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An exploration of co-creating South African city brands to revive the tourism industry post a global pandemic

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Abstract

City branding involves establishing unique identities for cities using branding principles. While Johannesburg and Cape Town are among Africa's best-branded cities, their branding strategies were largely top-down, lacking collaborative stakeholder engagement. In the wake of the global pandemic that severely impacted tourism, there is an urgent need to revise these strategies through a co-creative approach. In South Africa, city branding activities can benefit the local tourism sector, which was severely impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic, with strict lockdown measures leading to a standstill in tourism activities throughout 2020 and 2021. As restrictions eased and businesses in the sector aimed to revive tourism, innovative approaches became necessary. This paper focuses on co-creating specific South African cities post-pandemic. Two online co-creation workshops were conducted with stakeholders to explore their perceptions and ideas about city branding. Our results underscore the critical role of stakeholder engagement in crafting city branding strategies that not only resonate with residents but also effectively revive the tourism industry post-pandemic. Engaging stakeholders also fosters a deeper connection between the city brand and its people, which in turn might inspire unity. The study emphasises the need to revisit the city brands of Johannesburg and Cape Town and highlights the value of co-creation workshops as a methodological tool for designers and design students. It also provides a foundation for future research on city branding and reviving other industries, which may be relevant in other contexts, such as post-war Ukraine.

Keywords: City branding, co-creation, global pandemic, South Africa, Tourism industry.

Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic had a significant effect on the entire world, causing death tolls, economic ruin, and changes in social interactions (Committee for the Coordination of Statistical Activities 2020). The tourism industry is recognised as a crucial sector advancing economic change and creating job opportunities had been particularly hard hit (World Travel and Tourism Council 2020). Over 700,000 livelihoods and an annual economic contribution of R273.2 billion were at risk in the South African tourism industry during the pandemic (Tourism Business Council South Africa 2020). Though there has been an increase in tourist arrivals during 2022 in South Africa, the industry is still 44,3% behind where it was in 2019 (StatsSa 2023). Businesses had to modify their procedures to ensure tourist safety as well as think about how to promote tourism in the country when restrictions were lifted to revive the

struggling industry. Branding is essential in determining how tourists view cities and how trustworthy and alluring they are as travel destinations (Shoab & Keivani 2015, pp. 254-263). In the wake of the pandemic's devastating impact on tourism, the need for a more resilient and inclusive city branding strategy has never been more urgent. Our co-creative approach not only engages diverse stakeholders but also offers a roadmap for crisis recovery. This paper explores the co-creation of South African city brands to revive the struggling tourism industry in the aftermath of the global pandemic.

South African city brands

City branding involves creating a unique identity for a city that represents its values, culture, and attributes (Wu & Chang 2022, pp. 34-36). It is a process of communicating and managing the city's identity to differentiate it from other destinations (Jojic 2018, p. 151). City branding contributes to the socio-economic development of urban areas (Zenker & Erfgen 2014, pp. 225-234) and is rooted in concepts like destination branding, place marketing and place identity (Jojic 2018, pp. 151-152). A successful city brand enhances reputation, stimulates tourism, attracts investment, and improves the quality of life (Jojic 2018, pp. 151-152; Wu & Chang 2022, pp. 34-36). Key elements of city branding may include values, beliefs and culture that speak to different stakeholder groups, similar to corporate branding (Jojic 2018, p. 151).

South Africa consists of many diverse and unique destinations, and every province has something different to offer. A quick search on the internet reveals that Cape Town in the Western Cape province and Johannesburg in the Gauteng province are prominently listed as “must-see” places in South Africa. In the most recent Brand Finance City Index (2023), Cape Town was identified as the best-branded city on the African continent and 60th globally, followed closely by Johannesburg in third place for Africa and 72nd globally (Figure 1 for the brand identities of these cities). However, Johannesburg also made the list of the top ten destinations that do not live up to travellers' experiences on TripAdvisor (Mitchell 2023).



Figure 1: City branding of Cape Town and Johannesburg.

- 1) City of Cape Town logo (City of Cape Town 2023); 2) Table Mountain National Park, Cape Town, South Africa (D’Silva 2019); 3) City of Johannesburg logo (Joburg 2018); 4) Johannesburg, South Africa (Da Paixao 2020)**

Cape Town is branded as a beautiful and inspiring city known for its architecture, landscapes, and inner-city revitalisation (Scholvin 2022, pp. 357–371). It markets itself as an "opportunity city" with global competitiveness and has been recognised as Africa's top city brand (Nxumalo 2023). Johannesburg, on the other hand, emphasises communication, finance, and transportation facilities in its city brand, but critics argue that its revitalisation efforts have fallen short (Scholvin 2022, pp. 357–371). Despite this, Johannesburg has been ranked as the most culturally vibrant city in Africa, highlighting its support for arts and culture (Scholvin 2022, pp. 357–371). Exploring co-creation in city branding can lead to a more comprehensive and effective brand that promotes value creation and encourages brand ambassador behaviour from locals. Although both cities are well branded, it might be worthwhile to explore co-creating city brands that lead to a deeper understanding of the city and its brand (Marques & Borba 2017, pp. 86-93) that promotes value creation (Jojic 2018, p. 151) and brand ambassador behaviour from locals (Wassler, Wang & Hung 2019, pp. 437-446).

