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Imaginaries Governing Change – Branding towards ‘Sustainable Helsinki’

A Case of the City of Helsinki

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<p>Tiivistelmä - Abstract</p> <p>Around the world, cities are using branding as a discursive and strategic practice to adjust to intensified, ongoing competition of tourists, investments, events and skilled labour. Simultaneously, in the era of the societal turning point, sustainability issues have become a global topic, and cities have begun to brand themselves as ‘pioneer’ in sustainability. Gradually, place branding’s potential as a strategic instrument of urban development and change has been understood, and therefore, it is increasingly applied in urban governance. This thesis focuses on this change in place branding and explores the relationship between place branding and sustainable development in the context of Helsinki’s branding. More specifically, I study how place branding can be harnessed as a transformative and strategic tool to further sustainable urban development.</p> <p>The theoretical foundation is built on place branding literature that takes into consideration the diverse and transformative role of place branding. I reinforce the place branding theory with the concept of imaginary, which are visions of the future utilised to steer decision-making and further policies. The imaginaries can act as technologies of governance, through which cities delegate responsibility for the citizens to guide them towards a specific aim, for instance, ‘Sustainable Helsinki’. My research data consists of strategies and a website produced by the City of Helsinki. The material addresses sustainable development and the City’s branding cuts through all content. I analyse the content through frame analysis to find how Helsinki frames itself in terms of sustainable development and if any imaginaries attempt to steer the citizens to take responsibility for their sustainability actions.</p> <p>My research findings confirm the increasingly common perception in place brand research according to which place branding can be used as a comprehensive strategic tool in urban development. In Helsinki, place branding has moved over from mere city marketing towards a governance strategy whose objective is to both manage perceptions about places and shape the place according to the city strategies or policies. Also, what stood out was the emphasis on economic sustainability, which was visible even in sections that addressed the other two dimensions – environmental or social. This finding highlights how Helsinki’s branding is heavily influenced by the common narratives of economic success and international competition.</p> <p>Central findings in my research were that Helsinki uses competitive and cooperative ways of portraying itself in sustainable development and succeeding in global competition. In both of these frames, Helsinki uses imaginaries of ‘Sustainable Helsinki’, but in different ways. In the competitive tone of voice, the delegation of responsibility is more implying and indirect since the focus is on the objective, not the process. In cooperative framing, the imaginaries are more straightforwardly asserting responsibility to people and businesses. My research shows that there are several ways to guide people through place branding, but in Helsinki’s case, the city is appealing to the freedom and independence of its locals.</p>			
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1 Introduction

Around the world, cities are using place branding as a discursive and strategic practice through which they adjust to intensified interspatial competition (for ex. Jokela, 2019). Cities want to receive positive net migration, an endless flow of visiting tourists and established flourishing businesses. Place branding has strong visual and emotion-based communicative power, and therefore it is an attractive tool for local governments to convey the city's uniqueness and strengths (Joo & Seo, 2018). Harvey (1989; here, Jokela 2019) has famously tied the urban competitiveness and place branding to the emergence of the entrepreneurial city, which resulted from the crisis of the Fordist-Keynesian system in the 1970s; gradually, local governments have adopted the principles of product and corporate branding and an entrepreneurial attitude in order to succeed in the international competition. As the mental images of the places are created in people's minds, cities aim various methods of place branding to influence the people (Kavaratzis 2015, p. 156-157).

In the era of the societal turning point, mere conceptualisation and promoting attracting mental images of places are not enough. The global challenges are locally present in every city and demand instant recognition. Since sustainability issues have gained more coverage, cities have adopted them into their strategies and brand work. Furthermore, place branding's potential as a strategic instrument for urban development has been understood, and it is increasingly applied in urban governance. Thus, place branding is not anymore about creating a positive image of the city, for it can have a communicative power to legitimise policy decisions (Joo & Seo, 2018). By branding, cities can create imaginaries of 'specific ends' they wish to achieve, which produce conceptions of what is possible and steer decision-making (Hajer & Versteeg, 2019). Especially when the goals or future threats are not present to the senses, the imaginaries – for instance, 'Sustainable Helsinki' – are a powerful tool to justify political choices to make a transition to a more sustainable world (for ex. Vanolo, 2013).

In order to cope with the intimidating challenges, cities need to delegate responsibility to organisations and citizens. Place branding can activate by triggering emotions and motivating the actors to support actions against common threats. Participation can also be a means of controlling citizens at a distance and guiding them towards a specific aim, for instance, developing an attractive or sustainable city. (Rose and Miller, 1992; here, Eshuis, & Edwards, 2013.) In other words, in neoliberal cities, citizens are not governed by regulation, but steered to become more responsible for their own actions.

Helsinki offers a great case to study for my research since the city is highlighting sustainability in both its strategies and branding. For instance, as a measure to reduce climate change, Helsinki has declared to strive to become carbon-neutral by the year 2035¹ and calls itself the ‘model city of sustainable development’². Moreover, Helsinki’s efforts as a sustainable city have been recognised around the world. In 2021, the city was named one of the eight sustainable destinations by *National Geographic*³, and for many years in a row, Helsinki has been ranked as one of the most liveable cities in the world⁴.

Place brands have been a great interest of mine for a while. I studied Helsinki’s brand project ‘Brand New Helsinki’ in my bachelor’s thesis in 2016–2017. Back then, my main interest was the participatory brand process. Now, I find the relationship between sustainability and place branding both fascinating and meaningful since, by branding, we place value on things and direct people’s attention. As sustainability issues have become a global topic, cities have begun to brand themselves as ‘pioneers’ in sustainability. Therefore, it is worth researching how this pioneering materialises. I believe that cities need to show an example to each other and include sustainable development more extensively in their city strategies and brand work.

In the following chapters, I will first introduce my research objective, method and research questions. As my thesis centres around Helsinki’s city brand, I will offer context by presenting the main points of the ‘Brand New Helsinki’ brand project and its marketing strategy and reflect on it briefly on place branding literature. The following chapters form the theoretical foundation of my thesis and explore the multidisciplinary and fragmented field of place branding and marketing towards a broader understanding of place branding, where branding serves as a strategic tool for urban governance. In the third chapter, I dive deeper into my research method and data before the analysis. Then, I analyse the material using frame analysis, present the most prevalent frames, and mirror my findings to my

¹ *The Carbon-neutral Helsinki 2035 Action Plan*, City of Helsinki (2018), searched on 14.4.2020.

https://www.hel.fi/static/liitteet/kaupunkiymparisto/julkaisut/julkaisut/HNH-2035/Carbon_neutral_Helsinki_Action_Plan_1503019_EN.pdf

² Helsinki is a model city of sustainable development, Hel.fi, searched on 18.4.2021.

<https://www.myhelsinki.fi/en/work-and-study/helsinki-is-a-model-city-of-sustainable-development>

³ Best of the World: eight sustainable destinations for 2021 and beyond, *National Geographic*, searched on 18.4.2021.

https://www.nationalgeographic.co.uk/travel/2020/11/best-of-the-world-2021-sustainability?fbclid=IwAR1c6oR8yRCDXzMhx0Nv4gIVJ5Y_Av33HdGIbvqYMbn2ogRaNOW6Vbfqbo

⁴ Helsinki ranks 16th among the most liveable cities in the world, Hel.fi, searched on 6.4.2021.

