Anholt (2008), claim that the term place branding does not imply that a place can be branded. The image a person has regarding a place can affect the intent to purchase at or from that place. This image can be formed through many aspects related to the place, for example, historical importance, famous icons, values, meanings and also self-expressive and utilitarian attributes (Kotler & Gertner, 2002; Caldwell & Freire, 2004 and Campelo et al, 2013).

Place branding, and associated areas such as destination branding, location branding, and city branding are receiving increasing attention. Place branding has its foundation in the tourism-marketing field, but increasingly, places need to consider branding in a wider range of contexts and in respect to the management of the brand image and the brand experience for a range of stakeholders (Hanna & Rowley, 2011). Previous research has focused mainly on
attracting tourists to a city or a country (Hanna & Rowley, 2007) and not on attracting locals to a location within a city (Parkerson & Saunders, 2004). This is the major difference between place branding and city branding, although the concepts are intertwined (Caldwell & Freire, 2004). Furthermore, the use of the various definitions of how to brand places, cities or destinations varies from author to author. Place branding is seen as the umbrella term covering all these theories and the use of the term is often used interchangeably (Skinner, 2008 and Kemp et al, 2012). For example, Kavaratzis (2005) makes no distinction between city branding and place branding, which tells that there is a possibility to use the term in new ways other than those used in previous literature. For the reasons stated above the term place branding has been used to define the concept applied to this research.

Hanna and Rowley (2011) argue that current research has mainly focused on smaller aspects of place branding and have not taken a holistic view on the concept, including all of the important components that are somehow related to each other. They have, as a result, created a new model named Strategic place brand management model, which is based on the existing models within place branding: A model of destination branding by Cai (2002), The destination branding process by Laws (2002), The relational network brand by Hankinson (2004), City image communications by Kavaratzis (2004), 7A a destination branding model by Baker (2007) and lastly city brand management by Gaggiotti et al. (2008). Hanna and Rowley’s (2011) model is still the newest one available in the literature and is intended to brand a place mainly for tourism purposes. As a result, this model has not yet been used to brand a place within a city and in particular a city center. Since the model has a holistic approach (Hanna & Rowley 2011) it is likely that some components of the model are more applicable to city centers than others, thus contributing to branding city centers in a favorable way. Branding a city center poses new challenges compared to branding tourism destinations (Hanna & Rowley 2011), and the model could have limited uses when applied to city centers. Hanna and Rowley (2011) therefore recommends further researchers to explore the relevance of the SPBM model’s various components in relation to newer contexts and including additional components found through further research.
Figure 1. The Strategic place brand management model (Hanna & Rowley, 2011).

From an economic perspective, the more visitors a location has the smaller the cost of hosting each individual visitor becomes, thus, creating revenue (Kotler et al, 1993). This means that the more visitors a place has, the higher the likelihood to consumption, thus generating revenue for different stakeholders at the place in question (Kotler et al, 1993). Ryu and Swinney (2013) state that downtown areas are the hub of economic, cultural, historic and social parameters and that retail businesses located in the downtown area are essential in managing and maintaining the economic well being of a city. Furthermore, in order for retailers to be able to employ locals and contribute with taxes, it is of importance to attract visitors to a city center, which in turn is likely to generate income for the retailers and ultimately for the city (Ryu & Swinney, 2013).

As previous studies mainly have focused on attracting visitors to cities and tourism destinations, this paper aims to tackle the problem of diminishing visitors for city centers by exploring the components of place branding that could be applied to city centers.
1.3 Purpose

The purpose is to explore how the place branding components can be applied to city centers.

1.4 Research questions

RQ1: How can place branding be used in order to brand city centers?
RQ2: What components of place branding are essential when branding city centers?
2.0 Theoretical framework

This chapter discusses place branding from different perspectives and angels. First, an overall view of place branding is discussed, followed by all current models of place branding and their different components are reviewed, and finally, a table summarizing the models and their components are presented.

2.1 Place branding

Hanna and Rowley (2011) state that place branding encompasses everything a place wishes to sell, and write that it is the practice of applying brand strategy and other marketing techniques to towns, cities, regions and countries. Places like cities, regions and countries are faced with the effects of both economic and cultural trends, such as changes in behavior and technological changes (Hankinson, 2001; Kavaratzis & Ashworth, 2005; Lucarelli & Brorström, 2013 and Oliviera, 2015). According to Kotler et al. (1999) these places are challenged by changes in economic, cultural and social interactions, one of the challenges being an increase in competition. When alternative territories offer similar facilities and possibilities for visitors, residents or other resources like business relocation and investments, it is evident that competition occurs (Oliviera, 2015). Furthermore, as people have become more unbound, it is vital to provide an environment capable not only to attract new visitors but also to maintain existing ones within the location (Kavaratzis, 2005). Thereby, in order to enhance features, assets and other facilities, places have used branding techniques (Oliviera, 2015).

Anholt (2006) has done extensive research within the field of branding places and notes that place brands need to be managed carefully. He gives a “step-by-step guide” on how to create a place brand. First a current assessment must be done to understand where the brand lies and what must be done and why. Depending on the outcome of the assessment the place may need to be introduced. This step applies to places that are widely unknown. Other places may be known but not by the right target market. The next step is to target the correct market, for example, those with the desired spending power. The brand image may then need to be corrected due to a negative, a non-distinctive or an inaccurate image. Those brands that have negative images must then improve their image in order to change current perceptions of the brand (Anholt, 2006).
Since research within the concept has mainly focused on the comparisons between branding a destination and a city within the field of tourism the literature brings up specific areas within the place branding process such as image building, repositioning, communication and stakeholders. Since the field is relatively new, there is a lack of empirical research that calls for a more detailed analysis. Also, the previous literature does not give a holistic view of the area, only explicit models (Hanna & Rowley, 2011).

2.2 Place branding models

**Destination branding model by Cai (2002)**
Cai’s (2002) *model of destination branding* emphasizes the building of the brand’s identity and image as the core elements of the model. Cai (2002) notes that several components are needed in order to create brand identity, such as attributes, affective components, marketing programs, marketing communication, brand image building and the brand element mix as shown in Figure 2. However, Cai’s (2002) model does not include stakeholders’ points of view, which is emphasized by Hanna and Rowley (2011). In order for the model to function, the process of generating the identity of the destination should be cooperative. The point with Cai’s (2002) model is to provide a framework to use in order to build a positive destination image. Hanna and Rowley (2011) argue that this model is difficult to understand and, as a result, is hard to apply in reality.
Destination branding process by Laws (2002)

Laws (2002) model of destination branding processes has its focus on the process of branding a destination. It contains a generic step-by-step guide on how to brand a destination. The process contains seven steps, market audit, consumer research, portfolio strategies, identifying target markets, developing strategies, implementation (appropriate communication messages) and the final step track and review (Laws, 2002). Hanna and Rowley (2011) discredit this process as a viable option for destination branding based on its generic nature. Laws (2002) did not create a conceptual model, only theoretical building blocks to be used when branding a destination.

The relational network brand by Hankinson (2004)

Hankinson’s (2004) model focuses on the stakeholders’ perspective in the branding process. Furthermore, the model emphasizes relations and collaborations between different stakeholder groups and the place brand. The place brand is represented by the core brand and four categories of brand relationships as shown in figure 3. The model aims to clarify the role of the relationships between consumers, brand infrastructure, media and primary services at the place. The main point is that the core brand is influenced and developed through the interaction between the stakeholder groups and by the delivery of the services, which as a result creates an experience. The relationships are dynamic and they evolve over time since the actors/stakeholders may also change over time as the brand develops (Hankinson, 2004).
City image communications by Kavaratzis (2004)

The city image communications model by Kavaratzis (2004) focuses entirely on how the image of the city is communicated and is concerned with how the visitors perceive the image. The model brings up three ways to communicate the image as shown in Figure 4. Primary communication involves communication that is not intended but is a by-product of the main goal. Secondary communication involves traditional marketing communications, such as advertising and PR. Tertiary communication involves word-of-mouth from media and competitors communication (Kavaratzis, 2004).
7A Destination branding model by Baker (2007)

Baker’s (2007) 7A model of destination branding differs in its steps of procedure compared to Laws (2002) model of destination branding process. It takes on aspects of adoption and attitudes and despite the lack of the term brand it is hinted throughout the model. The seven steps of the model are as follows; assessment and audit, analysis and advantage, alignment, activation, adoption and attitude and finally action and afterwards (Baker, 2007). Furthermore, the 7A destination-branding model focuses on brand evaluation. Baker (2007) highlights the perspectives of internal stakeholders, differentiation in terms of strengths and assets, the context of communications and marketing, perceptions of external stakeholders, achievements as an indication of performance, positioning relative to competitors, experience and market alignment. Baker (2007) also emphasizes the evaluation of brand adoption by stakeholders, community pride and brand support, brand consistency, media, stakeholders’ feedback and attitudes towards the place.

Figure 5. 7A Destination branding model (Baker, 2007).

City brand management what models the economic growth by Gaggiotti et al. (2008)

Gaggiotti et al’s. (2008) Model of city brand management uses economic growth as its focal point. It builds a strategic direction in which to build a place brand. It uses four essential questions as its base to build its step-by-step model. These questions are as follows, “what are we now?”, “what are our options?”, “what do we want to be?” and “what do we need to do?” It uses these questions to conduct an analysis of the components place, people, processes and
partners (Gaggiotti et al, 2008). Even though this model focuses on the need of evaluating the current situation in order to create a picture of future prospects, it fails to explain brand evaluation as a separate component and does not discuss it in any detail (Gaggiotti et al, 2008).

Figure 6. City brand management (Gaggiotti, 2008).

**Strategic Place Brand Management Model (SPBM) by Hanna and Rowley (2011)**

According to Hanna and Rowley (2011), the existing place branding models take different perspectives and none of these models are widely adopted or tested. Based on these existing models, they created what they call a holistic model, named the *Strategic Place Brand Management Model* (SPBM). The model includes nine components that are related to each other and starts off with Stakeholder engagement. Stakeholder engagement and the infrastructure of the place are the fundamental components of this model and the other components are built with regard to these two. Brand identity is the component that sets the agenda of how the place should use its brand architecture, articulation and communication, which then creates the experience of visiting the place. Finally, the overall experience leads to word of mouth and the place has to make an evaluation of how the visitors perceived the place (Hanna & Rowley, 2011). In the following sections, the components of the SPBM model will be further discussed and explained.
2.3 Components of the SPBM model

2.3.1 Brand evaluation

Brand evaluation is the process whereby feedback is gathered on the place brand. Furthermore, it is central to the evaluation of the brand image and its experience. As a theory conceived in the 1970’s place image has become a large focal area for recent tourism based studies (Hosany et al. 2006). The end goal of creating a place image is to attract visitors and revenue (Blain et al., 2005). The place image is an attitudinal concept and is described as the sum of beliefs, ideas and impressions held by consumers regarding a place or destination. It is a key technique for positioning a place on the market (Hosany et al. 2006). It heavily influences the consumer's purchase process when evaluating the choice of destination (Mak, 2011). A key to a successful place image according to Blain et al. (2005) is consistency in both the image and message. He also notes that a typical technique used by place managers for communicating a place image is through the use of logos. A place image is often communicated through the use of a mixture of promotional tools including offerings and promotions and the use of media or celebrities to reflect their cultural, political or social status (Anholt, 2006). Research on place brand image evaluation has been conducted (Hankinson, 2004), however, Pike (2007) states that there has not been much research on the strategic effectiveness of place branding initiatives. The reason is argued to be that place branding has been recognized to be a complex construct. Thereby, using image evaluation alone is no
longer effective and as proposed in Figure 1, brand evaluation is the adequate term (Pike, 2007 and Hanna & Rowley, 2011). Furthermore, the relational network brand model by Hankinson (2004) also fails to separate brand evaluation and embeds it in the relational exchange between the brand and its stakeholders. However, brand evaluation is not discussed in terms of the stakeholders’ actions in this particular model (Hankinson, 2004).

2.3.2 Stakeholder engagement (Management)

Stakeholder engagement (management) is the component that is arguably one of the most important within place branding since it is the process whereby stakeholders are identified, their interests are exposed and interactions are managed (Hanna & Rowley, 2011). Parkerson and Saunders (2004) recognize the place brand as the product of stakeholder networks and partnerships, which can involve investors, employees, suppliers, and community groups. Furthermore, when the relationship between stakeholders lacks coordination, the resulting dynamic is mirrored in the relationships between the consumer and the brand (Hankinson, 2004; Hankinson, 2009). Stakeholders’ engagement provides the understanding of what a place has to offer, its talents, mentality and the attitude of its people. This leads to partnerships and a united community. Brand performance is thereby linked to stakeholders’ relations as the model suggests (Gaggiotti et al, 2008).

The 7A destination model provides information on stakeholders and suggests that they should have the opportunity to contribute to the place. Baker (2007) discusses the issues of maximizing stakeholder support in order to ensure that multiple projects have a voice. In addition, if stakeholders agree with each other the likelihood of collaboration and compromises will increase (Sautter & Leisen, 1999). If stakeholders are partners in brand creation, they will automatically support the brand strategy and deliver the brand experience. Although the understanding of what the brand creates and the context in which the brand exists, lies the basis of the relationship between stakeholders and infrastructure (regeneration) (Jones, 2005).

The other models highlight the importance of stakeholders under terms like consumer, brand infrastructure and media relationships (Hankinson, 2004) while organizational structures and the effectiveness of the city’s growing structure is discussed by Kavaratzis (2004). The
development of networks in the community, the citizen participation and the establishment of public or private partnerships are emphasized by both authors (Hanna & Rowley, 2011).