Co-creating city brands

City brand practitioners play a vital role in leading the city branding process, engaging stakeholders, and translating brand values into a desired tourist experience (Moilanen 2015, pp. 216–225). However, engaging diverse stakeholders with conflicting objectives can be complex (Moilanen 2015, pp. 216–225). Limited understanding of branding theory among stakeholders, especially in the public sector, poses a challenge. Active involvement of residents as brand ambassadors is crucial for successful brand execution and sustainability (Wassler, Wang & Hung 2021). By involving stakeholders and implementing a city brand that authentically represents locals, practitioners can enhance brand engagement and positive brand-related behaviours (Ambroise et al. 2014, pp. 273-285). Interactive and qualitative research designs that incorporate participative action are best suited to understand stakeholders' perceptions and co-create city brand strategies (Lucarelli 2018, pp. 260–271).

There is a growing recognition of the need to explore innovative approaches to revive the tourism industry, including co-creating city brands (Tregua et al. 2020). Co-creation is a collaborative process where stakeholders come together to co-create solutions and ideas that address a common challenge or opportunity (Tregua et al. 2020). Such workshops offer benefits such as innovation, authenticity, and resilience (see Eshuis, Klijn & Braun 2014, pp. 151-171; Zenker & Erfgen 2014, pp. 225-234; Ritchie & Jiang 2019, pp. 3465-3493). Challenges include coordination, conflict resolution, resource allocation and implementation. Therefore, it is recommended that the best practices of inclusivity, preparation, skilled facilitation and clear action plans and responsibilities for implementing the outcomes of co-creation workshops be followed (see Eshuis, Klijn & Braun 2014, pp. 151-171; Zenker & Erfgen 2014, pp. 225-234; Ritchie & Jiang 2019, pp. 3465-3493).

Co-creation, as a collaborative endeavour, has gained significant traction in various fields, from arts to business. However, like any approach, it is not without its challenges and criticisms. Zeilig et al. (2018, pp. 45-55) discuss the inherent difficulties of a co-creative approach, particularly highlighting the issues of power relations and the limitations of inclusivity. This sentiment is echoed by Jordan and Babrow (2013, p. 215), who argue that collaborative, creative design work presents a unique set of communication challenges, including the continuous effort to suspend normal inclinations to understand and appraise what we understand. Such challenges can be exacerbated by the complexities of power dynamics and the need for equitable dialogue in co-creative processes, as noted by Baumann and Le Meunier-Fitzhugh (2015, p. 295). Roig et al. (2014, p. 642) provide a nuanced understanding of co-creativity by analyzing practices, especially during moments of conflict and change. Their study reveals clashing models of co-creativity, with varying approaches to peer

production and hierarchy. This is further complicated by the introduction of technology into the co-creative process. While technology can facilitate collaboration, it also introduces new challenges. For instance, the use of platforms like Microsoft Teams and Mural in co-creative settings remains an area ripe for exploration. Säwe and Thelander (2015, p. 450) caution against an unreflexive use of co-creative strategies, especially in non-commercial settings, suggesting that it can lead to a lack of value creation or even co-destruction. This highlights the need for careful consideration and planning when implementing co-creative approaches.

However, it is worth noting that co-creation is not universally criticised. For instance, Xu et al. (2020, p. 7) found the co-design approach beneficial in engaging participants, allowing them to express their creativity and articulate the root of clinical problems. Similarly, Guzdial and Riedl (2019, p. 12) present a framework to understand the design of co-creative systems, suggesting that with the right design, co-creative AI systems can be effective. While the co-creative approach offers numerous benefits, it is essential to be aware of and address its inherent challenges. As the field continues to evolve, further research is needed to refine co-creative methodologies and ensure their effective implementation.

Co-creation workshops as method

The methodology for conducting co-creation workshops with stakeholders involves several key steps, including initiation and recruitment, preparation and setup, and realisation, facilitation, and engagement (see Benson, Pedersen, Tsalis, Futtrup, Dean & Aschemann-Witzel 2021, pp. 3-4; Co-create 2019, pp. 18-19). These steps should be carefully followed and adapted as needed to ensure the success of the co-creation process and the achievement of the desired outcomes. This paper reports only on the first few steps proposed due to the limited scope of the research study from which this paper originates.

Two virtual co-creation workshops were conducted online via Microsoft Teams and Mural in June 2021. These workshops also served as experiential learning platforms for design students, allowing them to understand the complexities and nuances of stakeholder involvement in city branding as they involved residents, tourism sector workers, and business owners from Johannesburg and Cape Town. Mural was chosen as the primary co-creation tool due to its collaborative features and ability to overcome geographical constraints (Kim et al. 2020, pp. 180–192; Wallgren, Babapour & Eriksson 2021, pp. 1787-1796). It offers a versatile canvas for ideation with various visual tools and templates, promoting active participation and a sense of ownership among team members (Kitch 2023). Its interactive interface fosters an immersive experience essential for successful co-creation workshops (Kitch 2023). The following is the step-by-step process followed for conducting the co-creation workshops:

Initiation and recruitment

Initiating the research and recruiting participants were vital steps in the co-creation journey. Diverse stakeholders, such as city officials, tourism industry representatives, and community members, were identified and invited to participate. Their involvement ensured a wide range of perspectives in the process. Recruitment involved explaining the research purpose, objectives, and extending invitations to the virtual workshops. This early engagement fostered a sense of ownership and commitment among participants towards the co-creation process.