<https://www.hel.fi/uutiset/en/kaupunginkanslia/helsinki-ranks-16th-among-the-most-liveable-cities-in-the-world>

theoretical foundation in response to my research questions. In the last chapter, I discuss the significance of my results and critically evaluate the success of the research and present topics for further research.

1.1 Research questions

In my thesis, I convey through frame analysis how the City of Helsinki portrays itself in sustainable development by using branding in a strategical way. Simultaneously, I will also study how the city aims to steer its citizens towards a more sustainable behaviour. My data consists of documents and a website produced by the City of Helsinki. All of them regard sustainable development in some way.

I selected frame analysis as my research method since it is a diverse method for studying written or spoken language. It offers a practical and flexible way to analyse and interpret phenomena from several points of view based on different theoretical traditions and concepts. Framing can be seen as a way to participate in public debate since framing brings out one's views and opinions and competes with others. The starting point in frame analysis is that societal phenomena have different aspects and can be examined from different perspectives. (Väliverronen, 2007.) Branding as a form of governance uses framing, which is a way of managing policy problems and solutions, therefore, branding is a tool for framing (Eshuis & Kljin, 2012). Through frame analysis, I can explore the frames Helsinki uses in its branding and analyse them critically.

Place branding in the context of sustainable development is an under-researched topic (Taecharungroj, Muthuta & Boonchaiyaprupek, 2019). Still, it deserves more attention since the connection between sustainability and place branding is present all around the world as many cities strive towards sustainability while constantly competing with other cities. Although some cities emphasise sustainability in their city branding, many have chosen to focus on the environmental dimension of sustainability. Through framing and branding, cities also create imaginaries of the desired futures, which can steer the citizens towards a more sustainable lifestyle. This topic is worth studying since the cities cannot achieve sustainable development alone but need locals' and organisations' participation in order to succeed.

Therefore, my research questions are:

- 1) How does Helsinki frame itself in sustainable development through branding? What does the tone of voice in Helsinki's place branding reveal about Helsinki's approach to fostering sustainability?
- 2) Are there any kinds of behaviour-steering imaginaries created in Helsinki's branding? What is to learn from the Helsinki case about how branding can guide people towards more sustainable lifestyles?

1.2 Brand New Helsinki – City of Helsinki's current brand concept

Helsinki's city strategy 2013–2016 obligated the investment for a livelier Helsinki by increasing Helsinki's conspicuousness with impressive marketing. A brand project, 'Brand New Helsinki', was kick-started in June 2015 with an outside partner, design office Kuudes. From August 2015 to May 2016, the brand concept and a five-year marketing strategy were put together, and the city council accepted them in May 2016. During 2014–2016 the city set aside 500 000 euros to create the brand and improve city marketing⁵.

The 'Brand New Helsinki' had two specific parts: research and validation⁶. The research phase included an analysis of the current state of the city and its starting point. Helsinki's strengths, weaknesses and attractions were surveyed through different methods, including studies, competitive analysis, workshops and interviews with influencers and city's employees. Based on the research phase results, Helsinki's strengths were culture and creativity, nature and the sea, functionality, quality of life, skilled and friendly people, fascinating strangeness, and a high level of infrastructure. Helsinki's weaknesses were bureaucracy, need for a more permissive atmosphere, under-utilisation of winter and darkness, need for higher-quality tourist services and 'branding' of attractions, urban structure, and attitude towards immigrants. The responses emphasised culture's importance: the strangeness and the 'feel' of the small town were considered fascinating⁷.

⁵ Helsingin kaupungin strategiaohjelma 2013–2016, liite 1. Strategiaohjelma 2013–2016 perustelumuistio. Published on 25.3.2013, searched on 10.4.2021.

https://www.hel.fi/static/kanslia/Julkaisut/Strategiaohjelma_2013-2016_Kh_250313.pdf

⁶ Brand New Helsinki website, searched on 10.4.2021. <http://www.brandnewhelsinki.fi/2020>

⁷ Brand New Helsinki website. liite: Tutkimusvaiheen yhteenveto. Published on 31.8.2015, searched on 10.4.2021.

http://www.brandnewhelsinki.fi/2020//app/uploads/2016/04/BnH_liite_02_Tutkimusyhenteenveto.pdf

The finished brand takes a stand on both communication and practical actions – the concept alone does not guide marketing. At the heart of the brand is effectiveness; *people, encounters and actions that make an impact*, as the brand strategy states⁸. In this context, the brand concept also defines the service promise of the City of Helsinki as an organisation: ‘Let’s act together to make an impact!’. The range of means to implement the brand is very wide, and since thousands of implementers can utilise the brand concept from their own perspective, it also requires systematic management⁹. The situation presents an interesting paradox, since everyone is free to use the brand concept as they will, but at the same time the actions need to be governed.

The position of Helsinki’s new brand is currently *One Hel of an Impact*, which distinguishes the city from its competitors. It is based on four areas: Transforming Helsinki, Smart and functional Helsinki, Fascinating contrasts of Helsinki, and Unique and diverse Helsinki¹⁰. Transforming means the city is undergoing significant transformations, which open up opportunities for new ideas and actions. Smartness and functionality imply that the city is recognised for its urban infrastructure, public services and high standard of education at all levels – in short, Helsinki ‘works’. What sets apart Helsinki from other cities is its uniqueness and contrast; the city is ‘authentic’ and has a ‘certain edge’. The contrasts include, for instance, pulse and peace just around the corner from each other. A typical example is Helsinki’s Central Park, a large recreational forest area near the city centre. Lastly, diversity means that different people are valued in Helsinki, and everyone can be themselves – ‘no matter how ordinary or unique’.

Place brands are often inspired by these types of local phenomena, attributes, and culture – the local identity. However, there is no consensus on the concept of local identity; it is considered elusive and paradoxical, which makes branding a place incredibly difficult. Typically, identity means something ‘that is the same to itself’. (Kavaratzis & Kalandides, 2015, p. 1379.) Kavaratzis and Kalandides (2015, p. 1379) comment on this definition by enhancing the paradoxicality of place identity: can anything in this constantly changing world

⁸ The City of Helsinki marketing strategy 2016–2020, searched on 10.4.2021.

http://www.brandnewhelsinki.fi/2020/app/uploads/2016/07/02_Helsinki_strategia_ENG_web.pdf

⁹ Helsinki city council meeting 20/2016 (23.5.2016) decision: Helsingin kaupungin brändikonsepti ja markkinointistrategia. Päätökset service, searched on 10.4.2021. <https://dev.hel.fi/paatokset/asia/hel-2016-004987/khs-2016-20/>

¹⁰ Brand New Helsinki website, Brand, searched on 28.3.2021, <http://www.brandnewhelsinki.fi/2020/en/>

ever be ‘the same’? Still, the concept is interesting for it includes change, continuity, community and heterogeneity.