2.3.3 Infrastructure (Regeneration)

The infrastructure of a place has the potential to determine its attractiveness (Gunn, 2002). According to Kavaratzis (2005a), there is a need of creating infrastructure projects that are developed to create, improve and give character to a city. This can mean improving the city’s accessibility to various areas, such as cultural hubs. Hanna and Rowley (2011) propose that the infrastructure of a place encompasses the existence, accessibility and sufficiency of functional and experiential attributes of the place. They state that functional attributes of a place are tangible whereas the experiential attributes are intangible. The experiential attributes are dependent on the impact of stakeholders and environmental changes, meaning that in order to change or improve the experience of the place investments of facilities and services are needed. Experiential attributes are created through symbolic traits, such as services and cultural entertainment (Hanna & Rowley, 2011). Functional attributes, on the other hand, are dependent on strategies about the landscape and the infrastructure as a whole, such as buildings and public spaces including urban design, parks and architecture (Hanna & Rowley, 2011). Sánchez et al. (2013) on the other hand, argue that a successful city should have an infrastructure including, what they call, six smart components; mobility, economy, the environment, the people, smart living and a smart governance. These components goes slightly hand in hand with Hanna and Rowley’s (2011) view on infrastructure, however, their model excludes the component of the people and the economy.

2.3.4 Brand Identity

The brand identity of a place involves the creation and maintenance of the brands image (Harmaakorpi et al, 2008). According to Gaggiotti et al. (2008) the identity of a place is developed through an analysis of the strengths and weaknesses embedded in its tangible and intangible attributes. Kavaratzis and Hatch (2013) state that place branding should become a standard tool for place managers and should be used to create a place’s identity. The place's identity is influenced by the attractiveness of the environment through architecture and can be created through historical, cultural or political influences (Harmaakorpi et al, 2008 and Govers & Go, 2009).
The culture of a place has an effect on the way it is perceived by its visitors and is a key component of creating a place brand image (Anholt, 2006 and Skinner, 2008). The literature has studied the effect of cultural events, such as music festivals and sports on the place brand and found that it has a considerable effect (Skinner, 2008). A strong sense of culture can be gained through using heritage and historical significance. Even where heritage is sparse it can be fabricated in an equally effective way if done honestly. For instance, sports events are an effective way to gain cultural significance (Anholt, 2006). Skinner (2008) argues that place managers have little influence over the identity of a place and base this on Trueman et al. (2007) where it is stated that local communities, the environment, historical influence or heritage and infrastructure have a large influence on the identity of a place. Place branding can change a customer's perception of a place and give associated characteristics. The infrastructure of a place plays an important role in the images it creates among customers. Four identity characteristics have been applied to the place branding theory, expressing, mirroring, reflecting, and impressing (Kavaratzis & Hatch, 2013).

According to Cai’s (2002) model, place identity is the foundation of the brand building process and is co-produced by stakeholders through symbols associated with the place, such as decorations or sculptures, and the enhancements of rituals, such as street parties, ceremonies, sales events and performances. These activities have impact on consumers’ perceptions, their experiences and what the place has come to be known for. The model gives input to building an image that goes hand in hand with the identity but fails to provide a relationship between these two. If the identity and the intended image do not correspond, an identity cannot be achieved (Cai, 2002). The remainder of the analyzed models does not refer to identity or image instead they discuss various concepts within branding. For instance, Hankinson (2004) focuses on personality characterized by functional, symbolic and experiential attributes and positioning, while Kavaratzis (2004) discusses communications and its components of landscape strategies and infrastructure. Baker (2007) emphasizes brand positioning, whereas Gaggiotti et al. (2008) concentrates on the analysis of present and future opportunities of the place to delineate how the place would like to be perceived.

2.3.5 Brand Architecture
Brand architecture deals with managing the organization, providing a proper structure and control (Douglas et al, 2001; Sanchez, 2004). Brand architecture is commonly thought of as
only applicable to product brands where the architecture consists of the main brand and its different sub-brands. However, Hanna and Rowley (2011) argue that places also need steady brand architecture even though they tend to focus on one central place brand supported by sub-brands. The place brand architecture includes brands that are owned by local authorities, organizations, businesses and community services, such as schools and hospitals (Hanna & Rowley, 2011). Furthermore, Hanna and Rowley (2011) note that these different brands should interact and supply the needs the inhabitants have, which in turn make brand architecture a central aspect of place branding theories since stakeholders have a central role in the place branding process. In addition, brand architecture not only describes the image and experience of brands, but also treats conflicts and contradictions between the brands in the place (Hanna & Rowley, 2011).

The brand architecture is a central part of the SPBM-model since it is influenced by the relationships between stakeholders. According to Baker (2007) stakeholder entities are powerful and diverse, therefore it is important to have an even distribution between supplies in order to eliminate stakeholder dissonance and reach a wider market segment. Baker (2007) highlights that brand architecture is an important component of the brand-management process and is influenced by brand infrastructure relationships, which in turn is affected by brand articulation. The other authors fail to incorporate brand architecture in their models (Hanna & Rowley, 2011).

### 2.3.6 Brand Articulation

According to Hanna and Rowley (2011) brand articulation is the component that focuses on how the place brand is expressed in terms of its verbal and visual identity including the choice and the design of the name, logo, colors and photographs. Furthermore, they state that brand articulation is an important aspect of branding the place since the appearance of the brand is connected to its identity and architecture (Hanna & Rowley, 2011). Also the design and visual communication surrounding the brand has become important since it is a way to differentiate the brand from its competitors (Page & Herr, 2002).

While Baker (2007) proposes that brand articulation is worth discussing, other authors do not discuss this component (Cai, 2002; Hankinson, 2004; Kavaratzis, 2004 and Gaggiotti et al, 2008). Baker (2007) writes that articulation is important because it represents the identity of
the brand but also due to the emotional ties to the name of the place and other factors such as logos, avoidance of overuse of words, color palettes and photos etc. Additionally Hanna and Rowley (2011) state that is is a vital component in the place branding process as the means of representing brand identity.

According to Montana et al. (2007) consumers achieve more knowledge and understanding of a brand and its image if the brand is consistent and cohesive. The design of it is directly connected to the brand and should be produced in accordance to the brand. Furthermore, both the visual and verbal communication can have an effect on visitors’ attitudes about the brand. This can lead to visitors having presumptions and thereby change their perceptions (Beverland, 2005; Wheeler 2006). Additionally another study made by Montana et al. (2007) suggests that the design management process for businesses is focused on giving the visitors an experience. The quality of the design is important and firms can use several elements in order to differentiate themselves, for instance logotypes and colors (Wheeler, 2006).

2.3.7 Brand Communications

Brand communications focuses on how to reach out with the identity of the brand and is tightly connected to the articulation of the brand (Hanna & Rowley, 2011). Kavaratzis (2004) and Hanna and Rowley (2011) argue that how the brand communicates to the target market is vital to its success and has a direct impact on how visitors will perceive the place before and after the visit. Furthermore the literature distinguishes between secondary communication and integrated communication (Kavaratzis, 2004 and Baker, 2007).

Secondary communication is easier to incorporate since the communication is coming from each stakeholder respectively, whereas integrated communication aims to embed all stakeholders into one single communication channel where their different interests could conflict with each other (Kavaratzis, 2004 and Baker, 2007). The difficulty of integrated brand communication is that it is connected with a coherent brand identity, leading to that different stakeholders feel uncertainty and unwillingness to contribute to the place brand since their identity as individual stakeholders are seen as irrelevant (Hanna & Rowley, 2011).
2.3.9 Word-of-mouth

Word-of-mouth (WOM) is the process where consumers share opinions and communicate with each other and is the information that is communicated between consumers about organizations (Grönroos, 2007; Lam et al, 2009; Radighieri & Mulder, 2012 and Berger & Iyengar, 2013). The marketing literature shows that WOM has a highly influential effect on decision-making (Lam et al, 2009 and Radighieri & Mulder, 2012). WOM-communication is seen as a powerful, credible and persuasive force since the company does not control the activities and the communicator does not have a vested interest (Baker, 2007 and Barreto, 2014). The engagement of WOM is recognized through three personal motives; the desire to help other people, gaining pleasure from sharing information and feeling the need to share information (Hanna & Rowley, 2011).

Hanna and Rowley (2011) suggest that WOM should be presented as interacting with brand experience and brand communication. The relationship between WOM and brand experience can increase the effectiveness of advertising and brand communications can act as a trigger for WOM. They suggest that the relationship between brand communications could also be used as a strategy in order to monitor the content of communications to establish whether the brand experience matches with brand communications. They additionally highlight that the brand experience has the most influential effect since consumers can engage not only in positive WOM but also in negative, which thereby can harm the brand. According to Kavaratzis (2004) WOM is an important component to involve in the place branding process since the goal of the process is to reinforce and evoke. Baker (2007) also discusses the importance of WOM in relation to media and competitors while the remainder of the models does not discuss the term.

2.3.8 Brand experience

As opposed to many other place branding theories, place experience differs in the sense that it is only utilized in conjunction with consumption (Blain et al, 2005). During the visit, the consumer builds perceptions, which are positive if the experience is satisfactory and negative if it is unsatisfactory (Hanna & Rowley, 2011). The sensory experience of any product or service has been regarded as the most important aspect that guides a purchase decision (Govers & Go, 2009). Hultén (2011) writes that using sensory marketing, and more specifically the human’s five senses, in order to stimulate personal and symbolic feelings
towards the product or service, can enhance the experience. The humans’ five senses include sight, sound, smell, touch and taste. By stimulating the senses, through for example music (sound), colors (sight), scents (smell), food (taste) and materials and surfaces (touch), marketers can enhance the overall experience, which is likely to make consumers purchase the experience again (Hultén, 2011). Research has shown that despite the purchase of, for example, a travel service the end product is the experience (Blain et al, 2005). The experiential value is stressed by place managers when communicating a place’s unique selling proposition and has been called a critical concept (Kavaratzis, 2005).

2.4 Summary of the models and their components

Hanna and Rowley (2011) founded their model on the previous models but have excluded some components they didn’t bring up as necessary and they have also changed the name of some of the components. For example, as shown in Table 1 below, Laws (2002) names a component Market audit and consumer research whereas Hanna and Rowley (2011) name theirs Brand evaluation. Furthermore, it is apparent that Hanna and Rowley (2011) have excluded components, such as People and Economic wealth, which Gaggiotti (2008) included in his model. Since this study explores which of the components that are essential when branding city centers, it could be the case that components from older models will be included, and some components from Hanna and Rowley (2011) could be excluded in a newer model specifically adapted for city centers. An overall outline of the terminology of the place branding theories can be found in Appendix 4.
Table 1. Summary of the models and their components.

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Brand evaluation</td>
<td>Market audit and consumer research</td>
<td>Brand evaluation</td>
<td></td>
<td>Assessment and audit</td>
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<tr>
<td>Stakeholder engagement</td>
<td>Adoption and attitude</td>
<td>Stakeholders perspective</td>
<td>Stakeholder engagement</td>
<td>Partners</td>
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<tr>
<td>Infrastructure</td>
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<td>Brand infrastructure</td>
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<td>Brand identity</td>
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<td>Brand architecture</td>
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<td>Brand communications</td>
<td>Marketing communications</td>
<td>Implementation</td>
<td>Primary and secondary communication</td>
<td>Activation</td>
<td>Brand communications</td>
<td>Brand communications</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brand experience</td>
<td>Action and afterwards</td>
<td>Primary services</td>
<td>Experience</td>
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<td>Word of mouth</td>
<td>Tertiary communication</td>
<td>Media</td>
<td>Word of mouth</td>
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<td>Brand image</td>
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<td>People</td>
<td>Economic growth</td>
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</table>


3.0 Methodology

This chapter explains what the researchers have done and why they have done it. The chosen methods, strategies and other relevant methodology are discussed and presented to clarify the working process during this study. Lastly, a table summarizing all methods is presented.

3.1 Research approach

3.1.1 Inductive and deductive research approach

Induction and deduction are two approaches a researcher can take on when conducting a research. These theories view the research process from different perspectives (Hanley, 2014). Deductive theory is the approach most frequently used among business researchers and stems from objectivism, meaning that the world is independent of social actors (Bryman & Bell, 2011). The process of deduction has a clear linear vision of what is to be done and derives conclusions based on a system of logic (Shepherd & Sutcliffe, 2011 and Hanley, 2014). The process starts off by using theories in order to deduce a hypothesis. Data is then collected out of the hypothesis and the hypothesis must include theories that can be translated into concepts applicable to the research. The hypothesis is then tested to see whether it should be rejected or accepted. Lastly, the researcher revises the theory if it is needed (Bryman & Bell, 2011).

Inductive research, on the other hand, has a non-linear process, meaning that the process of collecting data and generate theories goes back and forth until the research is done (Bryman & Bell, 2011 and Hanley, 2014). The idea is to start off broad and then narrow it down by deriving empirical knowledge, which is based on sense data (Shepherd & Sutcliffe, 2011 and Hanley, 2014). The inductive research process is founded on constructionism, which believes that the world is built on social interaction that is in constant change (Bryman & Bell, 2011).

Dubios and Gadde (2002) argue that there is an additional approach to the ones mentioned above named systematic combining, or abduction. The approach of systematic combining combines the deductive and inductive approach in order to make the process of generating theories more flexible (Dubios & Gadde, 2002). Furthermore, they state that systematic combining is a process enabling theories, empirical data and the analysis to evolve simultaneously and is particular relevant if new models and theories are developed during the research process.
According to Bryman and Bell (2011) the choice of doing a qualitative research approach guides to use the inductive theory approach. This study starts off with theory, which is indicative of deduction. Furthermore, the research needs to be flexible in order to revise theory and gain rich deep empirical data to be able to understand the place branding components that are essential when branding city centers. Literature shows that the theories of place branding are blurry, and many concepts within the term mean slightly the same thing but have been applied for other purposes than branding city centers. Hence, revision of the theory and using a new holistic model of place branding adapted for city centers is needed. Therefore, in-depth information will be highly regarded, which points at an inductive approach. The definite conclusion was to use the deductive approach in order to be able to discover and understand the relationship of place branding and city centers. Also, since the study starts with theory and aims to explore what theories that are essential when branding a city center deduction is the approach to use.