Preparation and setup

The virtual co-creation workshops were prepared by sending email invitations to stakeholders with a brief overview of the workshop's purpose and aim. The email included a detailed workshop agenda, clearly outlining the structure, topics, and intended outcomes. The collaborative nature of the process and the goal to co-create city brands for revitalising the tourism industry were emphasised. Materials and resources were also prepared, and an online environment was set up on Microsoft Teams and Mural. This preparation phase follows recommended best practices of Zenker & Erfgen (2014, pp. 225-234); Benson et al. (2021, p. 4) and Co-create (2019, p. 39).

Title: **Proposed Co-creation City Branding Workshop Structure & Agenda**
Duration: 4 hours

Item	Section	Description	Instruction/activity	Outcome	Tools	Time
1	Introduction	Facilitator will introduce themselves and set expectations for the workshop. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Why are we here today? Icebreaker and participant introductions Rules of engagement How to use Mural (if the workshop is virtual) 	Ice breaker: "Once upon a time" Respondents will be asked to share their first-ever job with the group along with one thing they loved about it, and one thing they hated.	The team has a clear idea of what to expect from the workshop.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> PowerPoint Presentation Mural Microsoft Teams 	20 minutes
2	Co-analysis	What are the current challenges facing the tourism industry in South Africa? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> An exploration of stakeholders' biggest challenges Grouping these challenges into themes and identifying common challenges Prioritising the challenges that need to be addressed (what are the critical issues?) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lightning-talk sessions with How Might We (HMW) statement drafting Evaluating and grouping HMW statements Voting on the most pressing problems to solve for 	A clear and deeper understanding of what the biggest challenges are while creating some common ground for the stakeholders to encourage them to start collaboratively thinking towards solutions to these challenges.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> PowerPoint Presentation Sticky notes Markers Mural Microsoft Teams 	45 minutes
3	Co-design	How do we brand the city (JHB/CT) to revive tourism? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Allowing stakeholders to collaborate creatively using strategic templates and discussion to draft prototype city brands Addressing any concerns and disagreement that may arise 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Outlining a city-brand blueprint Understanding the thinking behind the brand Identifying the focal points or pillars the brand is built on 	A prototype city brand and city brand blueprint based on the collaborative efforts of the stakeholders.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> PowerPoint Presentation Sticky notes Markers Mural Microsoft Teams 	90 minutes
COMFORT BREAK						15 minutes
4	Co-evaluation	What do we think about our proposed city brand? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identifying the perceived challenges that participants feel the brand poses Brainstorming ideas for how to improve or address any shortfalls 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identifying problematic areas and gaps in the proposed brand Refining the proposed brand accordingly 	Acknowledging the team's thoughts, feelings, and suggestions regarding the ideal city brand and refining the prototype.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Voting stickers Sticky notes Markers Mural Microsoft Teams 	30 minutes
5	Co-implementation	How do we make this happen? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identifying key roles and responsibilities associated with a successful implementation of the proposed brand 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Allocating tasks to various key stakeholder/players to determine what it would take to achieve a successful implementation of the city brand 	A clear strategy regarding how stakeholders feel that the implementation of their proposed brand should be managed.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sticky notes Markers Mural Microsoft Teams 	30 minutes
6	Closing	Thanking participants for their time and concluding the workshop	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Opening the floor for concluding thoughts 	N/A	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Microsoft Teams 	10 minutes
TOTAL						240 minutes

Figure 2: Co-creation workshop agenda

Realisation, facilitation, and engagement

The workshops were facilitated by the first author, who has skilled facilitation experience as recommended by Zenker and Erfgen (2014, pp. 225-234). The sessions began with an introduction to the co-creation process, the aim of the workshops, necessary background information, and an overview of the activities, following the guidelines of Benson et al. (2021, p. 4) and Co-Creat (2019, p. 39). An orientation session was conducted to explain the rules and guidelines of the workshop, how interaction on Microsoft Teams would work, and a walk-through on how to use Mural for the workshop activity. This ensured stakeholders were comfortable with the tools and established a foundation for productive engagement.

Interactive activities and exercises were used, following the approach suggested by Co-Creat (2019, pp. 17-18), to generate ideas and solutions for co-creating city brands. Mural's interactive whiteboard feature was employed for the workshop activity, enabling participating stakeholders to freely express their ideas and thoughts regarding city branding and the revitalisation of the tourism industry. The use of Mural's board facilitated the capture of a diverse range of inputs, allowing stakeholders to visually organise their thoughts, view, and build upon others' contributions. The board served as a dynamic document that evolved as the brainstorming session progressed. Group discussions were

encouraged during the workshops and were moderated by the facilitator to give all participants a voice (see Co-create 2019, p. 16).

Stakeholders were invited to reflect on their experiences throughout the co-creation process and provide their thoughts. This allowed for an assessment of their perspectives on the generated ideas and an evaluation of the effectiveness of the co-creation process. Open-ended questions were posed to guide the reflection and encourage thoughtful responses.