Behind the seemingly neutral choices of what is included in branding are always power relations that can create both dominating and faint identities. Local history, cultures and identities can be harnessed to serve commercial purposes, which can cause conflicts and tension. Kalandides (2009, p. 3–4) uses marketing creativity – one of the brand aspects the City of Helsinki has chosen – as an example of that can result in very selective and reductive place branding; it targets specific spaces, actors while rejecting others. This process can affect other places and events that receive benefits from the city and are acknowledged, whereas others are forgotten. Not only does the city exercise power by selecting what will be developed, reinforced and put forward, but also steer people to take responsibility for their own actions to achieve the city’s visions (Miller & Rose, 2008).

City marketing aims to strengthen the city’s reputation, local pride, and competitiveness by attracting tourists, new companies, experts, and investments to Helsinki. Helsinki lists residents, tourists and the business community as its target groups (The City of Helsinki marketing strategy 2016–2020, p. 15). Helsinki’s target groups are very traditional. According to Braun, Kavaratzis and Zenker (2013, p. 18), this definition can reduce the locals’ role to a mere target market and sometimes shut them outside of the place brand when the focus is on acquiring new residents and alluring tourists, especially since the brand is often communicated differently to locals and to people who live outside the city or in another country. Although interestingly, in Helsinki’s case, the CEO of Helsinki Marketing, Laura Aalto, has stated that all target groups are increasingly interested in ‘authentic experiences the locals enjoy’. Therefore, all the groups are targeted with more or less the same messages. In fact, Helsinki Marketing’s city marketing website My Helsinki is targeted at both locals and tourists¹¹.

Braun, Kavaratzis and Zenker (2013, p. 21) state the most neglected role in place branding theory and practice is residents’ role as citizens. By voting and taking part in political decisions, citizens have the power to overthrow the place brand if they do not see it fitting or truthful. Participation is both a right and an obligation for citizens. Therefore, place authorities are obligated to guarantee participation and opportunities for citizens to

¹¹ Hyvästi turistit, *Talouselämä*. Published on 4.8.2017, searched on 18.4.2021.
<https://www.talouselama.fi/uutiset/hyvasti-turistit/93f5f1a9-f825-3fc9-a0dc-cc5f29be310e>

contribute to decision making actively – this should also apply to the process of place branding implementation. Joo and Seo (2018) highlight that participatory branding should be ‘a continuous, interactive process that brings together the government and the general public in both decision-making as well as in implementation and re-creation’, meaning the participation must be deeply engaged, not a formal procedural part of a branding process.

Targeting locals is especially important because, as Zenker and Elfgrén (2014, p. 227) point out, nowadays, locals are a more significant part of place branding since they act in different roles and ultimately communicate the brand in different ways. The citizens that identify themselves with the place and eventually become also the brand ambassadors of the place. Therefore, the brand professionals in charge of the place branding should acknowledge this fact and support local pride and the sense of belonging. When done successfully, word of mouth can become a powerful communication tool that strengthens the place brand. In accordance with these ideas, Helsinki's city officials included the locals in the ‘Brand New Helsinki’ project in its assessment phase; people evaluated the draft concepts in workshops, events, and online¹². The drafts were based on several research studies, interviews of opinion leaders and brand vision workshops with various stakeholders. Therefore, the more extensive participation was more an assessment step than actually composing the place brand.

It remains to be seen what is next for Helsinki's city brand. The ‘Brand New Helsinki’ project reflected on what Helsinki will be like in the year 2020. Now, at the beginning of 2021, we are waiting for the launch of the City of Helsinki's updated and accessible brand website and an updated brand strategy for the future.

¹² Brand New Helsinki -projekti Helsingin brändikonsepti ja markkinointistrategiset linjaukset, searched on 1.5.2021. www.brandnewhelsinki.fi/2020//app/uploads/2016/04/BnH_projektin_kuvaus.pdf

2 Theoretical foundation and key concepts

2.1 Place branding

Branding derives its meaning from making a mark of ownership with a hot iron on cattle. Fortunately, today, branding products and places does not require as drastic measures. According to several scholars (Anholt 2007; Kavaratzis 2008; Kavaratzis and Ashworth 2005, 2008; Anttiroiko 2015 p. 236), governments' conscious attempt to shape a specially designed place identity and promote it to identified markets is almost as old as territorial government itself. At the very least, place marketing has been practised since the 13th century colonial times to attract people to the newly conquered land (Avraham, 2004, p. 472). Despite its long history, the concept of place marketing was established in European literature not earlier than in the 1980s. The need for increased coverage and the conversation about cities' strategic branding has become more common only during the 2000s (Braun, 2008; Kavaratzis & Hatch 2013, p. 70).

Branding emerged in business life during the early decades of the 20th century and gradually made its way to urban development in the 1990s (Avraham 2004, p. 472). According to Harvey (1989; here, Jokela, 2019), the crisis of the Fordist-Keynesian system in the 1970s increased intercity competition which resulted in local governments gradually adopting principles of corporate branding and an entrepreneurial attitude to attract businesses, potential inhabitants and tourists. In the private sector of business life, a brand is a way to distinguish oneself from the competitors. In most studies, scholars tend to separate the concepts of corporate brand and place brand. Despite these classifications, the development of corporate brands has affected and supported the development of place brands. Kavaratzis and Hatch (2013, p. 72) state that studying traditional corporate brands can help us understand place brands.

The trends of traditional corporate brands have reached the field of place branding. One big trend in place branding is the participatory branding approach, which enhances the significance of internal audiences and comprehends the branding process as a dialogue between stakeholders. This trend centres on the idea of brand as co-creation, which highlights the fact that 'brands are not formed through traditional communications but are

co-created by a multitude of people who encounter and appropriate them'. (Kavaratzis and Hatch 2013, p. 72.)

Another trend that originates from corporate branding are stories, which have become an integral part of branding activities. As stories give context and evoke emotions, they make wonderful branding tools. Stories were used as inspiration in the 'Brand New Helsinki' project. Helsinki's stories were a starting point to the branding – impressive people, actions and encounters that make Helsinki what it is. Usually, stories are created by professionals in the fields of PR, communications, advertising or city marketing (Kavaratzis and Ashworth 2005). Although locals can often participate in the content creation of branding stories, the creation is a highly selective process that can produce a simplified reality where the whole city's complexity is packed in one neat package (Kalandides 2009, p. 3–4).

In Helsinki's case, stories produce shared visions of the future of the city. Jokela (2019) has studied the Helsinki brand from a transformative perspective and links the storytelling to the enhancing and transformative dimensions of city branding. An analytical framework by Joo and Seo (2018) suggests that enhancing dimension highlights the city's positive sides and strengthens the existing policies and characteristics that are attractive. The transformative dimension focuses on changing the city into something new according to the city strategy or policies. According to Jokela (2019), in the light of this framework, storytelling has 'enhancing and transforming capabilities that contribute to the making of specific urban imaginaries', which frame the city and affect our experiences and decision-making.