3.1.2 Quantitative and qualitative research approach

Quantitative research emphasizes the quantification of numbers in the collection and analysis of data, which results in a numeric statistical analysis (Taylor, 2005 and Punch, 2013). Since the focus is on numbers rather than words, the data becomes robust and unambiguous in nature. Quantitative research is founded on deductive theory where the researcher tests theories and deduces hypotheses and views social reality as an external objective reality (Bryman & Bell, 2011). Furthermore, quantitative research emphasizes the testing of hypothesis and to study relationships between variables (Bryman & Bell, 2011). Using quantitative research tends to be distant from the respondents since, conducting questionnaires not necessarily mean that the researcher needs to establish connections with the respondents if the researcher decides to perform this method (Bryman & Bell, 2011). The heavy focus on numbers and statistics could be a drawback because it creates a static research process and excludes deeper data from individuals and that also somewhat hinders the connection to people's’ everyday life (Bryman & Bell, 2011).

Qualitative research focuses on words rather than numbers when collecting and analyzing data and has an inductive approach to research (Punch, 2013). The approach is ideal when the researcher wants to understand the unexplored, or relatively unexplored research areas (Pekrun et al, 2002). The importance lies in the generation of theories, to study how
individuals perceive and interpret the social reality, and also to understand the reality as a constantly shifting mean that is dependent on the individuals within the society (Taylor, 2005; Bryman & Bell, 2011 and Punch, 2013). The qualitative approach is described as being oriented towards the epistemological area with a clear positivist view, meaning that understanding the individuals within the society is the core to understand the society as a whole. Furthermore qualitative research has an ontological position, which focuses on the constructions that have resulted from individuals of the society. Qualitative studies are associated with an inductive theory approach, which is likely to gain rich deep data (Bryman & Bell, 2011). Qualitative research is often criticized for being subjective and hard to generalize, due to that the researcher often has freedom to interpret and use the data in a way that romanticize the research. The transparency in methods and data collection has also been criticized since it is sometimes difficult to understand how and what the researcher actually did during the research process (Bryman & Bell, 2011).

A qualitative research approach will be applied in this study. The main reason for using this approach is due to that the purpose of this study is to explore the place branding components that are essential when branding city centers. Furthermore, it is important to elaborate on the respondents’ answers and give them freedom to touch upon subjects they feel relevant to take into account in order to enhance the attraction of the city center. It is also important that the research process can be flexible, going back and forth, since current place branding theories are blurry and have not been focusing on branding a place within a city in particular. The authors’ desire was to gain rich deep data, which would not be possible using the opposite approach. The collected data need to be detailed and the methods to be used need to be flexible in nature in order for the authors to be able to interpret and understand how a city center can be branded.

3.2 Research designs

Research designs are an underlying factor deciding how the researcher will collect and analyze data. There are typically five types of research designs including experimental design, case study design, longitudinal design, cross-sectional design and comparative design (Bryman & Bell, 2011).
The experimental design aim to conduct experiments around a subject but are not very common within research in the field of business. The researcher usually has two groups where the first group is tested in a specific environment and the other group is tested in the same environment, but a variable is changed. The researcher then compares the two situations to see the effects (Bryman & Bell, 2011). The case study design is a detailed and intensive analysis of a case and is concerned with the complexity of the case in question (Bryman & Bell, 2011). This design is one of the most popular designs to use when conducting research within business and the case can be an organization, a location, a person, or an event (Yin, 2013). Furthermore, Yin (2013) argues that case studies are particularly relevant when the research questions are of “why” and “how” nature, when the researchers have little or no control of the phenomena to be studied and when the phenomena is relevant at the time of research. A cross-sectional design is conducted when the researcher wants to collect data from more than one case and at a single point in time to see patterns between the cases. The major advantage with this design is that it is cheap, quickly conducted and the best way to determine prevalence (Mann, 2003). Cross-sectional design are often associated with a quantitative approach, however qualitative approaches can also be used within the discipline (Ployhart & Vandenberg, 2010 and Bryman & Bell, 2011). The longitudinal design aims to study changes of organizations and are suitable when more than three observations are made (Ployhart & Vandenberg, 2010). The comparative design is the use of two identical methods to compare two or more different cases. This design emphasizes comparison of social phenomena when they are compared in relation to contrasting situations (Bryman & Bell, 2011).

This study uses a cross-sectional research design, where Växjö’s city center is the central case to be studied, however influences from Jönköping and Ängelholm is also incorporated in the study. Since the theories of place branding are blurry and have mainly been used in areas related to countries, regions and tourism destinations, this study requires a detailed in-depth analysis of how the place branding theories can be applied on city centers. The cross-sectional study design will, as a result, allow the authors to conduct an extensive study to be able to find patterns within the place branding field that are particularly relevant for city centers, which is likely to result in a new model that are suitable for all city centers that are in need of rebranding. This cross-sectional study will apply an exploratory approach since the phenomenon of decreasing attractiveness in city centers needs an extensive exploratory study in order to understand how different components of place branding theories can be used to make city centers more attractive. The current models of place branding have never been used
to brand city centers as far as the literature shows, which demand that the researchers explore the existing components of the current models that could be relevant for city centers.

3.3 Data sources

It is useful to distinguish between two different types of sources when collecting data i.e. primary data and secondary data (Cowton, 1998 and Hox & Boejie, 2005).

3.3.1 Primary data

Primary data is categorized as data that are collected for a specific purpose and research. A major advantage of collecting data that is intended to fit a specific purpose is that the researcher has control over the entire process of data collection to the analysis of data and can therefore ensure that the data fits the research questions and also that the data is coherent. However, collecting primary data could be time-consuming and costly (Hox & Boejie, 2005).

3.3.2 Secondary data

Secondary data, as opposed to primary data, is data that others have created and is therefore intended to fit another purpose than the research in question and can be generated by different bodies, such as governments, companies and the media (Cowton, 1998). The essential part of secondary data is that the researcher use data that already has been collected and analyzed, which in turn make the process cost efficient. However, since the data is already collected and analyzed by others, the researcher loses control over how the conclusions of the data were generated and cannot be sure of the degree of objectivity (Cowton, 1998 and Hox & Boejie, 2005).

Primary data was collected throughout this study in order to understand what is needed to brand city centers and what components that is essential in order to brand them. Since this study aimed at exploring suitable place branding components to be applied on city centers, only primary data was collected. Furthermore, theories were chosen on the basis of the purpose of this study and interviews were conducted in order to get the desired data, which was intended to fit this particular study. All in all, the purpose of this study, all used theories and the collected data made it proper to only use primary data.
3.4 Method for data collection

Qualitative research involves three methods for data collection, *observations, interviews* and *focus groups*, where interviews are the most frequently employed one (Roulston, 2010 and Bryman & Bell, 2011).

3.4.1 Observations

Observations are a technique where the researcher collects data by observing respondents in a specific environment. The purpose is to study how individuals behave in a chosen environment and to study if they behave differently if the environment changes. This type of method allows the researcher to make observations of individuals directly and provide a realistic approach to reality since the individuals should not know that they are observed (Bryman & Bell, 2011). Furthermore, Bryman and Bell (2011) argue that this method has a higher validity compared to other methods, such as surveys where the respondents are aware of what they answer.

3.4.2 Focus groups

Focus groups are essential when the researcher wants to create discussions between respondents regarding a specific topic. The researcher could ask a question or mention a topic that should be discussed among the respondents and then they elaborate on their experiences and opinions regarding that topic (Kitzinger, 1995). Furthermore, the interaction between the respondents is the fundamental feature of focus groups, which makes it important to be sure that each respondent has knowledge and experiences about the topic to be discussed (Redmond & Curtis, 2009).

Focus groups are favorable when the researcher wants rich information and provides opinions, ideas and attitudes regarding the topic. Focus groups are also useful when the researcher wants to learn how and why the respondents think as they do. However, conducting focus groups are seen as time-consuming and costly and the interaction can put pressure on the respondents to express thoughts that they do not stand behind in real life (Zane, 1998). There are no universal size of the focus group, it varies from time to time depending on the topics, how much contributing knowledge each respondent has and also how well the moderator can handle the group (Redmond & Curtis, 2009).
3.4.3 Interviews

Qualitative interviews are flexible in nature and are intended to gain rich deep data from the interviewees. Furthermore, the idea with conducting qualitative interviews is to understand the perspective of the interviewee in order to tap into areas that might not be tapped into if the researcher had a strict scheme to follow (Dicicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006; Roulston, 2010 and Bryman & Bell, 2011). The flexible nature of this method of data collection generates this kind of view since the interviewee is likely to tap into areas that might never been thought of by the researcher, and hence, the interviewee will be able to point out what he/she finds important within a particular area. The researcher will also be able to be flexible since no strict scheme of the interview will be followed. Therefore, questions that pop up during the interview can be asked and contribute with deep and rich information (Bryman & Bell, 2011).

It is important that the qualitative interview reach a certain level of quality, which increases the likelihood that the collected data is suitable to use in the research. Points to consider could be if the answers from the interviewee are spontaneous, rich and relevant, the length of the answers, generally, the shorter the question and the longer the answer, the better it is. Furthermore, Roulston (2010) argues that the interview should be flowing in a way that it nearly becomes self-communicating, meaning that the interviewer should not need to explain and clarify, rather, the interviewee should be able to easily understand and answer the questions in a detailed manner.

There are mainly two types of interviews within the qualitative framework, unstructured and semi-structured interviews (Dicicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006). Unstructured interviews are the most flexible kind of interview, where the researcher might only have one single question during the session and then develop new ones as the interview passes by (Dicicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006 and Bryman & Bell, 2011). The researcher need to shizzle out the points the interviewee brings up that might be relevant for the research and then follow up these points by asking new questions. The semi-structured interview is somewhat stricter than the unstructured interview, but still flexible in nature. Semi-structured interviews allow the researcher to have a list of questions or topics that could be necessary to ask during the session, often referred to as an interview guide (Dicicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006). Since the questions or topics to be covered should be open ended and broad, the interviewee will be able to respond freely and elaborate on the answers. However, the questions and topics to be covered during the session will most likely be asked to all respondents with the same wording.
but the order might differ from interview to interview (Dicicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006 and Bryman & Bell, 2011).

Interviews were considered as the best method for data collection in this study. Since the purpose of this study was to explore how the components of place branding could be applied to city centers, the need for rich deep data were desired in front of observations and interactions between respondents. Observations would be of no use for this study since they would not provide the desired in-depth information, rather, they would only provide data that show movement patterns and different behaviors. Focus groups were also excluded from this study since the authors did not want the respondents to be biased by others opinions, which could lead to invalid answers that would result in an incorrect outcome of the study. Furthermore, the authors favored to interview respondents with different backgrounds and roles in the city center in order to understand the phenomenon from different perspectives. As mentioned above, it was important that others did not affect the respondents, and as such, interviews tended to be the most suitable method for data collection. It was also decided to use the semi-structured approach to qualitative interviewing because the authors wanted to have a somewhat loose structure of the interviews in order to be able to touch upon areas that were not thought of before the sessions. However, it was important to cover the chosen components of place branding, which led to the creation of two interview guides and as a result, the semi-structured approach was selected.

3.4.4 Operationalization

The operationalization is based on the chosen theory of place branding and the different components that are relevant for city centers. The first column brings up the different components included in the place branding theories. The second column defines the model and the different components in order to get an understanding of what they mean and leads to the operational definition. The third column describes the operational definition of the components in order to get an understanding of their importance. The fourth and final column states the variables that measure the theories in the empirical material and analysis.
Table 2. Operationalization.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theory</th>
<th>Definition of theory</th>
<th>Operationalization of theory</th>
<th>Measurement</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Brand evaluation</strong></td>
<td>Is the feedback of the experience and the brand image from visitors (Hanna &amp; Rowley, 2011)</td>
<td>Gives insight of the importance of the evaluation of the place brand.</td>
<td>Brand evaluation through market research.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Stakeholder engagement</strong></td>
<td>Are the identification, interests and interactions of the stakeholders in the place brand (Hanna &amp; Rowley, 2011)</td>
<td>Gives insight of the importance of the stakeholders included in the place brand.</td>
<td>Partnerships, networks and cooperation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Infrastructure</strong></td>
<td>Is the interplay of functional and experiential infrastructure attributes of the place brand, where the former is tangible and the latter intangible (Hanna &amp; Rowley, 2011)</td>
<td>Gives insight of the role infrastructure has in the place brand.</td>
<td>Functional (tangible) and experiential (intangible) attributes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Brand identity</strong></td>
<td>Is the soul of the place brand, what it is and how it is built (Hanna &amp; Rowley, 2011)</td>
<td>Gives insight of the place brand’s identity.</td>
<td>Image and culture.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Brand architecture</strong></td>
<td>Is the construct of the place brand’s main brand and its sub-brands and how to manage them (Hanna &amp; Rowley, 2011)</td>
<td>Gives insight of the role architecture has in the place brand.</td>
<td>Portfolio of stakeholders.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Brand articulation</strong></td>
<td>Is the visual and verbal expression of the place brand (Hanna &amp; Rowley, 2011)</td>
<td>Gives insight of the articulation in the place brand.</td>
<td>Verbal and visual identity.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Brand communication</strong></td>
<td>Is the means of communication of the place brand’s identity to internal and external stakeholders (Hanna &amp; Rowley, 2011)</td>
<td>Gives insight of the brand communication processes in the place brand.</td>
<td>Secondary and integrated communication.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Word of mouth</strong></td>
<td>Is the spreading of positive or negative feedback of the place brand between visitors (Hanna &amp; Rowley, 2011)</td>
<td>Gives insight of the spreading of positive/negative word of mouth when a place is branded.</td>
<td>Listen to visitors’ opinions on the Internet or in real life.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Brand experience</strong></td>
<td>Is the experience the visitors get when visiting the place. Perceptions of the experience are created and the visitors will be able to interpret the image and identity of the brand based on how they perceived the place (Hanna &amp; Rowley, 2011).</td>
<td>Gives insight of the importance the experience has in the place brand.</td>
<td>Services and sensory experiences.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
3.4.5 Interview guide

The interview guide is an assisting help for the researcher in order to remember the topics that should be covered during the interview. The guide don’t necessarily need to consist of words, it can be anything that relates to the subject that should be discussed, such as a figure or a table. As mentioned above, it is important that the interview guide reflects the flexibility qualitative interviews have, in order to be able to elaborate on the interviewees’ perspectives and social world (Turner, 2010 and Bryman & Bell, 2011).