Data collected during the workshops

In co-creation workshops several types of data can be collected to ensure a comprehensive understanding of the co-creation process and the development of city brands, namely:

- Observational data involves observing stakeholders' interactions and behaviours during the co-creation workshop. As a facilitator, I took note of stakeholders' engagement, interactions, and emotional responses in a notebook. These observations provided valuable context to the written inputs, offering insights into their motivations and attitudes. The observational data helped manage participating stakeholders and enrich the analysis and understanding of the co-creation process.
- Verbal data consists of stakeholders' spoken words during the workshop. The workshops were recorded using Microsoft Teams (audio and video) and later transcribed verbatim. These recordings and transcripts are securely stored in a password-protected folder on Microsoft OneDrive, accessible only to the researchers.
- Non-verbal data collected during the workshops included stakeholders' views, ideas, and suggestions captured on Mural boards and in the facilitator's notebook. This data provided valuable insights into stakeholders' perspectives and attitudes, complementing the verbal data. The Microsoft Teams platform facilitated the collection of non-verbal data through visible cues such as hand-raising and emotive reactions, as well as the chat feature for comments and questions. These cues and interactions enriched the understanding of stakeholders' engagement levels and provided a nuanced perspective on the co-creation process.
- Artefacts are tangible items that are created or produced during the co-creation workshop. Artefacts created and produced during the workshops were the Mural boards that captured the brainstorming and idea-generation phase of the workshops (Figures 4 and 5 for artefact samples). Other artefacts include the concept maps generated as part of the data analysis section of this paper.

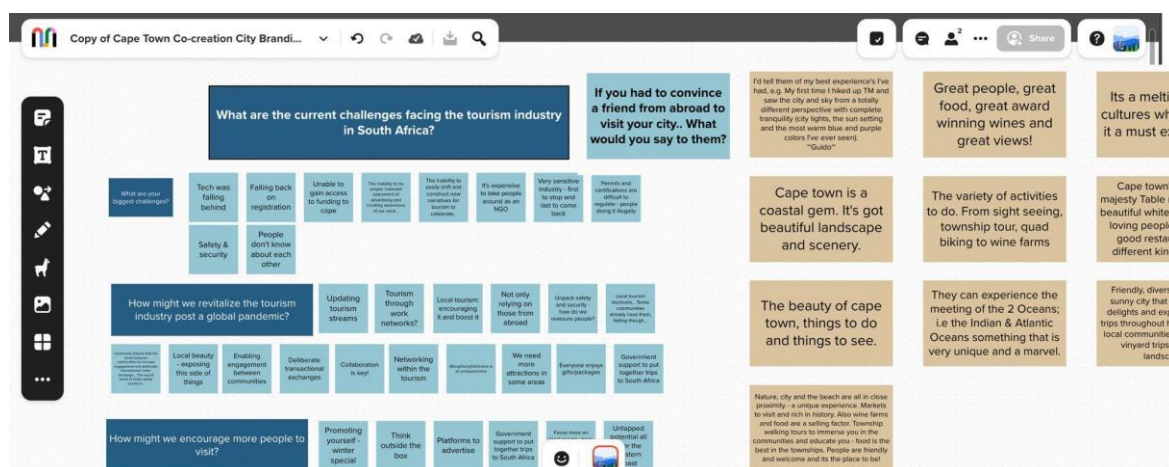


Figure 4: Sample artefact of Cape Town's brainstorming and idea-generation board on mural

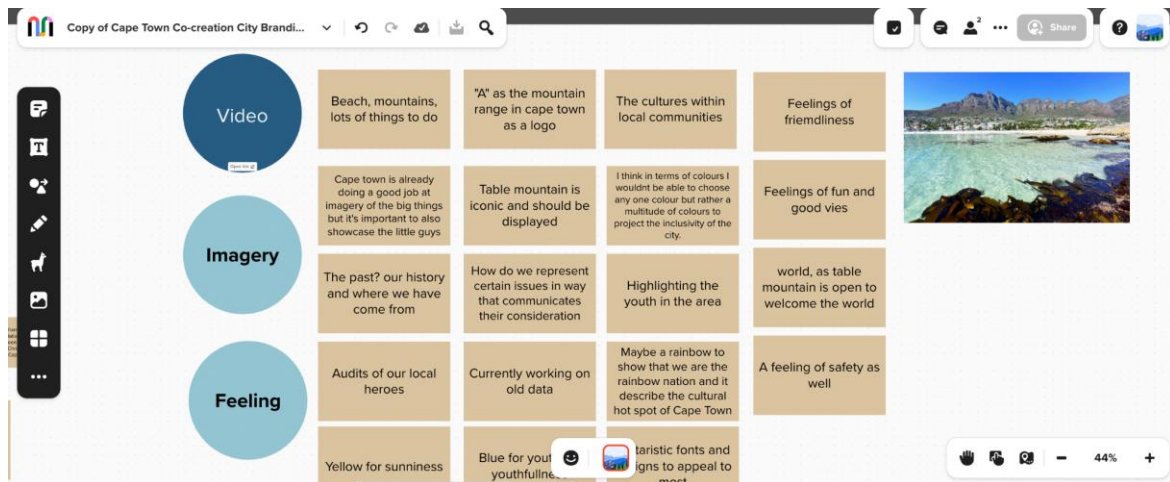


Figure 5: Sample artefact of Cape Town’s brainstorming and idea-generation board on mural

- Demographic data includes information about the background, experience, and characteristics of the stakeholders who participate in the co-creation workshop. Stakeholders participating in the co-creation workshops included city residents (n = 12; n = 6 per city) and representatives from the tourism sector (n = 12; n = 6 per city). The tourism sector participants comprised of hotel, B&B managers, owners, tour operators, cultural event coordinators, and restaurant industry managers/workers. Figure 6 provides a breakdown of the stakeholders' demographic information, including age, gender, background, and experience.