Despite many efforts, there is no one all-encompassing definition for place brand (Braun, Kavaratzis & Zenker 2013, p. 19). Kavaratzis and Hatch (2013, p. 70) state that the highly multi- and interdisciplinary literature concerning place marketing is what makes defining the concept even more complicated. Perhaps the most popular and encompassing definition is Zenker and Braun's (2010; Kavaratzis & Hatch 2013, p. 70). They define the place brand as 'a network of associations in the consumers' mind based on the visual, verbal, and behavioural expression of a place, which is embodied through the aims, communication, values, and the general culture of the place's stakeholders and the overall place design'. The definition brings forth how brand experiences and associations can differ significantly in different segments or target groups. These experiences are influenced by the segments' knowledge and expectations of the place; what they know beforehand and what they expect the place to be like. The most fundamental thing about the definition is the emphasis each

segment's role, action, and culture. (Braun, Kavaratzis & Zenker 2013, p. 19.) The City of Helsinki approaches place brand quite similarly as Zenker and Braun but compares the concept to reputation. The City states that the word 'brand' is easier to understand if it is replaced with the word 'reputation'; it cannot be created with mere marketing and communications, but it is formed by actions, experiences and encounters – what the city is and how it affects people¹³.

Kavaratzis and Hatch (2013, p. 70) have found four essential issues that Braun, Kavaratzis & Zenker's definition highlights, the first of which is that the place brand is formed in the minds of people – the brands exist in the mind of the market. Therefore, in practice, branding is the management of mental images. Secondly, the brand is a group of associations that are not necessarily aligned – they can be conflicting, even in an individual's mind. Thirdly, various and diverse actions and objects embody the brand. Some of which can be directly aimed at brand creation, while others have other purposes that significantly affect the place's brand. Fourthly, the significance of the place's stakeholders. Place as a brand is highly complex and cannot be treated with the means of common product branding. The lack of control over the branded entity, the conflicting interests of stakeholder groups, and the need for social sensitivity that leads to the inability to follow conventional targeting strategies demonstrate how crucial stakeholders are for place branding. (Kavaratzis & Hatch 2013, p. 70.)

Place branding is the act of creating place brands. Kavaratzis and Ashworth (2005; here, Kavaratzis 2015, p. 156) define place branding as 'an approach to urban governance that includes a set of activities and methods with the general aim to forge and project a desirable place image'. In my thesis, I will support this definition of place branding for it acknowledges branding as a method of urban governance towards a desirable outcome which, in the case of my thesis, is Helsinki's successful sustainability actions.

Kavaratzis and Kalandides (2015, p. 1371) suggest that place brands are formed when people encounter place-making elements and form associations. Place brands' formation is based on the unique ways people process different place elements to create their associations and how these associations interact with each other and change constantly. Place brands are formed and evaluated when people encounter the place-making elements. This experience

¹³ Brand New Helsinki website, searched on 23.3.2021, <http://www.brandnewhelsinki.fi/2020/>

of place-making elements can be direct through first-hand experience or indirect through other people; near or far or mediated. (Kavaratzis & Kalandides 2015, p. 1376.) In practice, encountering a place-making element can be a visit to a museum or seeing a city as a tv series' location. The place associations are constantly evolving and changing as they interact with other several dimensions. Like the associations, the place brands are ongoing, multiple, open, and somewhat unpredictable, going against the dominant understanding of place brands, which sees them a fixed asset. There is no singular, objective, or essential place brand to be 'built' or uncovered, but an ongoing and multiple processes of place brand formation. (Kavaratzis and Kalandides, 2015, p. 1375.) This view is far from the traditional idea of a fixed label on a 'product'.

Even though there is a reasonably steady consensus on how the place brands are formed, Kavaratzis and Kalandides (2015, p. 1371) point out that there are three significant gaps in understanding the formation process. Firstly, it is unclear what types of elements people base their associations upon; in other words, which elements people choose from the place and what they might invent to form place-related associations. Secondly, it is not clear how the associations operate collectively or how they are interconnected in the formation of the place brand. Thirdly, it is also important to consider that not all associations are equal; they differ from each other in impressiveness. Moreover, the source of the association affects substantially how powerful and impactful the association is. A reliable and authoritative source can make specific associations stay topical, although they might have become obsolete. Since these processes are primarily unknown and unpredictable, many cities have started to use branding as a form of governance or strategic tool instead of influencing people's mental images; from association-revoking and influential representations, the cities are moving over to actions. Jokela (2019) describes this as branding 'beyond representations'. I will explore this shift in place branding in the following chapter.

2.1.1 From influential representations to governance strategy

Branding has been on the rise in the public sector for several decades. As mentioned earlier, place branding has been borrowing the means of corporate branding and marketing since its beginning, for instance, representations, visually impactful pictures and slogans. Recently, cities have shifted their focus from traditional means of city marketing to a more action taking approach: branding as governance strategy. This approach is concerned with achieving

policy goals and communicating with the public (Eshuis and Klijn, 2012, p. 150), and it is even more advantageous when legitimising new forms of governance and new policies that challenge the status quo (Bellini et al., 2010). Therefore, we should explore place branding as a form of governance. Place branding is often a rather political activity, even though traditionally catchy slogans and emotion-evoking imagery might blur the fact. Place branding is not only about drawing a positive image of the city, but also it has transformative and enhancing aspects. When local governments design policies to meet the place brand's expectations, place branding becomes much more than marketing communications, for it has a communicative power to shape an image of the place, which can be used to legitimise policy decisions. (Joo & Seo, 2018.)

The shift from traditional city marketing to branding as a governance strategy can also be seen in Helsinki's case. In connection with the 'Brand New Helsinki' project, the City stated that 'the Helsinki brand needs action, not words', and the brand consists of shared experiences. The City even announced at the beginning of the project that *One Hel of an Impact* is not a slogan, but 'an attitude that challenges everyone to think big' and take exceptional actions that impact and draw attention¹⁴. According to Jokela (2019), the key message is that full the potential of Helsinki's assets can be utilised when the culture surrounding the operations of the city are changed to match recent urban transformation. This includes a shift in urban citizenship: 'more than ever, urban citizenship is built from the ground up, meaning that individuals and communities – as collectives formed by individuals – are becoming the driving forces of development'¹⁵. In other words, the citizens are expected to take action towards the city strategy's visions. Branding manages perceptions by emphasising the emotional and the psychological, therefore, it is not aimed at either deliberation or reason, but rather effective and quick assessments based on heuristics (Eshuis & Edwards, 2013).