In order for the interview to be as good as possible, it is important that the researcher is familiar with the interview guide (Bryman & Bell, 2011). In order to get familiar with the guide, the researcher can include some basic elements in the guide that is likely to strengthen the interview. The guide should have a logical order in order for the questions to flow in an understandable manner. However, since the interview is flexible, the researcher needs to be able to alter the order of the questions if needed. It is also important that the questions are able to answer the research questions and is formulated in a way that suits the topic and that is understandable for the interviewee (Bryman & Bell, 2011).

Two interview guides were made in order to customize the questions to each category that participated. The first interview guide (See appendix 1) was suited for the experts working with place branding. The main idea with this guide was to cover all the place branding components that are applicable for city centers and to explore how the experts think and work with these different components. The second interview guide (See appendix 2) was made in order to fit the local stakeholders, such as restaurants, cafés and shops within a city center. The aim with this guide was to get an understanding of how the local stakeholders view the branding process of a city center and what they feel are important when making a city center more attractive.

3.5 Sampling

Robinson (2014) argues that qualitative sampling involves four steps. The first step is to define a sample universe, meaning that the researcher should select a target population, which then have to include an inclusion or an exclusion criteria showing what cases that qualifies or disqualifies for participation in the research. The next step involves deciding on the sample
size or the sample size range by looking at the practical and ideal relevance meaning that it might be more relevant to have a range stretching from minimum to maximum of respondents rather than deciding on an exact number. The third step is about deciding on a sample strategy, and since this study has a qualitative focus it should be decided to use a purposive strategy. The final step is to source the sample and then start to interview the selected cases (Robinson, 2014).

There are mainly three types of probability sampling techniques, *random sampling*, *stratified sampling* and *cluster sampling*, however, an alternative method of sampling is called *theoretical sampling* and is connected to grounded theory (Bryman & Bell, 2011). Random sampling means that each unit in a chosen population has an equal chance of being selected in the sample. Stratified sampling is a sample where the researcher wants to have several relevant groups in one sample that complement different areas of interest and is combined with random sampling. Cluster sampling, on the other hand, is a sample that is chosen on a geographical base, such as a hospital or a neighborhood (Teddlie & Yu, 2007). Sampling in qualitative research is most frequently connected with some kind of purposive sampling. Purposive sampling is a type of nonprobability sampling where the researcher chooses whom to interview rather than randomly select units out of a sample (Teddlie & Yu, 2007 and Bryman & Bell, 2011). Purposive sampling aims to strategically sample respondents that are of major interest for the research, meaning that the respondents are selected because they have specific knowledge regarding a social phenomenon (Bryman & Bell, 2011 and Robinson, 2014).

Theoretical sampling is, as mentioned above, clearly connected to grounded theory. The main feature with theoretical sampling is the ability for the researcher to collect data based on theory while finding patterns and analyzing the data, which indicates that the process is flowing, moving back and forth. Furthermore, the researcher do a sample based both on the collected data, and on the number of respondents. When the researcher finds that enough data has been collected, there is no need to collect even more, and therefore, moves on to new theories and respondents that are relevant for the new ones. This stage is called theoretical saturation and simply means that the existing data is enough to be able to draw conclusions and that new data would not contribute, instead only repeat what has already been said on the subject (Bryman & Bell, 2011).
This study was based on a non-probability sampling technique, and more specifically a purposive sampling. The use of a purposive sampling allowed the researchers to pick respondents they felt were particularly relevant for the subject. Furthermore, it also allowed the researchers to exclude people that would not contribute with desired in-depth data. Theoretical sampling was also used since the researchers wanted to be able to have a flexible data collection process and this type of sampling is also connected to grounded theory, which was used when analyzing the data. Theoretical sampling helped the researchers to predict that enough information about the specific topic was collected, hence, moving forward in the data collection process. As a result, two groups of people were interviewed, experts working with place branding, and stakeholders, such as local shops, restaurants and other service providers, that are a part of forming the place brand. It was important to get both of the group’s perspective of how to create and enhance the place brand since the experts and the stakeholders could have different views of the place brand.

### 3.5.1 Sample selection

This study includes seven interviews with respondents that are involved in creating and forming the place brand. The goal was to conduct five to ten interviews, but after the seventh interview the authors felt they had been provided with enough data that would help to understand how to brand a city center. However, since the sampling procedure was formed around theoretical sampling and saturation, no exact number of interviews was decided. Instead, the data itself helped to predict when enough information had been collected.

The respondents were divided into experts and stakeholders, where the experts were the ones having fundamental knowledge regarding place brands and the stakeholders were the ones operating at the place, such as shops and restaurants. This resulted in a mix of expertise and perspectives, which yielded a deep and broad understanding of what is important in order to enhance a city centers’ attractiveness. The organizations the respondents’ work for can be found in Appendix 3. The respondents are anonymous as far as to the name however their employers are public to show their credibility in the area. The authors put more emphasis on the expert's point of view since they were regarded as having the most knowledge and power to influence the place brand. The stakeholders provided information that complemented what the experts said and added a new dimension to the data by contributing with a different perspective. Locals and visitors of city centers were not taken into consideration during this
study since the focus was to get a strategic base of knowledge, which only persons working with place branding and stakeholders operating at the place can provide. It is important to bear in mind that locals and visitors could have some kind of knowledge, but they would most probably have little or no experience of such questions, which in turn decreases the trustworthiness of their answers.

3.5.2 Interviews with the experts
The initial interviews during this study were conducted with experts working with place brands. As this study was focusing on city centers, people working with city centers in particular were interviewed in order to get an understanding of what components of place branding theories that are relevant to apply on city centers. In addition, an interview with an external consultancy organization that has years of expertise in the area was conducted. This resulted in a mix of data, including several perspectives of how to think and what components to involve when branding city centers. The questions that were asked when interviewing the experts can be found in the interview guide in Appendix 1. These questions were based on the operationalization found in Table 2 and the interviews were recorded in agreement with the respondents and all interviews lasted for 30 to 40 minutes. Since all of the respondents were native Swedish speakers, all questions and answers were given in Swedish, which later on was transcribed and translated into English.

3.5.3 Interviews with the stakeholders
When the experts had been interviewed, stakeholders were next. The purpose of interviewing stakeholders was to get input from actors working in city centers. The stakeholders within city centers form its identity and therefore it was important to gain data from them to understand what components of place branding they value in a city center and how they believe they can be utilized. The questions were adapted to the stakeholders’ level of knowledge regarding the place branding theories and sometimes, additional explanations were needed in order for them to understand a specific question. The interviews were recorded in agreement with the respondents and took approximately 20 to 30 minutes. Furthermore, they were held in Swedish but were transcribed and translated into English. The interview guide for the stakeholders can be found in Appendix 2 and even though the questions were adapted, they followed the same logic as the operationalization found in Table 2.
3.6 Analysis of collected data

Qualitative research often generates a large amount of data, which can be problematic for the researcher to handle. Researchers tend to get confused when starting to analyze qualitative data since there are not many well-cited rules for analyzing it. However, the most common way of analyzing qualitative data is by approaching it through a thematic analysis. This approach has not a strict set of strategies to follow. Instead, the researcher makes the analysis out of themes from the data. Searching for themes from the collected data is a frequent way of analyzing it and one approach is to use grounded theory (Bryman & Bell, 2011).

3.6.1 Grounded theory

Grounded theory is theory that has been derived from data, which are then gathered and analyzed during the research (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). The emphasis lies in the managing of words and what they mean (Walker & Myrick, 2006). The purpose of grounded theory is to approach the data in a systematic way to be able to see patterns and connections. The analysis of the collected data and the theories are tightly connected. Grounded theory has two central aspects to consider, the first being that it is concerned with development of theories from data and that the data collection and analysis should be synchronized, meaning that they should refer back and forth to each other (Bryman & Bell, 2011). Grounded theory is favorable to use when the researcher, for example, needs to capture complexity of different contexts, when areas of research have not been widely explored, and when linking theory with practical actions. Despite the advantages of grounded theory, it often fails to result in new theories in that it manage to put forward new concepts but fails to create a solid explanation of them and the process is often time-consuming (Walker & Myrick, 2006; Denzin & Lincoln, 2011 and Bryman & Bell, 2011).

3.6.1.1 Coding in grounded theory

Coding is seen as the key feature of grounded theory in that it breaks down data into parts and put labels on the components, which could be of relevance for the study. Coding is the first step in generating theories and is likely to be of constant state of revision. It is important that the researcher treats the data as potential indicators that are likely to lead to new theories or results (Bryman & Bell, 2011).
According to Bryman and Bell (2011), three types of coding techniques are frequently used among the research community named open coding, axial coding and selective coding. Open coding is the stage where data is broken down, examined, compared, conceptualized and categorized, which leads to the labeling of names of the data, which are later turned into categories. Axial coding tries to put back data in new ways by linking codes to different contexts, consequences and patterns of interaction and to causes. Selective coding is the last stage in the coding procedure and emphasizes the selection of core categories that is related to other categories, which later on leads to the final result (Walker & Myrick, 2006 and Bryman & Bell, 2011).

When the authors had conducted the interviews, they were transcribed and compared in order to find patterns that could be connected to the components. Superfluous data that did not contribute to clarify the components were erased in order to not take focus from the most important data. This study used a qualitative approach including semi-structured interviews, which resulted in a large amount of data that was somewhat difficult to handle. Since this study explored which place branding components that are essential when branding city centers, the presentation of the data needed to be clear in order to understand how it could be coded to the different components. When analyzing the data, the authors followed the process of open coding, axial coding and selective coding, by firstly code the data into different themes depending on which of the components they should belong to. Then the authors tried to put the data into new contexts, to see if it could be used in several components. Lastly, the authors compared the different components to see if they were related to each other and if some components should be tied together as one, which resulted in new components adapted for city centers. A coding scheme can be found in Appendix 5.

3.7 Ethics in business research

Bryman and Bell (2011) argue that ethics in research often comes down to the values that surround the research process. Essential points to take into consideration could be how the researchers should treat the respondents or if the researchers should form relationships with them or not. Another point to take into consideration is the privacy aspect of being part of the research. For instance, if the respondents want to be anonymous, it shall be accepted by the researchers (Bryman & Bell, 2011). Furthermore, Market Research Society (MRS) has created codes of conduct the researcher should follow when conducting a qualitative research.
The researchers should inform the respondents that the session is voluntary, they should be straightforward and honest, they should stick to the area of interest and be transparent and they should respect the respondents’ rights and well being (MRS, 2014). Furthermore, the researchers should ensure that being part of the study does not harm the respondents, meaning that the respondents should not be harmed physically or psychologically (Bryman & Bell, 2011 and MRS, 2014). The researcher should also ensure that the respondents are not risking future employment and career prospects by being part of the research (Bryman & Bell, 2011).

This study was in need for interviews providing in-depth data, which required the authors to let the respondents develop their answers for an unlimited time. Before the interview sessions, the respondents were introduced to the study and were given as much information as they wanted and they were also allowed to ask questions about the study in order to be sure that no inconsistencies would occur during or after the interviews. Furthermore, the respondents were also promised to be anonymous in order for them to feel that they could answer the questions without thinking of their wording and if they had any criticisms towards the current state of the city centers. During the interviews, it was important that the respondents were not stressed and felt they had the freedom to develop their answers. The authors aimed to be as transparent as possible by sticking to the subject and they also tried to be as neutral as possible when asking questions in order for the respondents not to be influenced in any way. After the interviews, all respondents wanted to have a copy of the final study, which the authors highly emphasized since this would increase the credibility of the study and also help to promote and spread the word of how to brand city centers to people that work or are interested in the area.

3.8 Quality criteria in business research

Reliability, replicability and validity are three criteria used to ensure the quality of researches (Bryman & Bell, 2011).

3.8.1 Reliability

Reliability seeks to study if the results of the research are repeatable and is often used to see if the measures used in the research are consistent. This means that the results of a particular research should be the same if other researchers performed the same research again (Riege,
2003 and Bryman & Bell, 2011). Riege (2003) writes that when conducting a qualitative case study, reliability should be proved when the researchers give detailed explanations of what, why and how they have conducted the research. Furthermore, he states that all important steps and argumentations should be clearly clarified so others can follow the process, theories should be fully outlined, comparisons and discussion of pros and cons with issues in research designs and approaches should be highlighted, data collection procedures should be recorded and the researchers should be as concrete as possible (Riege, 2003).

Replication is close to reliability and means that researchers choose to replicate findings of others when the findings don’t match recent evidence. In other words, if a study is replicable, it means that same results of an old study have appeared once again (Bryman & Bell, 2011). Bryman and Bell (2011) argue that replication could be hard to achieve in qualitative research since it impossible to stop the time and the social construct that were present at that point in time and get the exact same result if conducting the same study again in a later stage.

In this study, reliability was proven by providing detailed information about how the study was conducted, especially in the methodology chapter, which should provide other researchers with enough information to be able to conduct this study once again and getting similar results. The operationalization, Table 2, and the interview guides, Appendix 1-2, could be of importance for other researchers since they could simply use the measurement tools and questions and put them into their own context.