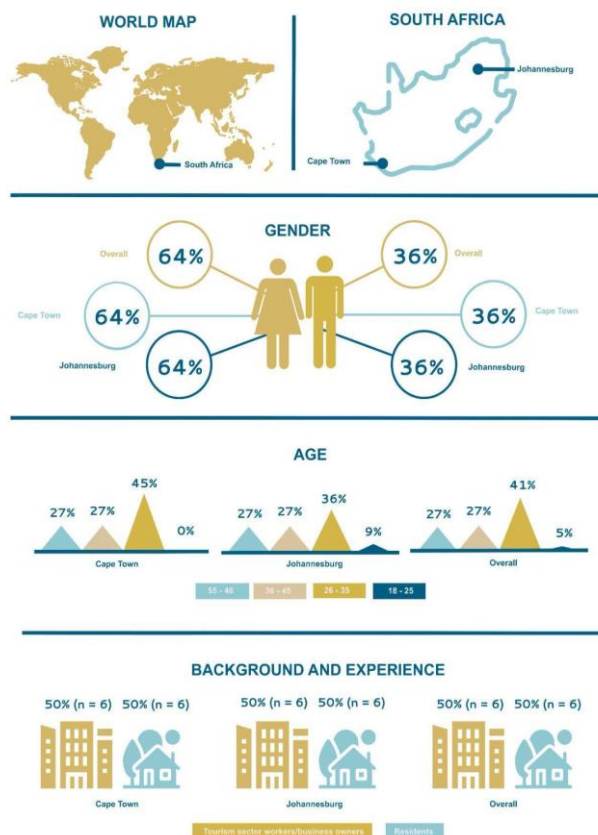


Figure 6: Demographic profile of participating stakeholders (n = 24)

Findings and discussion

The data from the two co-creation workshops was analysed, coded, and grouped together according to the emerging three themes that relate to city branding, namely the challenges of branding cities, who are the stakeholders that need to be involved, and how the city brands can be successfully implemented (Figure 7). The three main themes that will be discussed in this section are the challenges of city branding, stakeholders that should be involved in city branding, and successful implementation of city branding.

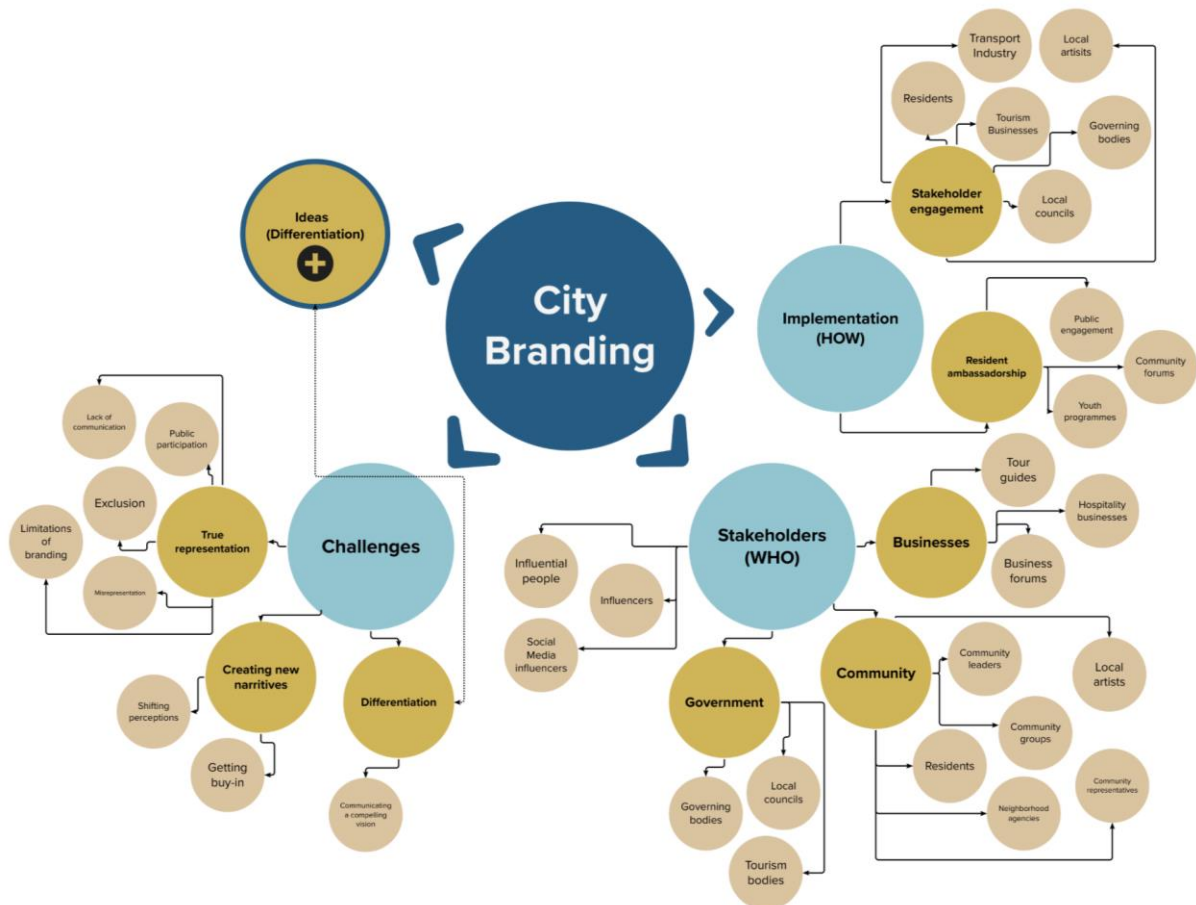


Figure 7: Qualitative themes and codes emerged from the two co-creation workshops

Challenges of city branding

The stakeholders involved in the co-branding workshop were left with a whirlwind of ideas and emotions. They found themselves juggling a mixture of anticipation, worry, and resolve as they dove into the key issues identified for city branding, namely representation of the city, differentiation of the city from others, and creating new narratives for the cities.