2.1.2 Sustainable city imaginary as driver of change

With their images, logos, and storylines, brands can draw attention and push policy processes ahead when actors gain interest. But also, they can trigger the development of counter images

¹⁴ Helsinki Brand Concept, searched on 23.3.2021.

http://www.brandnewhelsinki.fi/2020//app/uploads/2016/07/01_Helsinki_brandikonsepti_ENG_web.pdf

¹⁵ Brand New Helsinki website. liite: Tutkimusvaiheen yhteenveto. Published on 31.8.2015, searched on 10.4.2021.

http://www.brandnewhelsinki.fi/2020//app/uploads/2016/04/BnH_liite_02_Tutkimusyhteenveto.pdf

and attract opponents. Eshuis and Kljin (2012, p. 69) argue that branding can influence two aspects that are crucial to the modern governance process. Firstly, branding can activate actors; brands can trigger emotions and motivate actors to act and support, for instance, ideas and values of the branded policy or solution or the aspiration built in the brand can be great motivators. Secondly, branding can bind actors in a governance network; binding is a process that happens over time when an actor becomes attached to the desired objective by building a relationship with it and committing to the ideas that it conveys. Activating an actor can be a one-time thing. Still, binding is about commitment and contributions to the cause: it can mean interaction with other actors, contribution to the resources, engaging in negotiations, developing solutions etc. (Eshuis and Kljin 2012, p. 70.)

Branding as a governance strategy can create imaginaries of hoped results that can be achieved, for instance, 'Sustainable Helsinki' or 'Carbon-neutral Helsinki'. The promise built in the imaginaries shows what can be realised, and it motivates by appealing to the citizens' emotions. Hajer and Versteeg (2019) have stated that these imageries produce conceptions of what is possible and therefore steer decision making: imagination is both 'the faculty or action of forming new ideas, or images, or concepts of external objects not present to the senses' as well as 'the ability of the mind to be creative or resourceful'. Especially when the goals or future threats (e.g., climate change) are not present to the senses, imaginaries are powerful devices to justify political choices to make a transition to a more sustainable world. (for ex. Vanolo, 2013.) Soja (2000) describes urban imaginaries as 'the interpretive grids through which we think about, experience, evaluate, and decide to act in the places, spaces and communities in which we live,' in other words, the imaginaries influence how we act.

According to Jokela (2019), in Helsinki, there is a shift in city branding towards the transformation of the urban realities in accordance with contemporary policy paradigms by using the brand as a tool to reimagine and constitute the city as a 'desirable location with light regulation, and thereby to empower local communities and to encourage active and innovative people to experiment and make *actions with impact*'. Therefore a 'Sustainable Helsinki' or 'Carbon-neutral Helsinki' imaginaries can be described as 'neoliberal visions' which seek to make citizens responsible for their actions. Miller and Rose (2008) describe this steering as governmentality. Originating from Foucault's concept of *governmentalité*, it describes an action that systematically aims to steer people's behaviour towards a desired outcome. Vanolo (2013) states that the concept of governmentality involves 'the way in which subjects perceive themselves and form their identities through processes of

government which control, incite or suppress actions by drawing a line between what is ‘acceptable’ and what is ‘unacceptable.’” (Vanolo, 2013.)

Miller and Rose (2008) distinguish two aspects in governmentality – rationality and technology. Rationality refers to the way society names and prevails to understand problems in governance. It also contains the moral content of governance, areas of knowledge, and the division of labour between different forms of expertise. The aspect of technology is more essential for my research, for it refers both to the concrete practices of governance and the relevant people and institutions that exercise governance. From this perspective, branding is the technology through which the citizens can be guided to take responsibility for their actions instead of regulating their actions directly. In fact, governance is not about close surveillance but striving towards freer environments that support citizens’ autonomy and forms of interaction. Governance’s target is different forms of community actions that aim to balance the extreme forms of individualistic culture to enable the state to step back from its nanny role. (Miller & Rose, 2008.) Some have criticised that citizen participation in a neoliberal context is a governmental technology to implement policies, rather than transferring power to citizens; by establishing rules in participatory projects, governments aim to shape citizens’ behaviour. However, Eshuis and Edwards (2013, p. 1069) argue that such notions underestimate actors’ agency as citizens are not ‘victims of neoliberalism’ but have their own consciousness and sometimes even modify neoliberal policy programmes in accordance with local needs.

2.2 Sustainable development

Since my interest is branding as governance in the context of sustainable development, the concept has to be defined. One of the most common definitions for sustainable development is the Brundtland Report’s *Our Common Future*, published in 1987 by the United Nations. In the said publication, sustainable development is defined as ‘development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs’. The report laid the foundations for the Rio Summit (also known as Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro in 1992), leading to the creation of the UN Commission on Sustainable Development, whose task was to oversee the said summit’s outcomes. Although popular, the Brundtland Report has been criticised for over-emphasising the relationship between sustainable development and economic growth (for ex. Langhelle, 1999 and Rydin,

2011). However, it is important to note that sustainable development is not an anti-economic concept; rather, it inquires how economic activities interface with the social and environmental dimensions of our lives; economic dynamics generate wealth within society, provide for people's needs and support investment for the future. (Rydin, 2011, p. 4.)

Brundtland Report and the concept of the triple bottom line (in short, TBL) by Elkington (1994) are often linked to each other. The concept references how sustainable development includes economic, social and environmental dimensions. The economic dimension focuses on maintaining capital and encompasses the resource base that provides renewable and exhaustible inputs to production processes. Social sustainability has been famously defined by Bramley et al. (2005; here, Ghahramanpouri, 2013) with two overarching concepts: social equity (which centres upon distribution fairness) and sustainability of the community (which refers to the viability and health of society as a whole). There are several concepts that are also associated with social sustainability, which highlight the diversity of the concept. For instance, public services, employment and income, education, pride and sense of place, cultural and social diversity, empowerment and participation, urbanity, attractive public realm and safety, to name a few. (Ghahramanpouri, 2013.) The environmental dimension refers to 'the life-support systems essential to the existence of humanity' (Ukko et al., 2019). Environmental sustainability is concerned with the usage rate of renewable resources, pollution and the depletion of non-renewable resources. One of the most common goals in environmental sustainability is to reduce climate change. With an essential and equal emphasis on each dimension, all the aspects are needed as pillars to hold up the plaque of sustainable development.

The triple bottom line forms the groundwork for numerous sustainability agendas, for instance the UN The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) – international development goals established in the Millennium Summit of the United Nations in 2000 for the year 2015 – and the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which are depicted in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The agenda includes 17 interlinked SDGs and 169 targets that describe how the goals can be achieved. Through the implementation of the SDGs, the UN seeks to achieve 'a better and more sustainable future for all' (UN Sustainable Development Goals, 2015). The SDGs address many global challenges, for instance, poverty, inequality, climate change, environmental degradation, peace and justice – and therefore cover all the three dimensions of sustainable development. Currently, the SDGs are a world-famous framework that countless organisations and companies utilise, for instance, the City

of Helsinki has put together *The Implementation of the UN Sustainable Development Goals in Helsinki 2019*, a report which describes the implementation of the blueprint provided by the United Nations.