3.8.2 Validity

Validity aims to check the integrity of the conclusions of a study. Content, external and construct validity are applicable for qualitative studies and will be discussed below (Bryman & Bell, 2011).

3.8.2.1 Content validity

Measuring content validity is seen as an important aspect in research since it emphasizes the degree to which the measures reflect the components that are examined and should ideally be looked over before collecting the data (Yaghmale, 2003).
This study conducted two pretests of the interview guides before the first interview was conducted. Two peer students participated and gave their thoughts about them, which resulted in modifications of some and others were excluded since they were seen as similar or not measuring the intended component. Furthermore, a lecturer at the University gave his input on them as well, which also contributed to the content validity.

3.8.2.2 External validity

External validity studies the degree to which findings can be generalized in and around social settings. External validity is commonly concerned with case studies since case studies often deals with a small sample and thereby affects the generalizability and in turn the external validity (Bryman & Bell, 2011). Case studies rely on analytical generalization meaning that findings are generalized to broader theories and aims at understanding and exploring the developed theories in relation to the collected empirical evidence in the case to be studied (Riege, 2003).

This study used a cross-sectional research design, focusing on city centers, and especially Växjö’s city center. However, influences from outside of Växjö, such as Jönköping and Ängelholm were incorporated as well. As a result, the created model of the components of place branding that are essential when branding city centers could be used in any particular city center. Furthermore, since the interviewees had different positions and relations to place brands, several perspectives and inputs were given. However, this does not mean that the study is fully generalizable rather it creates a spectrum of knowledge by taking several perspectives into account.

3.8.2.3 Construct validity

Construct validity is commonly referred to as the extent to which an operationalization of concepts measures what they are intended to measure (Bagozzi et al, 1991 and Riege, 2003). Riege (2003) emphasizes the importance to give credibility where credibility is needed, hence, using several sources to strengthen the measurable concepts.

In this study, the construct validity is founded on the operationalization found in Table 2. The operationalization outlines how the components of place branding are measured and what insight they give in the process of branding city centers. The seven respondents also secured
the construct validity as they had different knowledge regarding the place branding processes and were representing different parts of organizations and areas in Sweden. Their answers were compared and they showed to match the intended purpose of the operationalization.

### 3.9 Source criticism

Source criticism is the process of evaluating whether a source could be seen as valid or not. When conducting research, having valid and reliable sources are of importance in order to make it as trustworthy as possible (Thurén, 2005).

Linnaeus and Lund University have created similar guidelines for how to evaluate sources. As a result, these guidelines were taken into consideration when evaluating the chosen articles in this study (LU, 2013 and LNU 1, 2013). Criteria to take into consideration when evaluating a source could be if there was information about the author(s) and the institution he or she belongs to. Is the source’s purpose to sell or to inform? Further considerations are if the article hints subjective or objective thoughts, and if the facts could be considered as correct. Publication date was also an important aspect to evaluate, however, the authors emphasized a spread in the time-span of the articles (LNU 1, 2013).

LU (2013) and LNU 2 (2014) have given more points to look on when evaluating sources. It is important to notice that scientific articles could have several appearances but they usually have the following elements:

- **Abstract**, including a short overall summary of the article.
- **Introduction**, including background information.
- **Methodology**, including information about the research process
- **Results**, including the results of the research
- **Discussion**, including conclusions and reflections of the research
- **References**, including all sources used during the research

In addition to the points mentioned above, a scientific article should also be peer reviewed, meaning that experts within the particular area should have critically examined the article prior to publication (LNU 2, 2014). If the article reaches the desired level of quality, it becomes published (Coniam, 2012). The expert only review the journal the article is
published in, which means that even if a journal as a whole is regarded as scientific, some articles published in it, could be regarded as not being scientific. With regard to what has previously been said, it is important to do some sort of overall evaluation when looking at articles. Ulrichsweb is a database where all journals are published and the researcher could use it when checking if a journal is scientific (LNU 2, 2014).

The chosen articles to be included in this study were found on three databases, OneSearch, Business source premier (BSP) and Google Scholar. These databases were used since they provided a mix of journals, covering most of the articles ever published (EbscoHost, 2015). The articles selected for this study were examined by looking at the criteria outlined above. It was important that the articles contained most of the elements a scientific article should have, i.e. an abstract, an introduction, a methodology, a discussion and a reference list. The authors also looked at if the journal the article was published in was regarded as scientific. If the journal was not regarded as scientific, the authors had a discussion and looked at the other criteria. If the other criteria were fulfilled and if the article was relevant for this study, the authors chose to include it anyway. Further considerations taken into account were if the article contained information about the authors, if the intention was to inform or to sell and if the information in the article could be regarded as reliable. The authors also looked at citations of the articles since they found it important to use articles that were regarded among other researchers in the field. The authors’ aim were to only use articles with high citations and exclude the ones with few, but exceptions could be made if articles were seen as relevant to use in this study.
3.10 Summary of the methods

The table below presents the main methods used in this study.

Table 3. Summary of the methods used in the study.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Chosen method</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Research approach</td>
<td>Deductive and qualitative approach.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Research design</td>
<td>Cross-sectional research design.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data sources</td>
<td>Primary sources.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Method for data collection</td>
<td>Semi-structured interviews.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sampling</td>
<td>Non-probability purposive sampling and theoretical sampling.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Analysis of collected data</td>
<td>Grounded theory and coding.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethics in business research</td>
<td>Anonymous participants, clear information and explanations before, during and after the interviews, no harm, unstressed and comfortable participants and transparency.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quality criteria in business research</td>
<td>Reliability, replication, content validity, external validity and construct validity.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Source criticism</td>
<td>Guidelines on how to evaluate sources and looking at different elements included in the sources.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
4.0 Empirical investigation

This chapter presents the data that was collected by conducting seven interviews with experts and stakeholders operating at city centers. The chapter is divided into the nine different components suggested by Hanna and Rowley (2011).

4.1 Brand evaluation

According to most of the respondents, a city center should offer a wide variety of offerings and have a good mixture of different businesses that pleases the visitors’ needs and wants. There should be a mix of clothing stores, restaurants, pubs and bars, shoe stores, opticians, book stores, jewelry stores and so forth. Some general examples of what is needed in city centers was given, such as a pleasant atmosphere that matches with the image and identity of the place, the attractiveness and appearance of the place, with for instance logos, engagement of stakeholders. They should also have many different kinds of offerings that give an experience to customers and lastly, create and maintain good customer relationships with the visitors.

Several respondents highlighted the importance of creating a pleasant and nice atmosphere in a city center and explained that it is one of the main reasons why individuals visit it. The store managers gave an example that if a city center is perceived as cozy, ideally the businesses should also correspond to that feeling in their stores to create a unified message to individuals, however, they explained that it is hard since different businesses have different concepts to follow.

Four of the experts within place branding stated that the most important tool to use when branding a place is the people who live there. In order for a city to satisfy demands of individuals, city centers must first understand the individuals and create knowledge of what is needed and wanted. When asking the respondents about how a city center can ensure that the different stakeholders supply the needs the visitors have, the answers were all the same. Both the store managers and the experts said that it is important to consistently ask visitors and to be close to them. Five respondents emphasized that it is important to get in touch with the locals, create relationships and engagement together in order to get feedback, while others suggested different kinds of market research, for instance surveys. Several experts said that
they usually hire a firm that collect feedback for them, while the store managers stated that they encourage individuals to write to them.

All of the respondents answered that it is possible to measure visits statistically both physically and digitally and that the data is used to understand the behaviors of the visitors. Four experts also highlighted that it is common to measure what effects a city center has got when individuals have visited it, often in terms of how much money they have spent when being there. Furthermore, one project leader developed that in the end, place branding is about marketing the place in order to generate more revenue, for instance through taxes that can be reinvested by the local community within a city center. The respondents had a variety of answers of how to create an image of a city center that will match the visitors’ impressions, beliefs and desires. The store managers stated that it is essential for a city center that things are happening. Some examples they brought up was that there should be new offerings continuously, a wide range of offerings, good infrastructure and availability for the visitors.

4.2 Stakeholder engagement (Management)

The respondents agreed upon the fact that there is a need for cooperation between local stakeholders and different organizations. In order to make a city center as attractive as possible, offerings should be tied together, and the stakeholders should get to know each other on a deeper level. All respondents pointed out cooperation as a key to success in the long-term perspective. Both store managers and the experts said that a main organization should work with the treatment of visitors, a complementary offering and to promote and perform marketing activities to compete against a city centers competitors.

One representative from PlaceBrander said that it is crucial to involve the local stakeholders when promoting a city center since they are the foundation of its identity and most likely the reason why people will return. Two experts and one store manager said that cooperation would not come without conflicts and different thoughts of why and how things should be managed. Therefore it is important to promote the place as a whole but also to make use of its different ingredients that adds to the overall place brand. Two experts and both of the store managers expressed that a city center should help stakeholders to come to a compromise when internal conflicts arises. Both of the store managers stated that it is important to build a strong relationship from the start with its competitors and make up some kind of a plan
together in order to help and work together. Also, Citysamverkan said that it is important that different businesses take their own responsibility of playing fair, which will decrease conflicts. Furthermore, PlaceBrander said that in order for the stakeholders to be willing to cooperate, they must feel they gain something in return and that it is worth the effort of putting some extra time and money on it. In the end of the day, it is cooperation that will be the difference of failure and success and the local stakeholders have to understand that cooperation will pay off in the long-term.

Two experts meant that even if organizations emphasize cooperation, they should also have respect for some stakeholders that might have economical difficulties, or have rules to follow from their national bosses and, as a result, won’t be able to participate in such activities. One store manager insisted on having their own free will, and has the right to offer whatever they would like to offer. Citysamverkan said that the stores’ offers should fit the demand of the locals and also, if possible, fit what surrounding stores have to offer. Furthermore, the other store manager didn’t think that a city center is able to think of all the stores, restaurants and other service providers at the same time and were skeptical to if some stakeholders will gain more and some less if having too much cooperation. However, she still insisted that cooperation to some extent is good. Both of the store managers said that organizations can help stakeholders with marketing and arrange happenings but they didn’t think they should interfere with individual stores.

It was not only cooperation between the organization and the stakeholders operating at a city center that were emphasized among the respondents. Some experts and one store manager also stated that they encouraged stakeholders to cooperate with each other because it is likely to create an environment characterized with kindness and friendship and a one for all, all for one spirit. One expert expressed that she felt that many stores tend to get into conflict with each other and that cooperation between stakeholders would create a better environment for everyone.

Citysamverkan said that trends are often analyzed and thereafter strategies for how to meet these trends are created, which could lead to repositioning of different stores. For example, if a store is considered as functioning better somewhere else along the main street, it has happened that some stakeholders have switched locations, which is a good example of cooperation between them. One project leader said that cooperation between the stakeholders
could be about what times the stores should be open. She developed that it is stupid that a city center doesn’t match competitors opening hours and that it is important to start to think of if the stores in a city center are able to change their opening times to adapt and compete in a better way. Furthermore she draws parallels to an ordinary family where the parents usually work until four or five P.M. and won’t have time to visit a city center if the stores close at six P.M. As a result they will visit a shopping mall or another marketplace, which has longer opening hours. One important factor in this example would be the property owners, which have to understand that they also need to adapt to the visitors’ demands. An idea would be to open the stores one hour later and close one or two hours later since not many visitors comes to a city center between 10 and 11 A.M. in the weekdays according to the project leader.

4.3 Infrastructure (Regeneration)

Two of the experts brought up that the use of city centers had changed and explained that in the past, city centers were used solely for shopping, however today it is used differently. The experts said that it is important to think of a city centers’ infrastructure as a package and that city centers should have restaurants, cafés, cultural activities and other facilities. Furthermore, one of the store managers developed that a city center should be built according to visitors’ different desires. The same respondent continued that this creates a dilemma since it is hard to match all the desires. PlaceBrander commented that the municipality has to take responsibility to make sure that the infrastructure of a city center functions as it should and stated that there is many puzzle pieces that have to come together. Some examples of what should be taken into consideration was that it is important to think about how individuals travel to a city center, how accessible the parking lots are, how much parking lots there should be, the cost of parking the car and how businesses are located. One project leader expressed that an example of how to attract more people to a city center could be to have free buses that goes to the city center from a specific location. It is also essential to make sure that a city center is adapted for people with disabilities even though the buildings adapted for the disabled can become less attractive.

One of the store managers expressed that the most important thing to keep in mind when building a city center is the image, identity and appearance in order to attract visitors. The other store manager stated that a city center should be built according to tradition and culture because they are lasting attributes. Additionally, PlaceBrander also brought up that the digital
infrastructure is at least as important as the physical infrastructure. A part of the digital infrastructure could be to offer free wireless Internet access within a city center, which can enhance the experience. She said that since we live in a time where social media plays a large part of our everyday life, it is important for people to have access to the internet wherever they are e.g. at restaurants, cafés and shops etc.

All respondents stated that the landscape, parks, public spaces and buildings were important when branding a city center. A city center must bring out what is beautiful and have a lot of green parks since this make it more pleasant and attracts individuals. One project leader also emphasized that culture make a city center desirable for locals and other visitors.

All of the respondents stated that it is important how businesses are located in a city center. One store manager said that since people are very commercially influenced, they want to be where everyone and everything else is. She also stated that it is therefore crucial that there are different kinds of businesses located in the same place. The other store manager said that it is not as important for well-known businesses because people will look for them, however it can be essential for small local businesses. Furthermore, several experts voiced their opinion that businesses have discovered that it is good to have local competition since it makes it easier to compare and compete.