The representation of the cities

The need for genuine representation was a common sentiment among the stakeholders. They understood the need to capture the distinctive qualities of Johannesburg and Cape Town, highlighting their rich diversity, cultural heritage, and vibrant energy. The participating stakeholders also recognised that a successful city brand should embrace the diversity, obstacles, and aspirations of the city as opposed to focusing only on its appealing characteristics. They were determined to reject stereotypical narratives of the cities and present a genuine image that would appeal to both citizens

and tourists. This can also counter the finding that Johannesburg does not live up to travellers' experiences on TripAdvisor (see Mitchell 2023).

A potential challenge would be a misrepresentation of the city in terms of culture sensitivity and exclusions of different groups (Cape Town Stakeholder 7).

I think one of the biggest challenges that we might face is not representing every side of Joburg [...] But I think some people might find that as a problem, especially if you're not exactly in the glorious side on a daily basis (Johannesburg Stakeholder 4).

We do have crime, but not necessarily within the city because the city is pretty well protected in terms of our tourists and our visitors. But I think we do have quite a bit of crime within the township areas (Cape Town Stakeholder 8).

Differentiation of the cities from others

The stakeholders were aware of the intense competition among cities on a global scale for attracting tourists, business opportunities, and talented people. During the workshop, they started to realise how crucial it was to set Johannesburg and Cape Town apart from other places. They debated how best to highlight the unique qualities of each city while also highlighting their individual advantages. They came to the realisation that differentiation would necessitate striking a delicate balance between highlighting shared qualities and highlighting the distinctive selling points of each city. Finding the right balance that would distinguish Johannesburg and Cape Town in a crowded market was a complicated task. It was interesting to note the different perceptions stakeholders had about their cities. Figure 8 provides a summary of the themes and codes that emerged from the brainstorming and ideation phase of the workshop on how to differentiate the cities from others.

We must always be able to like if you look at America, every city can summarise itself in like one centre. Right. Like New York, they say, the big apple and all the city that never sleeps, they've got these subtle brandings that are out there without having to pay for branding and marketing (Johannesburg Stakeholder 2).

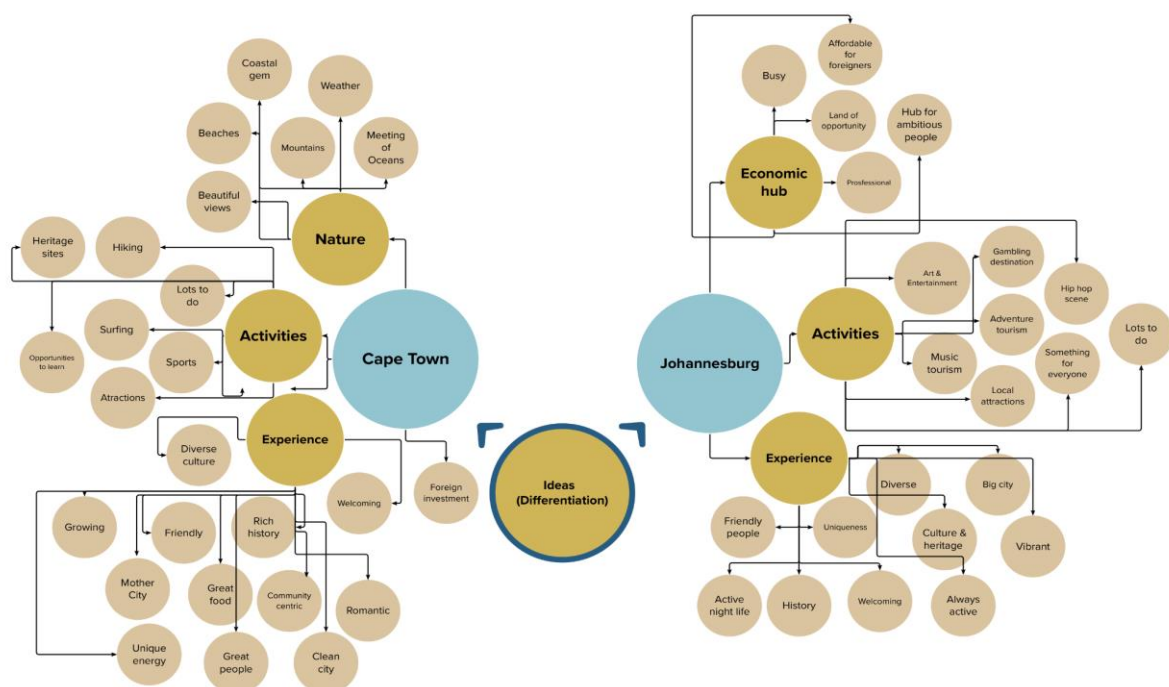


Figure 8: Ideas for the differentiation of the city brands of Johannesburg and Cape Town