When talking about cities and sustainable development, urban sustainability is often mentioned. It has become a significant concern with increased urbanisation all around the world. However, there is debate over how and to what extent urban areas can actually be sustainable. One view suggests that an urban area can never be truly sustainable since it always relies on its hinterland to provide resources and process its waste. (Rydin, 2011, p. 9.) Rydin (2011, p. 9–12) argues that ‘urban sustainability is not about creating a closed loop in which all resources are internally sourced, and all waste products are internally recycled’. Rather, he states that urban sustainability has three aspects. Firstly, urban sustainability is about the extent to which activities within urban areas contribute to unsustainable outcomes. Secondly, it is about the possibilities of using urban areas to render economic development more sustainable. And thirdly, it is about using governance to pursue action for sustainability and to demonstrate commitment to the sustainable development agenda. In other words, urban sustainability is about doing the best that possibly can be done in the framework of the urban area while motivating everyone to take part in sustainability actions defined in the city strategy. Governance and motivating locals to pursue the sustainable development agenda are crucial since many people live in urban areas.

The word sustainability derives from the Latin *sustinere*, which means ‘to tenere’, ‘to hold’. In modern English, ‘to sustain’ means to ‘maintain’, ‘support’, ‘uphold’, or ‘endure’. (Simpson & Weiner, 1989.) Despite the popularity of the word, in urban studies, sustainability is not explicitly discussed as ‘sustainability’ or as ‘sustainable development’, but through many other concepts that highlight different dimensions of sustainability. Therefore, in my research data, sustainability can appear as other words – for instance, equity, liveability, safety and attractiveness of the city – which I will take in consideration in my analysis.

3 Method and research data

Place branding is widely a multi- and cross-disciplinary field, so there are several traditions and approaches that become prevalent. Lucarelli and Berg (2011) recognise four approaches; 1) *managerial* examines the development of place brands as a result of a managerial process, 2) *integrated* attempts to explore the place brand in connection to broader processes and integrate these in the branding process, 3) *critical* approaches place brands from a highly critical perspective revealing their implicit goals and agendas and 4) *culturally informed* is a fusion of all the studies mentioned above (Kavaratzis & Ashworth 2015, p. 157). In addition to the aforementioned, Kavaratzis and Hatch (2013) recognise an *identity-based* approach which is based on the relationship between the place brand and place identity.

My approach to this study is the *culturally informed* approach since I aim to explore place branding as governance in sustainable development – I research branding as a part of broader processes. However, I approach my data from a critical perspective. For instance, in my analysis, I try to find out if there are other possible interpretations to the frames, and is the frame trying to blur some negative aspects of Helsinki's development, and who do these frames serve in the end.

3.1 Frame analysis as a method

In essence, branding as governance is an attempt to influence the stakeholders' perceptions. (Eshuis & Klijn, 2012, p. 28–29.) Before the actors can commit to the cause, they must internalise the desired outcome. Usually, what needs to be influenced are perceptions of problems, solutions, the innovativeness of the policy, or the initiator's competencies. This act of branding is close to a well-known governance strategy called framing, which refers to the process of selection and editing through which representations are produced.

The imaginaries (for ex. 'smart city', or in my case, 'Sustainable Helsinki') are perceptions of reality that are discursively produced and can also be viewed as place-frames. Martin (2003; here, Torkington & Ribeiro, 2020) describes place-frames as 'a shared representation of a place toward specific ends, based on material experience of the place and drawing on a set of goals, values and beliefs, and which is articulated through discourse'. The specific end depicts the wanted strategic outcome. In my analysis, I will follow the example Torkington

and Ribeiro (2020), as they have used frame analysis to study place-frames that are produced through discursive practices. Frame analysis is also a diverse method for studying written or spoken language; it offers a practical and flexible way to analyse and interpret phenomena from different views based on different theoretical traditions and concepts. Both branding and governance use framing as a way of managing policy problems and solutions. In this light, framing can be seen as a technology of governance. Hence, frame analysis is a suitable method for my research in many ways.

In theory, framing refers to the process of selection and editing through which presentations are produced. Framing involves various linguistic, visual and aural means of constructing a certain kind of image of world events, but it can also be seen as creating a context for represented things. Through framing, social actors seek to define issues from their perspectives (Seppänen & Väliverronen, 2012, p. 97–98).

The frame analysis can be done either quantitatively (in which case the research data can be extensive) or more qualitatively (in which case the analysis can be focused on narrower data). Alternatively, the analysis may consist of a combination of these approaches. There is no right way to do frame analysis, as the method can be applied flexibly to the researcher's interests and theoretical emphases. (Linström & Marais, 2012.) I use the qualitative approach since my research data is relatively compact, and the quantitative approach would not bring any added value to my research.

For a long time, frame analysis has been a popular theory amidst media analysis. One of the most credited theories about framing is from Goffman. His book *Frame Analysis: An essay on the organization of experience* (1974) is one of the classics of frame analysis. Goffman approaches frames from the perspective of impressions, how people interpret situations and draw conclusions in the light of prevailing circumstances. (Linström & Marais, 2012, p. 21.) Initially, Goffman defined frame as the principle of organisation that guides (social) events and people's attitudes toward them. Through these interpretive frames, people structure their daily lives. (Linström & Marais, 2012, p. 23.) Framing has been seen as a concept, theory, and approach. Goffman's famous definition is intrinsically linked to the concept of situation definition; in everyday life, we face a wide range of situations from which we draw our own conclusions and act accordingly. Often, frames are inconspicuous, routine ways of grasping and structuring the world. Framing is a way for a person to organise a flood of information; the world is easier to comprehend by filtering the information through certain frames

(Karvonen, 2000, p. 79.); a frame is a tool through which we structure the world into meaningful entities that are easier to understand. (Välvirronen 2007, 51.)

The frames are based on selection: they highlight certain things and exclude other things, emphasising only certain aspects of a phenomenon. The starting point is the definition of a situation, which means that a person entering the situation must first understand the nature of the situation in order to act correctly (Karvonen 2000). The interpretive frame contains a preconceived notion of how reality is constructed and therefore contributes to the construction of social reality. (Välvirronen 2007, p. 52.) According to Entmann, frames are about picking up elements of perceived reality and arranging narratives that emphasise connections to create a certain kind of impression. (Linström & Marais 2012, p. 24.) Thus, frame analysis assumes that the subject of the research is different from reality, or it creates a certain kind of image for its audience. If convincing, certain types of emphases can shape an individual's perceptions of reality.

Gitlin has discussed media interpretive frames and found them to be primarily unspoken and unconscious patterns. The patterns structure the world for both the content creator and the audience. Based on these interpretive frames, we either trust or dislike the content we experience. (Karvonen 2000, p. 80.) The interpretive frame works schematically so that the content creator needs to activate it in the audience's mind by placing specific keywords, basic phrases, metaphors, concepts, symbols, and stereotypical pictorial elements (Karvonen 2000, p. 81–82).

Frames are the element that connects the individual and the community. Frames are not person-specific or change from individual to individual but are culturally constructed, shared means to understand phenomena and what is happening. Some frames are self-evident and mundane ways for us to understand the world. (Linström & Marais, 2012.) In the context of places, frames describe and imagine the ideal state of the place – e.g., create imaginaries. Place-frames can therefore define the scope and scale of the shared collective concerns. (Martin, 2008.)