### 4.4 Brand identity

All respondents said that the identity of the place should be based on who we are, what we like and what our contribution to the people is and that there is no point of creating an identity that is fake. Everyone said it is better to create an identity that is real and have some kind of substance in the visitors’ identity. Furthermore, PlaceBrander stated that in order to create a strong identity, it is good to start to create it from the locals and then take influences from possible visitors that don’t live in the city to find a red thread and create a balance between them. She emphasized that the locals are most important since they will be the foundation of what the identity will be. However, in order to be able to attract others, the identity needs to be formed in a way that fits others living in different places as well. One store manager expressed that in order for the identity to be as strong as possible, people working with these questions need to have extensive knowledge about the place, the locals living there and how different cultures function.
One expert said that there are a lot of tools to use to create an identity with a red thread. For example, you can draw a triangle between the words “place”, “locals” and “other visitors” and put up interactive solutions between these words to see the similarities and differences of them in an easier way. PlaceBrander said that it could be hard to know how others perceive the identity of a city center and one way of getting more knowledge of that is to conduct a national analysis to get feedback when creating an identity. The same respondent also said that the national analysis is important since it is usually a very big difference of how locals perceive the place and how others perceive it. The challenge is to decrease this gap because the aim should be to have a perfect match between the locals and others, which is very difficult to achieve. Citysamverkan stated that it is important to analyze how the visitors behave and act, who they are and how well stores and service providers manage to correspond to their behaviors. She also pointed out that creating a unified identity is hard, especially in city centers, since it is not allowed to do whatever one want with the buildings etc. Furthermore she mentioned that it could be an advantage to incorporate more identities in a city center since it will connect to more visitors.

Two experts encouraged making use of the people living in the particular place, both famous and locals. Furthermore they said that local famous people have a level of attraction that stretches beyond others and they are or have been, idols for many locals that believe in them. By incorporating them in the identity will strengthen the trustworthiness of it. One project leader wanted to highlight the image of the place as reflecting the identity. A city center should have a clear image that is favorable to make the place brand easily recognizable. Furthermore the experts highlighted that it is important to not create an image of a city center that is too comprehensive and says too much, instead, it should be concise and interesting. Two of them also developed their answers and said that it is better to create a niche in order to stand out and be unique. Citysamverkan expressed that the image can be reflected by how you communicate with your audience. For example, by having warm and welcoming commercials or in the way social media is used.

4.5 Brand architecture

Three experts and both of the store managers stated that it is important to bring out the best of every city center by creating a wide range of businesses that don’t copy each other. Citysamverkan developed that it is about trying to create alliances in order to entice customers
to go to various businesses. Citysamverkan also brought up that whenever there is something new visitors become very interested for a while and then it subsides and the excitement decrease, therefore it is important that a city center helps stakeholders to come with both new and fresh offerings and activities. City centers must feel that there is a drive and a willingness to develop and help local businesses and make them more available.

Several experts stated that there should be a mix of supplies, such as restaurants, bars, stores, cafés and so on. In addition, there should be a basic range of products, and then the offerings should go in one direction in order to create a strong city center brand. It is important to find tips and niches. Also, there should be a variety of quality products and prices that attract different target groups. Additionally, one of the store managers explained that the offerings of suppliers have turned to a more experienced economy and that businesses must think of creating an experience with their products or services. Also, most importantly is to have a range of experiences in a city center that individuals can combine with, for instance, shopping experiences and food experiences.

4.6 Brand articulation

All respondents except two said that brand articulation is either important or very important. For example, Citysamverkan mentioned that the articulation of logos should be used frequently throughout all of the marketing activities and is intended to reflect a city center’s identity. Furthermore, one store manager emphasized that the articulation should be modern and simplistic so it is easily recognizable, both for a city center and its different stakeholders. Another store manager said that the visual identity is crucial since it plays a big role in the recognition of a city center and also how it is likely to be perceived by potential visitors. She also noted that everyone that operates in a city center have to critically examine their articulation to come up with more creative solutions that lies closer to the visitors’ identity.

One project leader mentioned that there is homework to be done when it comes to communicating a city center externally and displaying the stakeholders’ offers internally. She mentioned that one interesting example of articulating an offer is by promoting how many opticians a city center has and that “this city center is the shit if you are looking for a pair of good looking glasses”. Both of the project leaders expressed that articulation is hard to work with when it comes to colors of the buildings and making them livelier. Even though this aspect is hard, they said that it is still important to try to do as much of this as possible in
order to beautify a city center. Small parts, such as repairing visual damage, working with lighting, flags and signs will definitely contribute to a better perception of a city centers identity.

PlaceBrander and one store manager did not favor brand articulation and said that the visual identity is not as important as the content of the place brand. PlaceBrander and the store manager stated that articulation is good in order to create associations whereas visual identity helps to build consistency and recognition and place brands always begin with the content, such as the people, feelings and words. Furthermore, PlaceBrander mentioned that articulation and identity are small puzzle pieces that should be put together but that articulation comes last in the cycle.

4.7 Brand communication

According to all of the respondents, the most relevant communication channels when city centers wants to inform individuals are social media platforms. The respondents stated that social media is very important today since it is a central part of people's everyday lives. Two experts brought up that city centers could take advantage of this since they know where they can find individuals. Some examples of the types of social media that is most effective are Facebook and Instagram. One store manager said that it is important to be active on the social platforms businesses find most effective for themselves. Businesses must be curious to see what visitors think of them and their brands. One project leader further developed that city centers should focus on a few social platforms and do it really well, instead of being everywhere and doing half the job. However, having a website, Facebook and a combination of personal meetings are success factors. One of the store managers explained that city centers should work towards bringing local business into the digital world. She expressed that it is important for local businesses to give out knowledge and information.

One project leader said that it is important for city centers to create attention so that their messages spread on social media. It is challenging to get everyone to like what you do because there is always a group that is critical and undermines the work a city center does. One store manager emphasized that traditional marketing in form of flyers, newspapers and screens are also important and that city centers should not forget about them.
While some of the experts said that a city center should communicate that it is for everyone, both of the store managers stated that a city center should have a mixture of stores in order to attract a larger target market. However, Citysamverkan expressed that a city center should focus on fewer target groups in order to communicate more efficient. They gave the example that 30-55 year old have the most purchasing power and that city centers could focus on attracting them in order to increase the likelihood of revenues. One store manager said that a city center should try to create a package of what it represents and create a message that reflects that representation. The other store manager discussed that since there are so many and different types of businesses that are both local and chains, it is very hard to have one unified message. Furthermore, three experts also said that most cities are often known for something special. For instance Växjö is known as being the greenest city in Europe, however this does not incorporate a city center only, rather the whole city. One store manager developed this discussion and said that a city center could take advantage of what the city is known for and use it in order to create a message.

### 4.8 Word of mouth

All respondents said that word of mouth is probably the hardest component to affect but it is still important to be aware of the rumors that are spread about city centers. Also it is important to try to meet criticism by putting down extra hard work on the things that are questioned by the visitors.

Citysamverkan said that it is important to actively work with word of mouth by being present on social medias, where there is an opportunity to share pictures, to give explanations and to be close to the visitors. Furthermore, two other experts also emphasized the opportunity to take part of discussions and to be able to give answers directly to the visitors in order to kill bad rumors quickly. One project leader explained that social medias have enabled organizations to take part of how visitors discuss, what they think and what they value, which is a good platform to stand on when working with the development of a city center. All respondents agreed on that it is mostly the positive word of mouth that is taken into account and that negative word of mouth is used if the criticism is constructive and justified. However, some of the experts also said that it is important to carefully consider criticism since it can have a damaging outcome for a city center. One project leader expressed that it is
hard to know where to draw the line towards criticism, meaning that some criticisms are true and some are false.

The store managers said that positive word of mouth is created when the visitors come to the stores and get qualitative customer service. They said that every store needs to work on how they treat their customers and that you can come far enough by only focusing on this aspect to create positive word of mouth, which also is likely to create long-term relationships. One of the store managers said that this is a win-win situation since both the stores and city centers will profit from it in the long run. On the other hand, Citysamverkan said that what city center organizations can work with in order to gain positive word of mouth is to inform the stakeholders about important aspects in their customer treatment, how they display themselves, and also that the organization arrange happenings and make sure to have an appealing environment in a city center. The same respondent also highlighted that it is important to focus on the things that are good and try to avoid the negative ones and painted up a common situation where it is usual to complain about parking fees. Instead of focusing on the cost, one could highlight that there are free parking lots a bit further away and if the visitor wants to park really close, it has to pay a small fee for it.

**4.9 Brand experience**

Brand experience was regarded as the component that was most important among the respondents since the experience is the factor that makes people feel something when visiting a city center. Citysamverkan said that the experience in a city center is comprised of many things, such as the visual aspects, flowers, green parks and outstanding service. Furthermore, the respondents emphasized that a city center should feel alive by making use of parks and adding, for example, flowers here and there, which will provide a living atmosphere. Two experts and one store manager pointed out that using music, both from radios inside the stores, but also by having small-scale concerts in a city center could enhance the experience. Furthermore, one store manager emphasized the involvement of visual aspects whereas PlaceBrander emphasized smells, tastes and sights and said that restaurants can make use of smells and tastes to attract visitors. Citysamverkan said that smells could be hard to work with and that sight and sound are most important.
One project leader mentioned that feelings, such as warmth and playfulness are important when creating an experience. The same respondent also said that surprises of any kind often are well perceived by visitors, which should be used more frequently. Three experts emphasized the opportunity of making a city center alive and exciting by using cultural or famous persons that lives or originates from the city by using them as ambassadors when performing marketing activities. They can take part in co-branding processes to make a city center more attractive and exciting, because people who like a famous person tend to copy the person’s lifestyle in some manner, which could increase visitors to city centers.

One store manager mentioned that all stakeholders in a city center have a responsibility of enhancing the visitors’ experience by making the visitors having a good time and make sure that they feel welcome and are seen. One project leader predicted that the future will include less physical shopping as the online shopping has increased at a quick pace. She expressed that instead of physical shopping, visitors are likely to visit city centers because they want to have an experience rather than buying a new shirt. She thought that city centers have all the opportunities in the world to adapt and to increase the experiential desires visitors have.

Another project leader stated that Malmö has succeeded in creating a living marketplace named “Lilla Torg”, which is an excellent example of when experiences are enhanced by local stakeholders. She requested that more city centers should adopt this way of thinking by creating meeting points and, in this case, an area where they gather the restaurants and make some kind of food market, which enhances the experience of going out and eat dinner in a city center. Furthermore she said that it requires that many stakeholders go together and create a strategy that is likely to be favored by all operators in a city center.

All respondents were clear on the fact that different happenings, such as events and days with different themes are important to be able to create lasting experiences from a city center and to gain additional revenues. One project leader said that such activities should be used to complement the ordinary experience the visitors get from just walking through the pedestrian street on the weekdays. One store manager said that it could be useful to have events that connect to the city center’s identity. For example, if the city is known for sports, food or fashion, one can create events that cover these subjects. Three experts gave examples of how the culture could be embraced and emphasized that going to local concerts, staying at hotels, shopping and dining were a few ways of bringing out the culture of a city center and developed that it is a great opportunity to try to work with building experiences in a city.
center and that culture and art in public spaces is a good way to create different and fun experiences.

Two experts and one store manager mentioned that city centers need to have different events that attract different target groups. They expressed that if a city has popular sport teams, a city center can take advantage of this and create an event that is oriented towards that particular sport the team performs. If a city center wants to attract people that are not into sports, but like to hang out with friends and party, they can create an event that is oriented towards this instead. The project leader that suggested a party event was aware that such an event would not contribute to the stakeholders in the same way as other events but it is likely that those visitors would come back to the city center again in a later occasion for other purposes than partying. Another project leader highlighted that an event can make people come back and stay longer next time and contribute to a city center by for example stay at a hotel, visit different attractions, shop and eat at the restaurants in the city. This creates a cycle where many stakeholders can gain revenues. She stated that the visitor gets a broader experience and is able to consume more of what a city center has to offer.
5.0 Analysis

This chapter analyzes the empirical material by putting it in relation to the theories used in the theoretical chapter. Furthermore, interpretations of the empirical material in relation to the theories are made and the chapter is structured in the same way as the empirical chapter to make it easier for the reader.

5.1 Brand Evaluation

Evident from the empirical material, the concept of brand evaluation in the SPBM model can be useful in order to investigate which tools place branders can use. This is to collect feedback from visitors to create assumptions of how visitors perceive city centers. Pike (2007) and Hanna and Rowley (2011) proposed that brand evaluation is an adequate term instead of image evaluation. Thereby, it is agreed that the brand evaluation is a sufficient term to use since it incorporates everything of the brands components instead of only the image. By using brand evaluation alone it is possible to collect feedback of the image, identity, experience and the other components of the place brand.

In accordance with Anholt (2006), who declared that a place's image is often communicated through a mixture of promotional tools, many of the respondents suggested some attributes a city center should have in order to have a good place image. One of the most important attributes that were brought up several times was the variety of offerings and businesses. The majority of the respondents expressed that it is very important that a city center has a wide variety of businesses and offerings in order to match visitors’ impressions, beliefs and desires. Furthermore, other important attributes that was suggested as a way to communicate its image was a pleasant atmosphere and an attractive appearance, for example, in terms of logos that is highlighted by Blain et al. (2005) and engagement by stakeholders and value-creating customer relationships.

While Blain et al. (2005) suggested that the end goal of having brand evaluation is to create a place image that will attract visitors in order to increase revenue, the interviews showed that the starting point of doing so is by evaluating individuals. It came across that a city center must first of all understand the individuals and create knowledge of what they demand.
Having a good relationship and continuously asking them will help to understand how the city center is perceived. In order to get feedback by visitors, the empirical material showed that asking directly is the right way to go. Once again, the importance of creating relationships, especially with locals, and engage them in activities could help to collect feedback and thereby position themselves in the desired way. Furthermore, the interviews showed that all respondents agreed that market research, for instance surveys, are good tools in order to collect feedback. By doing questionnaires of the city center, place branders can get feedback in a quick and easy way. A way to incorporate consumers in the city brand is by encouraging them to write to them. Additionally, respondents also brought up statistical evidence as another way to collect feedback and understand behaviors.