The stakeholders' perception of the Cape Town brand emerged with key themes that encapsulated the city's unique identity (Figures 8 and 9). Nature stood out as a defining characteristic, with its breath-taking beauty and majestic mountains providing a backdrop to the cityscape. The meeting of the Atlantic and Indian Oceans was seen as a symbol of Cape Town's geographical distinction, offering a sense of awe and wonder during the workshop. The stakeholders also recognised that Cape Town had an abundance of activities and experiences to offer, which can cater to a wide range of interests. From hiking trails that showcased the city's natural splendour to a thriving sports scene, Cape Town was seen as an adventure playground with endless possibilities. The city's diversity was also celebrated, with a vibrant mix of cultures and people creating a rich tapestry of experiences. The stakeholders were impressed by the warmth and hospitality of the locals, contributing to the perception of Cape Town as a place where tourists would feel welcomed and embraced. Cape Town's reputation for excellent cuisine and culinary delights was acknowledged as a last point, further adding to the allure of the city as a destination. Overall, the stakeholders' perception of the Cape Town brand reflected a unique and diverse experience that combined natural beauty, adventure, cultural richness, and warm hospitality.

The amount of activities you can do in the space of a day in Cape Town is literally unbelievable [...] There's a diverse, enormous amount of things you can do in a day, which I think is a very unique, I think, for a city (Cape Town Stakeholder 9).

People in Cape Town are very friendly to visitors and they're very welcoming and they always highlight that (Cape Town Stakeholder 4).

Cape Town's have the majestic Table mountain. The beautiful white beaches. Fun loving people. And really good restaurants with different kinds of foods (Cape Town Stakeholder 6).



Figure 9: Wordcloud of emerging themes and codes of the Cape Town workshop

The stakeholders' perception of the Johannesburg brand emerged with key themes that captured the city's dynamic essence (Figures 8 and 10). Art and entertainment were central to Johannesburg's identity, with a flourishing creative scene that showcased the city as a cultural hub. Music tourism was seen as a significant draw, with a vibrant music industry and a diverse range of genres that attracted both local and international tourists. Johannesburg's status as an economic powerhouse was also

prominent, with the city being recognised as a thriving business and professional centre. Its big-city allure, with towering skyscrapers and bustling streets, symbolised the opportunities and possibilities that Johannesburg offered. The stakeholders acknowledged the city's active nightlife, filled with vibrant bars, clubs, and cultural events, contributing to a lively and energetic atmosphere. Overall, the stakeholders' perception of the Johannesburg brand reflected a city of opportunity, creativity, and vibrancy, where art, entertainment, economic growth, and active nightlife combined to create a dynamic urban experience.

If we put our branding out there as a money city, a big money city, unlimited job, unlimited, a money place, money that can only be good for all the tourism operators because you're going to get tourists coming in with that already programmed into their mind, money (Johannesburg Stakeholder 2).

My city is exiting and there are many social activities, you won't get bored and there are many places for you to visit [...] We have many historical and heritage sites that are worth visiting! We had 2 noble prize winners on one street! it's the place to be (Johannesburg Stakeholder 4).

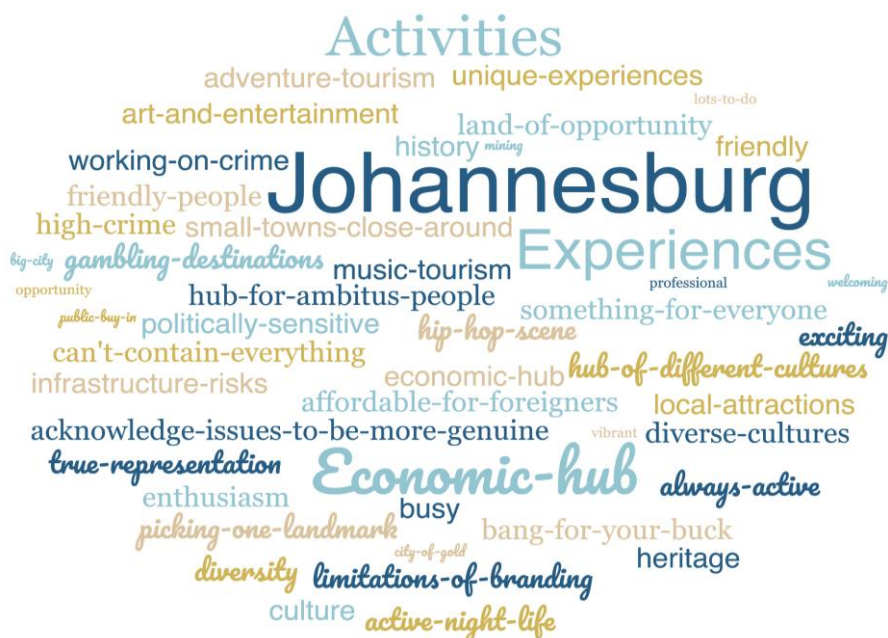


Figure 10: Wordcloud of emerging themes and codes of the Johannesburg workshop

Creating new narratives for the cities

The stakeholders understood that the stories that had been told about the cities in the past fell short of expressing their full potential and ambitions. The stakeholders agreed that new, compelling stories were needed to change perceptions and draw in a wide range of audiences. This required a different approach that encompasses engaging the public, involving regional governing bodies, business participation, and community projects to define the cities as vibrant, welcoming, and unique locales. The stakeholders, however, acknowledged the difficulty of dispelling ingrained myths associated with the cities and the continent and doing away with unfavourable stereotypes about the cities, such as the association with high crime and past inequalities.