Frame analysis is not a perfect research method, and therefore it has received criticism. The main problems in frame analysis are the reliability and validity of the study. Validity can be problematic, especially in the context of qualitative frame analysis, where frames are defined operationally. In addition to this, the subjectivity of research and the researcher's own

stereotypical or conventional ways of approaching the subject of research may also hinder the analysis. (Linström & Marais, 2012, p. 34.) I realise that in this thesis, I am looking at the frames from my own perspective in the light of the information I have previously gathered. However, I will strive to conduct my analysis as objectively as I possibly can. As a Finn and a long-time Helsinki resident, I am part of the target group Helsinki aims its branding messages to; in order to succeed in sustainable development, the City wants to govern my behaviour towards a more sustainable lifestyle. However, after studying place brands in my bachelor's thesis, I have acquired a critical mindset towards them, and I will use it to the advantage of my study and avoid the 'cultural blindness' my status as a resident might cause.

3.2 Data produced by the City of Helsinki

All of my research material is produced by the City of Helsinki and concerns either the city's sustainability efforts or goals or Helsinki's strategy and direction. Helsinki has set ambitious plans for the city's sustainability, and thereby all of the material addresses sustainable development in some way. Since Helsinki's brand work is filtered in all the city's activities, I argue that this data has earned its place in my place brand research. There are several studies of Helsinki's brand work (for ex. Jokela, 2018 & 2019, and Sipilä, 2018), but as of now, there are no studies on the relationship between sustainability and the Helsinki brand. However, the topic is certainly worth studying since sustainability is one of Helsinki's key objectives during this and undoubtedly next strategic period as the city strategy creates the foundation of the brand work.

As my data I have selected:

- The Carbon-neutral Helsinki 2035 Action Plan
- The Implementation of the UN Sustainable Development Goals in Helsinki 2019
- The Most Functional City in the World – Helsinki City Strategy 2017–2021
- Signals from Helsinki website; sections 'Sustainable solutions' and 'News'

Since there cannot be a discussion about sustainable development without addressing all of its elements – economy, environment, and social – I have selected material where all of these sustainability dimensions are discussed. I chose the most recently published material in order to examine the current 'big picture' of how Helsinki frames itself in the context of sustainability.

I selected the *Carbon-neutral Helsinki 2035 Action Plan* (2018) because it is the most important and specific paper on how Helsinki strives to cut admissions, and it serves as the city's strategic guide map to sustainability. From the document, I selected the introductory chapters that address Helsinki's sustainability actions more verbally. In contrast, the rest of the document details the technicalities of Helsinki's climate actions, which I didn't find fruitful for my research. *The Implementation of the UN Sustainable Development Goals in Helsinki 2019* (2019) was also an obvious choice because it discusses Helsinki's sustainability through well-known international goals. *The Most Functional City in the World – Helsinki City Strategy 2017–2021* (2018) is a relevant piece of data, as it gives a frame and direction for everything that Helsinki does while discussing the city's sustainability. *Signals from Helsinki* website is also part of my research material because it is a website dedicated to Helsinki's sustainability actions: it offers insight and practical solutions, whereas the rest of my data consists of mostly strategic documents.

In the next chapter, I will present the most recurring frames and analyse them according to the frame analysis theory in the light of branding as governance. My frame analysis consists of three phases; first, I start my frame analysis by searching for different kinds of linguistic expressions, for instance, idioms, metaphors, phrases, and descriptions, which can be used to affect the reader's perspectives in the context of sustainability. Secondly, I re-examine the sections and name the most prevalent frames, which will help me answer how Helsinki frames itself in sustainable development through branding. Thirdly, I categorise the frames according to different dimensions of sustainability to compare different sections that address the same themes and topics, which helps me look for the discursively produced imaginaries and see how Helsinki emphasises the different dimensions.

4 Analysis

4.1. Helsinki's most prevalent frames

As I went through the research material, I came across two types of frames, which I categorised by their tone of voice and diction and named accordingly as the competitive and cooperation frame. There was not a single text that used only one frame, but multiple frames were found in all the texts.

The first frame makes distinctions and puts Helsinki on a pedestal. As the name of the frame proposes, the competitive frame is also very competitive: it compares Helsinki to other cities, especially on an international scale. The frame is used to highlight Helsinki's high points and accomplishments. In this frame, sustainability is a race where some are winners, and some are left behind.

With the second frame, Helsinki brings up how sustainable development can be achieved together. In this frame, the City of Helsinki is both a cooperator and a coordinator. The frame is about creating a team spirit and sharing the experiences and achievements that will or have been made in a cooperative relationship. The language of the frame is very active, and it often uses we/us-pronouns. The cooperation frame also aims to assert responsibility to the citizens for their behaviour and sustainability actions.

The following table represents the framing elements and the discursively created imaginaries based on my analysis of the linguistic expressions in the City of Helsinki's content.

Frame	Imaginary	Example from the research material	How sustainability is addressed	Framing elements in the text
Competitive frame	‘Sustainable Helsinki’ as a world-leading example as ‘specific end’ i.e., wanted strategic outcome	‘By international comparison, Helsinki has managed to control such differentiation better than most peer cities. In the future, too, Helsinki will strive to hold its position as a textbook example in Europe of how to prevent segregation.’	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - controlling differentiation - preventing segregation - social sustainability 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - international comparing - ‘better than most’ - ‘textbook example’ of preventing segregation
Cooperative frame	The ‘specific end’ called ‘Sustainable Helsinki’ can be achieved together - imaginary as a technology of governance	‘To achieve a carbon-neutrality, Helsinki will require cooperation between residents, businesses, research centres and the City organisation.’	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - carbon-neutrality - environmental sustainability 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - requiring cooperation - targeting residents, businesses, research centres and the City organisation as key actors in achieving the goal

Table 1. Explanation of the analysis and most prevalent frames

4.2 The competitive frame

The first frame gives one answer to my first research question, ‘how does Helsinki frame itself in sustainable development through branding?’. Even the city strategy ‘the most functional city in the world’ implies that Helsinki is trying to achieve a forerunner’s role. The same type of framing was frequent in all Helsinki’s content. The competitive frame draws a line between Helsinki and other cities in Finland and abroad. My research material consists of strategic texts that look forward, set goals, missions and visions – often, these types of strategies paint the picture we want to realise for the future, but they also ground plans based

on the current situation. In the research material, the competitive frame is used to create powerful imaginaries of sustainable Helsinki.