With this said, the brand evaluation concept in the SPBM model is suggested to be use when city branders or marketers need to collect data from visitors. Also, using the component alone without involving other components of the model will still be sufficient. If city centers need to get information of its brand, it can be possible by only using the brand evaluation concept to collect much information from the brands different components, such as identity, services and experience.

5.2 Stakeholder engagement (Management)

The empirical material confirmed Hanna and Rowley’s (2011) thought that stakeholder engagement plays a central part when branding city centers. Most of the respondents emphasized cooperation on all levels, both between the organization and the stakeholders and also between the stakeholders. This was highly regarded by Hanna and Rowley (2011) since they expressed that cooperation is a key feature if the place brand wants to be successful. Furthermore, Parkerson and Saunders (2004) also emphasized this and stated that cooperation can involve partnerships between investors, employees, suppliers and different community groups, which mean that city centers need to encourage its different stakeholders to take this into consideration. In addition, the respondents agreed on that the stakeholders need cooperation in order to get a sustainable development in the long run, which once again indicates the importance of cooperation. The empirical material showed that cooperation will lead to a united community indicating kindness and friendship, which Gaggiotti (2008) predicted when he stated that this will be reflected in the place brand’s offerings, mentality and attitude.
Hanna and Rowley (2011) stated that stakeholders’ actions, conflicts and interests should be carefully managed, which the respondents also found important from a city centers’ perspective. Since there are many different stakeholders operating at a city center, the respondents stated that conflicts will occur, and how to manage them are essential in order to lead everyone towards the same goal. It was shown that return on investments of cooperation was a key in order for the stakeholders to be a part of such activities. This indicates that city centers need to involve stakeholders and make them feel important and at the same time have a mutual respect towards the different interests that exist among the stakeholders. Baker (2007) stated that stakeholder support should be emphasized in order to ensure that as many stakeholders as possible have a voice in the place brand. All respondents except one agreed on the fact that every stakeholder should be able to contribute to a city center and have their voices heard. The skeptical one said that this is impossible and will result in an uneven distribution of wills, which contradict Baker’s (2007) thoughts. However, since the majority favored cooperation and the skeptical respondent wanted cooperation to some extent, it is indicative that Baker’s words are true and should be incorporated when branding a city center.

5.3 Infrastructure (Regeneration)

Hanna and Rowley (2011) note that places’ infrastructure is divided into both functional (tangible) and experiential (intangible) attributes. By analyzing the empirical material the researchers found that both tangible and intangible attributes of a city center are vital to its infrastructure. Among the noted experiential attributes were restaurants, cafés and activities, such as sports events. These were seen as important in order to increase visitors’ desire to shop in city centers. Transport was a common occurrence when discussing infrastructure as well as travelling and parking, which were intangible attributes that were noted as important to a city center’s infrastructure. This can improve accessibility to and within a city center by both increasing visitors to a city center and packaging it through connectivity. This is in agreement with Sánchez et al (2013), who include mobility and Hanna and Rowley’s (2011) accessibility attribute. Comments on the experiential attributes also included culture. Culture and tradition were noted as lasting attributes making them a worthy investment and easy to maintain. The digital infrastructure came up as a relatively new phenomenon where free Wi-Fi plays a central part. This is likely to increase the attraction of visiting city centers by making the lives easier for the visitors and was said to enhance the experience for today’s technology dependent people.
The infrastructure was noted as having a major impact on the general attractiveness of a city center. Functional attributes, such as buildings, parks and nature play a large role in the tangible aspects of a city center, which is likely to create a pleasant atmosphere. As Hanna and Rowley (2011), the experts also emphasized that functional attributes must function together in order to make city centers as accessible as possible and is also likely to make city centers more attractive. The location of buildings in comparison to one another was also noted as enhancing the functionality of a city center, since visitors demand that everything should be near and accessible. Furthermore, this indicates that businesses should be located in such a way that it maximizes activity in city centers. However it was also noted that adapting accessibility for the disabled could mean sacrificing attractiveness, creating a dilemma between beauty and accessibility. This shows that it is important to create a strategy that draw a fair line between making city centers as attractive as possible, and still making it accessible for everyone.

5.4 Brand identity

The identity of city centers were shown to be important in order to make the visitors engaged in a city center and to make them feel like home. The brand identity was regarded as an important component when branding a city center since if city centers lack an identity, or an unclear one, it is likely to be perceived as boring and strict. Even though Skinner (2008) said that brand identity of a place is something hard to control and create, the respondents still felt that identity could be worked on and be controlled to some extent. Furthermore, Anholt (2006) and Skinner (2008) write that the identity should be built on the existing culture of the place and its people, which the respondents were aware of. It was shown that they were keen on creating an identity and image that is genuine and have a substance in reality. They emphasized that the identity should be reflected in the culture of a city center, what it stands for and what it has to offer. An interesting detail that were mentioned by all respondents were the fact that a fake identity and image would be found out easily by visitors. This could be interpreted as the identity and image should be reflected in the visitors’, and that it is better to have a true one in order for them to connected when visiting a city center.

Creating continuity between the visitors’ identity and the city center was also shown to be important among the respondents. The literature did not mention this, however, it could be taken into consideration when branding a city center since it could have an increasingly
importance in this field compared to branding a tourism destination. Instead, the literature highlights a creation of a red thread between the identity and image of the place and if they were not connected, a true identity would not be able to be created. One respondent who also emphasized simplicity by, for instance, not having a too broad identity and image, confirmed this. Since a few other respondents favored that the identity and the image should have a niche, focusing on something specific, it indicates that the identity needs to be clear, easy to understand and be communicative in order for the visitors to recognize and feel connected with it.

According to Cai (2002) and Skinner (2008) the identity could be formed around cultural events, such as street parties, sales events and performances founded in the interests of the locals. This was also highlighted by the respondents and was seen as a good way to make a city center match the visitors’ expectations. This could be interpreted as if a city center has many famous restaurants and are recognized as having good knowledge and interest into the food industry, it can use this identity to create an event about food, such as a food market. This is likely to be well perceived by the visitors sharing the same interest in food. Such events and happenings that reflect the identity of a city center are likely to make the locals engaged and make them perceive it in another way than before. Furthermore, the respondents emphasized the use of historical or famous inhabitants to make the identity of a city center even clearer, for instance by using singers, sportsmen or other locals that are regarded in the community. This could be connected to what Anholt (2006) highlighted, where it was stated that the identity can be formed according to the place’s history. This shows that famous locals could be used as ambassadors for city centers in order to create a more representative image of it in the mind of the visitors.

5.5 Brand architecture

It was found that the concept of brand architecture in the SPBM-model could be useful in order to understand what visitors demand in a city center and how the different supplies should be distributed. In accordance with Hanna and Rowley (2011) who stated that the different brands of a place should interact and supply the needs the inhabitants have, the empirical material showed that a city center should include a mix of supplies, such as restaurants, bars, stores and cafés. Furthermore, Hanna and Rowley (2011) argue that places need steady brand architecture with a central place brand including sub-brands and it was
proposed that there should be a basic range of brands. The offerings should then be connected in order to create a strong city center brand. It was also suggested that there should be a variety of both quality of products and prices. It was evident that the different supplies should incorporate experiences in their offerings since this is what visitors demand now and in the future. Furthermore, the brand architecture could be used as a branding technique to create a city centers niche in order to stick out and be unique.

Baker (2007) argues that it is possible to eliminate stakeholder dissonance by having an even distribution between supplies, which will help to reach a wider market segment. The empirical material agreed and highlighted the importance of creating a wide range of businesses in order to reach a larger target group. Therefore, it was suggested that the businesses should try not to copy each other, but rather have a complementary supply. It was seen as important to try to create alliances in order to entice customers to go to various businesses. Thereby it can be argued that brand architecture can be a relevant component to use in order to create a good and fair distribution of supplies in the city center. Since brand architecture involves both how the stakeholders are distributed and conflict resolution, it can be argued that it is possible to incorporate the term within stakeholder engagement and create a more consistent and effective term.

5.6 Brand articulation
The importance of brand articulation is more apparent from the literature than the empirical material. The gap between the theoretical findings and the empirical findings also indicate a gap of the importance of brand articulation when branding city centers. One expert noted that marketers need to do more research on the topic and, interestingly, authors, such as Cai (2002) Hankinson (2004) and Kavaratzis (2004) neglect to mention articulation in their models. This could mean that the importance of brand articulation is not fully understood and that it might not be regarded among the research community. Brand articulation tended to be more important for the businesses located in a city center than the city center itself, which questions the relevance of this component when applying it to city centers. Since the store managers regarded brand articulation the most, it is indicative of that the businesses located in a city center have to use it in order to differentiate themselves, which goes in line with what Wheeler (2006) emphasizes. However, since one expert stated that city centers in general
need to adopt brand articulation in a more effective way by using it consistently, it show that articulation can not be completely excluded when branding city centers.

Another expert noted that brand articulation encompasses the entire branding process and should be founded on the brand’s identity. A simplistic and recognizable brand articulation as suggested by one expert, complies with Hanna and Rowley’s (2011) theory that brand articulation helps to differentiate brands from their competitors. Another respondent noted the connection between visual beauty in a city center and its perceived identity, which is the core behind brand articulation according to Hanna and Rowley (2011). However, brand articulation was not seen as a major component to take into consideration when branding a city center, rather, it is a small piece in the overall communication of the brand. This implies that brand articulation may not be a sufficient independent component when branding city centers. Instead, it could be incorporated into the brand communication component, since it is heavily influenced by how to communicate city centers visual identities.

5.7 Brand communication

Through analyzing the empirical material it is evident that the concept of brand communication is a central part when branding a city center. Communication is a critical factor since it is through the communication channels that it is possible to inform and give out knowledge about the brand. In accordance with Kavaratzis (2004) and Bakers (2007) discussion of secondary and integrated communication the decision on which of the communication methods to be used divided the respondents. By communicating a city center as a package rather than individual components, the place brander could create consistency in the brand identity. However, agreeing with Hanna and Rowley’s (2011) statement that integrated brand communication can lead to uncertain stakeholders who are unwilling to contribute to the place it was evident that communicating a city center as a package will increase the risk of tension between stakeholders since they will be less exposed as individuals. The empirical findings showed that local businesses should work through secondary communication and communicate themselves through channels they find to be most effective. This method aims to give each stakeholder the ability to communicate their own identity but may lack consistency in the overall communications of a city center. It is therefore evident that communication is a hard task to manage, and drawing the line between unified and individual messages are important to create some sort of substance.
In relation to Hanna and Rowley’s (2011) argument about how the brand communicates to the target group is vital to its success, the recurring factor in the interviews was the notable focus on social media as a communication channel. By using social media channels it was noted that a brand could easily reach a large group of people. Both Instagram and Facebook were seen as effective channels to inform and reach the target groups since they play a part of people’s everyday lives. The digital world can be used as an effective tool to create valuable relationships with individuals, which can result in higher profitability and larger market share. Taking advantage of social media platforms will give city centers a possibility to create attention and be more exposed.

Contrary to the previous paragraph it is also important not to forget the traditional communication tools, such as flyers and newspapers, since some elders may not be familiar with untraditional media. As a result, if city centers aim to target elders, traditional media also needs to be adopted.

5.8 Word of mouth

Word of mouth tended to be the component that was hardest to control and to affect when analyzing the answers from the respondents. Word of mouth showed to be something that is created by others rather than by city centers, making it difficult to measure how to manage this. As shown by the empirical material, word of mouth can only be managed properly if city centers match visitors’ desires to 100 %. However, one respondent mentioned that no matter how good a city center is, there is always someone who spread negative thoughts about it. Since this component is controlled by other factors rather than the city center itself, it was interpreted as not being a central part of the place branding model to be used when branding a city center.

The literature brought up word of mouth as a phenomenon that is out of the organization’s control but didn’t explain how to manage it, except from being present on platforms where word of mouth is spreading. This was emphasized among the respondents to some extent, which concludes that it is important to know how the talk goes, but affecting it is difficult. As a result it is important to be aware of the criticism, to listen on the good criticism, and to sort out relevant constructive feedback to improve something that is perceived as being negative.
The store managers were the ones who suggested working actively with customer service in order to create trust and to avoid negative word of mouth. The meaning of this is that the hard work starts in each and every business and that good customer service is likely to be the core of creating positive word of mouth. Furthermore, this indicates that the stakeholders should have a responsibility of helping to improve the overall image of a city center by taking care of their customers and in that way enhance positive word of mouth. Another interesting input was how the main organization can work to increase positive word of mouth, by for instance, helping the stakeholders with different things around their businesses. They could help them by lecturing about customer service, displaying and to make sure that the external environment is appealing. To focus on positive word of mouth was also an interesting point that was highlighted by one respondent. For instance, instead of informing about parking lot fees, one could inform about free parking lots available a bit further away from a city center. This creates a positive tone in the communication and attempts to avoid negativity.

5.9 Brand experience

The respondents echoed the importance of a brand experience, which was noted in the literature. Several aspects of the experience were exposed in the empirical material. It was noted that the experience in a city center is comprised of several things. City centers should create experiences in forms of different happenings in accordance with their identities, such as events with different themes. For instance, if a city is known for its food, one can create events that cover this theme. Using different themes and activities during the year will enhance the daily experiences of a city center’s offerings and can be used as a complement to the ordinary experience the visitor gets when visiting it in the weekdays.

Hultén (2011) writes that using the human’s senses towards a product or service can enhance the experience. It was noted that visuals aspects, such as flowers and green parks was seen as important techniques when branding city centers since it is likely to provide a living, playful and warm atmosphere. Using music to target the sound sense was undoubtedly the most stated technique of creating an experience in a city center and could be used by, for instance, arranging concerts or by playing radio music. Furthermore, it was suggested that restaurants and cafe’s could emphasize smells and tastes. It was also noted that city centers should create experiences by surprising visitors more frequently. By using new and fresh offerings city
centers could attract more visitors and by using cultural activities and famous persons as a strategy to bring out the experience could create excitement and fun.