We do have something unique and special in our Ubuntu and the fact that we have moved on and we do work together [...] We have a fantastic unique energy within our social structure (Cape Town Stakeholder 7).

There's people out there that think the highest crime, and some people are scared from back home. They think, oh, it comes to Jozi, you're going to get mugged, your corporate get stolen (Johannesburg Stakeholder 4).

Stakeholders that should be involved in city branding

The stakeholders involved in creating a city brand consisted of three key groups: government, communities, and businesses (Figure 7). Government stakeholders, including local councils, governing bodies, and tourism bodies, play a vital role in shaping the city's brand image and strategy through policy implementation, infrastructure development, and marketing initiatives. Community stakeholders, including residents and community leaders, are integral participants in the co-creation process, providing valuable perspectives and insights for an authentic and inclusive city brand. Business stakeholders, such as hospitality businesses, tour operators, and the transport sector, contribute their expertise in understanding market demands, identifying unique selling points, and implementing practical strategies to enhance the city's appeal. The collaboration of these diverse stakeholder groups ensures a comprehensive approach to city branding, capturing the city's essence while meeting the needs and aspirations of its residents.

We need to involve as much as possible every single part of Joburg every single rung of society (Johannesburg Stakeholder 5).

We are responsible for driving this thing forward because if it doesn't come from the bottom up, it's not going to happen (Cape Town Stakeholder 2).

Successful Implementation of city branding

Stakeholders identified two key themes for a successful city brand implementation during the workshop: stakeholder engagement and resident ambassadorship (Figure 7). They emphasised the need to involve residents, local government, tourism businesses, and local artists to ensure the brand reflects the city's aspirations and unique qualities, fostering ownership and pride. Stakeholders also highlighted the significance of public engagement initiatives, youth programmes, and community forums to establish a strong connection between residents and the brand. Empowering residents as ambassadors was seen as essential for authentic, relatable, and effective communication of the brand message. These themes underscore the importance of inclusivity, collaboration, and community involvement in shaping a successful city brand implementation.

I think if we only put responsibility one sector in terms of we say it's the government alone or it's the businesses or the tourism sector, I think we'd never really get anything done or we'll never get anything done to the best of its potential (Johannesburg Stakeholder 4).

Conclusion

Cape Town and Johannesburg have made significant strides in their city branding efforts, as reported at the start of this paper; however, it is important to acknowledge the shortcomings of the current city brands from the perspective of various stakeholders. The current city brands have established the cities' presence on the continent as indicated in the 2023 Brand Finance City Index; however, findings from the workshops indicate that the crucial elements of stakeholder engagement and resident ambassadorship might have been overlooked. It is imperative to involve stakeholders from various sectors in the city branding process to counter the identified challenges of (mis)representing the city, differentiating the city from other destinations, and creating new narratives for the cities that are

more suitable. Furthermore, engaging stakeholders may lead to a deeper connection between the city brand and the people it represents to inspire a sense of unity. This paper highlights the importance of teaching co-creation workshops as a methodological tool to enable designers (and design students) to create impact through their work with stakeholders on similar topics. This research offers valuable insights for design education, suggesting the incorporation of co-creative, stakeholder-driven approaches in academic curricula.

The way forward

The study highlights the need for further research to revisit and strengthen the city brands of Johannesburg and Cape Town. Participating stakeholders provided ideas for future co-creation workshops. Additionally, the study sets the foundation for future research on city branding and reviving other industry sectors, which may be applicable to post-war countries like Ukraine. Moreover, the research methodology employed here, especially the co-creation workshops, provides a template for hands-on pedagogical approaches in design education, offering design students an immersive learning experience.

I think there should be a competition to brand the city (Cape Town Stakeholder 3).

“Sell the idea beautifully to people [...] what's at the heart and the root of these [...] we should use them to be our influencers (Johannesburg Stakeholder 8).

Ethics

In the virtual co-creation workshops, rigorous adherence to ethical standards was upheld. Ethical clearance was obtained from the affiliated institution. Prior to the workshops, participating stakeholders were given comprehensive informed consent forms to ensure transparency about the research's purpose, procedures, and potential benefits and/or risks. The process emphasised the voluntary nature of participation and the right to withdraw at any time during the data collection phase.

To maintain confidentiality and anonymity:

- Participants' names were replaced with pseudonyms.
- Any identifying details, such as specific job titles or affiliations, were either omitted or altered to prevent recognition.
- Direct quotes used in the research findings were carefully reviewed to ensure they did not contain any identifiable information.
- This approach encouraged open and honest participation by assuring respondents that their identities would be protected.

Cultural sensitivity was a priority throughout the research process. The research team was particularly mindful of:

- Cultural norms and practices that could influence participants' responses or comfort levels.
- Potential power dynamics that might arise due to cultural or organizational hierarchies.
- Ensuring that all participants felt their voices were equally valued, irrespective of their cultural or professional background.
- Participating stakeholders were treated with respect, acknowledging their diverse experiences and cultural sensitivities. Digital data was securely stored using encrypted methods. This includes Mural boards, Microsoft Teams meeting recordings, transcripts, and consent forms, all of which were stored in password-protected folders with access limited to the research team.

The adherence to the above-mentioned ethical considerations cultivated a safe, respectful environment that encouraged meaningful collaboration in the workshops.

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Declaration

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