It was considered important to understand that the future will include less physical shopping as the online shopping has increased and, as a result, visitors will look for an experience when they visit city centers. The importance of services was noted several times as critical in the experience delivery. In agreement with Govers and Go (2009) who state that the sensory experience of any service has been regarded as the most important aspect that guides a purchase decision, it was noted that a good experience was a key component in creating a valuable and lasting relationship with a city center for the visitor. Furthermore the importance of the brand experience may have increased and may continue to increase as consumers are constantly seeking for new experiences from city centers. The intention to purchase services rather than goods is likely to increase, which highlights the importance of creating long lasting experiences in the visitor’s mind.

It was also noted that the creation of the experience was not a job only for city branders, but also for stakeholders. This shows that it is essential to enhance every individual store and their experience offerings in order to create a living marketplace that will attract different target groups. However, city centers as a whole should think of creating a marketplace of meeting points that enhance different experiences in a city center, meaning that this requires the stakeholders to work together and create strategies that are likely to be favored by everyone.
6.0 Conclusion

This chapter presents the results of the study. First an overall conclusion is presented, which is then narrowed to each individual component. Lastly, the new City center branding model is presented.

It was concluded that most of the components in the SPBM model can be used when branding city centers. However, some of the components should be incorporated into one single component since they showed to have a strong connection. For instance, City center stakeholders and supply includes brand architecture and City center communication includes brand articulation. Word-of-mouth was not an applicable component since it is controlled by others than the city centers and is therefore excluded from the new model. The new model is a strategic tool for place branders and word-of-mouth proved not to be a strategic component since it can’t be controlled. In addition, it was concluded that people in terms of locals and local celebrities play an important role when branding city centers and as a result, a new component was implemented. The new model specifically adapted to city centers is named “City Center Branding Model” and contains the following components: City center people, City center identity, City center infrastructure, City center stakeholders and supply (including brand architecture), City center communication (including brand articulation), City center experience and City center evaluation.

![City Center Branding Model](image)

Figure 8. City Center Branding Model.
The City Center Branding Model has a new order compared to previous models since it was found that the old order was not appropriate when branding city centers. The model begins with *City center people* since the people were concluded to be the foundation to build all the components on. Furthermore, the model ends with *City center evaluation* since collecting feedback from visitors was proven to be important in order to improve the overall experience of visiting city centers. The model emphasizes the relationship of the different components and suggests that they should function together in order to brand city centers in the best possible way. This means that no component is completely sufficient alone, rather they depend on each other when branding city centers.

**City Center People**

It was found that a city center is based and built according to its local people and therefore it was concluded to have City center people as the starting component of the new model. It was also concluded that local famous people are important since they could be used as ambassadors for attracting visitors in co-branding processes and can also help to create a clearer identity.

**City Center Identity**

The *City Center Identity* component was concluded to be one of the central concepts in the City center branding model. The identity should reflect the culture, history and traditions of the people, what they stand for and what they believe in.

**City Center Infrastructure**

*City Center Infrastructure* was concluded to be an important component when branding city centers and it was proven that city centers are in need of experiential and functional attributes. It is proposed that place branders can use the component in order to create knowledge of how the city centers’ infrastructure should be built.

**City Center Stakeholders and Supply**

It was concluded that there is a strong need for using *City Center Stakeholders and Supply* by combining the older components of stakeholder engagement (management) and brand architecture to understand cooperation on all levels, both between the organization and stakeholders and between stakeholders. It would create a more efficient term since stakeholder’s relationships are influenced by how the supplies are distributed.
City Center Communication
It was concluded to combine Brand communications and Brand articulation since brand articulation is not sufficient alone. Instead, City center communication was created in order to have a component that is entirely focused towards all aspects of city center communication, both primary and secondary communication as well as communication of visual identities.

City Center Experience
It was concluded that the experience in a city center is influenced by all other components above, what the city center offers, how the center looks like, how businesses are located, its identity and how it communicates. It was also concluded that the future will include less physical shopping and as a result experiences will be a central part when visiting city centers.

City Center Evaluation
It was concluded that evaluation of a city center is important in order to understand what the visitors think about the city center. It was also shown that it is important to get feedback about the things that are perceived as negative to be able to develop city centers. The branding evaluation component should be used in order to evaluate what visitors think of a city center as a whole package. The component is placed last in the City center branding model since it is not until the visitor has created a perception of the overall experience that it can make an evaluation of the entire city center.
7.0 Research implications

This chapter presents the contribution of this study from a managerial perspective, as well as from a theoretical perspective. Furthermore, it also presents recommendations for further research.

7.1 Managerial implications

The findings in this study give insights of what place branding components that are essential when branding city centers. This knowledge is important for all people working with making city centers more attractive. It was shown that city centers are the economic hub of the city and it is important to manage to create long lasting relationships with visitors to generate repeat visits in the long run.

This study has shown that branding a city center could be a challenging task and the new model that is especially adapted for city centers aims to make it easier for place branders to sort out the components that are essential in order to get as good results as possible when branding city centers. A recommendation when branding city centers is to use the new model by taking one step at the time by first starting with the people and then following the process until city center evaluation is reached and to then listen to the feedback to improve the city center. Furthermore it is crucial to use the local inhabitants when creating the identity, which was shown to be the core of the city center. In fact if the city center’s identity does not correspond to the visitors’ it is likely that the city center will fail to attract visitors, which shows the importance of being meticulous when working with the components.

7.2 Theoretical implications

The findings made in this study have created valuable knowledge into the field of city center branding. It was shown that the existing place branding theories are focused towards branding tourism destinations, cities and places and not on branding city centers specifically. This study fills this gap by generating valuable insight into the components that are essential when branding city centers.

This study contributes theoretically by providing a new model adapted for city centers. The study has also explored the current place branding components in order to be able to take
apart old models to see which components that are useful within city center branding and then they have been put together again, which has resulted in a new model. This study explains each component’s functionality, how they relate to each other and why they are important when branding city centers.

7.3 Suggestions for further research

There is need for further research into the area of city branding. This study has created a new model adapted especially for city centers, which is in need of testing on different cities with various sizes. It would be interesting to see how this model functions on larger city centers, and also on smaller downtowns to see if it is applicable on all city centers no matter the size of it. It would also be interesting to test the model on city centers outside of Sweden, in order to see if there are components that need to be added or subtracted from the City center branding model depending on the culture it is applied on. One advice is to study each individual component on its own on city centers to gain an even deeper understanding of the functionality of each of them. Another suggestion would be to conduct a quantitative study where visitors answer questionnaires about the City center branding model in order to see if there are any differences between how the management and the visitors value the components.
8.0 Reference list


9.0 Appendices

9.1 Appendix 1 - Interview guide experts

Brand evaluation
1. What branding tools can a city center use in order to satisfy visitors needs and wants?
2. How do you gather feedback from visitors in order to meet their needs and wants?
3. How do the city center create an image that matches or satisfies the visitors impressions, beliefs and desires? (For example, supply, offerings and events)

Stakeholder engagement (management)
1. How are the stakeholders involved in the place branding creation?
2. Is it any conflicts regarding their different interests that need to take into account when branding a city center?
3. How can the different stakeholders be tied together in terms of offerings and partnerships in the place branding process in order to develop new stores and a bigger supply?
4. How can the city center help each individual stakeholder to stand out in the marketplace so they feel that they are important contributors to the place?

Infrastructure
1. How can the infrastructure of a city center be used in the place branding process?
2. What functional attributes in terms of landscape, parks, public spaces and buildings are important when branding a city center?
3. Is it important how the businesses are located in the city center?
4. What experiential attributes in terms of investments of stakeholders offerings and environmental changes i.e. facilities, services and cultural development, are important when branding a city center?

Brand identity
1. How do you create a place’s identity? (What is the identity based on? Involvement of stakeholders? Ex. Associated with the place, such as decorations or sculptures, and the enhancements of rituals, such as street parties, ceremonies, sales events and performances)
2. How do you create a place’s image? (What is the image based on? Involvement of stakeholders?)
3. How do you know that the visitors perceive the identity and the image of the brand in the way managers intends it to be perceived?

**Brand architecture**
1. How can the city center brand use its stakeholders in order to make the place more attractive?
2. How can the city center ensure that the different stakeholders supply the needs the visitors have?
3. How do the city center manage to handle internal conflicts with stakeholders?
4. How can the city center handle the different types of businesses in terms of opening hours etc? (private owned vs large store-chains, that have different kind of rules to take into account)

**Brand articulation**
1. What role does the visual identity in terms of logos, name etc play in the place brand?
2. What role does the verbal identity play in the place brand?

**Brand communication**
1. What type of communication and channels are relevant for a city center when it wants to inform the target market?
2. Should the city center choose a specific target group to communicate with?
3. How can the city center communicate a unified message for all stakeholders involved?
4. In what way can the city center help businesses that are close to bankruptcy to reach their target market in order not damage the reputation?

**Word of mouth**
1. In what way is word of mouth important for a place brand?
2. How can the place brand work to increase positive word of mouth and decrease negative word of mouth?
3. How can the city center work to improve damaged reputation?

**Brand experience**

1. How can the city center work with the experience of visiting the place?
2. How can the city center involve the humans’ five senses in order to enhance the experience?

**9.2 Appendix 2 Interview guide stakeholders**

**Brand evaluation**

1. What do a city center need in order to satisfy visitors needs and wants?
2. How do you gather feedback from visitors in order to meet their needs and wants?
3. How can the city center create an image that matches or satisfies the visitors’ impressions, beliefs and desires? (For example, supply, offerings and events)

**Stakeholder engagement (management)**

1. In what way should stakeholders be involved in order to enhance the place brand?
2. Is it any conflicts regarding stakeholders’ different interests that need to take into account when branding a city center?
3. How can the different stakeholders be tied together in terms of offerings and partnerships in the place branding process in order to develop new stores and a better supply?
4. How can the city center help each individual stakeholder to stand out in the marketplace so they feel that they are important contributors to the place?

**Infrastructure**

1. How can the infrastructure of a city center be used in the place branding process? (To help people with disabilities, local traffic etc)
2. What functional attributes in terms of landscape, parks, public spaces and buildings are important when branding a city center?
3. Is it important how the businesses are located in the city center?
4. What experiential attributes in terms of investments of stakeholders offerings and environmental changes i.e. facilities, services and cultural development, are important when branding a city center?
Brand identity

1. How would you create a place’s identity? (What is the identity based on? Involvement of stakeholders? ex. Associated with the place, such as decorations or sculptures, and the enhancements of rituals, such as street parties, ceremonies, sales events and performances)
2. How would you create a place’s image? (What is the image based on? Involvement of stakeholders?)
3. How do you know that the visitors perceive the identity and the image of the brand in the way managers intends it to be perceived?

Brand architecture

1. How can the city center brand use its stakeholders in order to make the place more attractive?
2. How can the city center ensure that the different stakeholders supply the needs the visitors have?
3. How do the city center manage to handle internal conflicts with stakeholders?
4. How can the city center handle the different types of businesses in terms of opening hours etc? (private owned vs large store-chains, that have different kind of rules to take into account)

Brand articulation

1. What role does the visual identity in terms of logos, name etc play in the place brand?
2. What role does the verbal identity play in the place brand?

Brand communication

1. What type of communication and channels are relevant for a city center when it wants to inform the target market?
2. Should the city center choose a specific target group to communicate with?
3. How can the city center communicate a unified message for all stakeholders involved?
4. In what way can the city center help businesses that are close to bankruptcy to reach their target market in order not damage the reputation?
Word of mouth
1. In what way is word of mouth important for a place brand?
2. How can the place brand work to increase positive word of mouth and decrease negative word of mouth?
3. How can the city center work to improve damaged reputation?

Brand experience
1. How can the city center work with the experience of visiting the place?
2. How can the city center involve the humans’ five senses in order to enhance the experience?

9.3 Appendix 3 Respondents
Table 4. Respondents.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Respondent</th>
<th>Organization</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Representative, Citysamverkan Växjö.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Representative, Citysamverkan Jönköping.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Representative, PlaceBrander AB.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Project leader, Växjö municipality.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Project leader, Ängelholms municipality.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Store manager, Växjö City center.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Store manager, Växjö City center.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

9.4 Appendix 4 Terminology
Place branding, also known as location branding (Kemp et al. 2012), is an umbrella term that covers nation branding, where the country, state or nation is the brand (Dinnie, 2008), region branding and city branding, attracting tourists, workers and inhabitants to a city (Parkerson & Saunders, 2004; Lucarelli & Berg, 2011). Destination branding can be described as a method used to communicate a destination’s USP and differentiate it from other destinations. It focuses on attraction tourists to the place in question as a destination for pleasure. A destination can be described as. Location branding differs from destination branding in the sense that it has the intention of attracting workers and inhabitants and also selling exports (Hanna & Rowley, 2007). The term destination has been most apparent in tourism research (Skinner, 2008). The term place may be used when referencing in smaller scales and in business-focused work, whereas location is used in terms of cities, towns or regions (Hanna
The purpose of this paper is to apply a theory to brand the downtown area of Växjö city and not the city as a whole, which guides to the use of using the place branding term (Hanna & Rowley, 2007).

9.5 Appendix 5 Coding scheme

The three figures outlined below illustrate how the authors coded the data. First, the authors coded the data according to the components of the SPBM-model it should belong to as shown in Figure 9. Figure 10 illustrates the axial coding process where the authors tried to see if the components could be connected to each other. This resulted in that some components where tied into one and one component was excluded from the new model. Figure 11 illustrates how the authors came up with the new components in the City Center Branding Model and shows how the old components were mixed and then how they were put together into new labels, which resulted in the new City Center Branding Model.

Figure 9. Open Coding.
Figure 10. Axial coding.

Figure 11. Selective coding.