Competing in all dimensions of sustainability

There were sections where Helsinki wanted to accomplish all the dimensions of sustainability. Most of these sections were found in *The Implementation of the UN Sustainable Development Goals in Helsinki 2019* where it was evident that Helsinki wanted to pioneer in implementing the SDGs. In the document, the City of Helsinki used an ambitious tone of voice:

Helsinki wants to be the most functional city in the world and stand out as a pioneer in implementing global responsibility locally.¹⁶

This sentence is part of introductory words signed by Helsinki's current mayor, Jan Vapaavuori. It is also one of the most recurring sentences and frames in all the selected data as 'the most functional city in the world' is Helsinki's strategic slogan during 2016–2021. The functionality is further explained in the many strategic documents through copious examples, but in short, it means that everything in Helsinki operates and works smoothly; life is happy, easy and interesting for the locals, and there are good opportunities for businesses and skilled labour. Another part of the sentence, 'stand out as a pioneer in implementing global responsibility locally,' depicts how Helsinki wants to implement the global SDGs locally and how global sustainability goals can be transformed into locally implemented guidelines through ambitious and efficient processes. This means that Helsinki aims to implement the SDGs quicker than other countries and wants to be a leading example – an illustration of competitive framing. The section also presents an imaginary of the specific end that can be achieved: the most functional city in the world, which implements global responsibility. The City states that it uses the SDGs as one of the criteria for success in sustainable development, which creates an impression that sustainability is about succeeding and competing. This sort of competitive frame recurs more than once, and there are sections where Helsinki positions itself with impressive peer cities:

¹⁶ *The Implementation of the UN Sustainable Development Goals in Helsinki 2019*, p. 2

In September 2018, Helsinki decided to follow New York City's example and become the first European city to commit to submitting Sustainable Development Goal implementation reports at the city level.¹⁷

Helsinki follows international developments of sustainability and compares itself to other cities. Becoming the first European city to commit to submitting the SDG implementation reports at the city level might have been possible either because Helsinki was already creating a sustainability strategy or because it had the advantage of agility as a relatively small capital to react fast. The city also mentions that it follows New York City's example, which is a strategic choice: by choosing New York City, Helsinki positions itself with a progressive, neoliberal and global city.

Competing in environmental sustainability

Next, I will go through the sections that use the competitive frame in environmental sustainability. Lately, Helsinki has famously campaigned about its efforts in this field by ambitiously declaring the city could go carbon-neutral by 2035. In this sustainability dimension, the competitive frame was most recurring in the Sustainable Solutions website, which is dedicated to showcasing Helsinki's advances in overall sustainability. Especially the Smart & Clean programme was framed with a competitive and forward-looking ambition:

The programme aims to create the world's smartest and cleanest city.¹⁸

Again, superlatives are used: Helsinki wants to be cleaner and smarter than any other city, which adds a competitive edge to the sentence. The sentence also paints an imaginary of Helsinki's future: 'the world's smartest and cleanest city'. Vanolo (2013) notes that smart city discourse is one of the most common urban imaginaries and describes it as an evocative slogan that lacks a well-defined conceptual core. Therefore, the term can be used in many ways to support various smart city related agendas. However, Helsinki defines the smart city concept quite clearly, according to the city, it includes 'smart and bidirectional electrical grids, demand response, renewable energy, smart mobility, and smart building and home automation systems with open communication interfaces, not to forget energy efficiency and

¹⁷ *The Implementation of the UN Sustainable Development Goals in Helsinki 2019*, p. 2

¹⁸ Sustainable Solutions website, Smart City, searched on 10.4.2021.
<https://kestavahelsinki.hel.fi/en/sustainable-solutions/smart-city>

environmental values'. Helsinki wants to benefit the entire city community with smart city solutions¹⁹.

The page goes on to list the Smart & Clear programme vision, which follows the same competitive path:

The world's most appealing emission-free mobility:

1. *The world's most resource-smart citizen*
2. *The world's smartest city energy*
3. *A world-leading city in the circular economy*
4. *Pioneer of climate-positive construction*²⁰

Again, there are superlatives and words like 'world-leading' and 'pioneer' which continue to create distance and distinctions to other 'smart cities'; Helsinki wants to be the thought leader in smart city solutions. According to the Smart & Clean programme's website, the programme aims to mitigate climate change with innovative solutions while providing new business opportunities for the companies involved. The objective is in line with what Vanolo (2013) has said about smart cities as powerful devices; 'they can activate and rethink specific rationalities in order to trigger new economic paradigms – in other words, accumulation regimes that generate new businesses and possible capital accumulation?.'

But on the other hand, businesses need to get involved in mitigating climate change since they can find opportunities to position themselves competitively. Businesses also create emissions, so by getting involved in the earlier stages of these types of programmes, they can alter their procedures in a way that can be beneficial for them in the future. Also, the climate is an increasingly hot global business that lures investors; International Finance Corporation IFC states that global markets for climate-smart companies and technologies have grown to \$1 trillion annually, and the growth is expected to accelerate²¹. Climate as a lucrative business opportunity can create value in other ways than just to the investors – it can also create sustainable solutions.

¹⁹ Sustainable Solutions website, Smart City, searched on 10.4.2021.

<https://kestavahelsinki.hel.fi/en/sustainable-solutions/smart-city>

²⁰ Sustainable Solutions website, Smart City, searched on 10.4.2021.

<https://kestavahelsinki.hel.fi/en/sustainable-solutions/smart-city>

²¹ FC's Work in Climate Business, IFC.org, searched on 6.4.2021.

https://www.ifc.org/wps/wcm/connect/Topics_Ext_Content/IFC_External_Corporate_Site/Climate+Business

As mentioned earlier, Helsinki's most recognised objective in environmental sustainability is becoming carbon neutral by the year 2035. The goal was also framed in a pioneering manner on the Sustainable Solutions website. The goal is mentioned to be internationally ambitious, which implies that globally other cities do not dare to aim as high as Helsinki does. 'Carbon-neutral Helsinki by 2035' is one of the most recurring and imposing imaginaries the City has, and it is used to support specific development policies. According to Vanolo (2013), there are many links between neoliberal urban development policies and the 'smart city' imaginary. Vanolo uses the concept of 'smart city', which represents a kind of sustainable city: 'the construction of a clean, green and intelligent city image is, in fact, useful to attract investments, leading sector professional workers and tourists'. The same idea appeared in competitive framing of Helsinki's environmental sustainability in a section that discussed smart mobility, traffic and public transport solutions. This topic was actually mentioned in several different documents: *The Implementation of the UN Sustainable Development Goals in Helsinki 2019*, *The Most Functional City in the World: Helsinki City Strategy 2017–2021* and the *Smart Solutions* website. These transport and mobility solutions were framed as achievements, which explains why they were mentioned multiple times. The following example depicts how Helsinki frames the transport and mobility solutions:

*Surveys show that Helsinki public transport services have the world's most satisfied customers. The services are functional, the Metro system is expanding, and Helsinki Region Transport (HSL) is in the vanguard of the development of smart mobility services.*²²

Public transport is one of the most convenient ways for a Helsinki local to cut their carbon footprint. With the world's most satisfied customers, the section is framed in a light that makes it seem that Helsinki's public transport system is somehow really advanced compared to other cities in the world. Also, this framing paints yet another competitive and attractive picture of Helsinki: with this kind of framing, who would not want to use Helsinki's public transport? The future might be different since HSL has had financial difficulties due to the COVID-19 pandemic; people don't use public transport to go to work since most of them are working remotely at home and the popularity of walking and biking is increasing²³. The

²² Sustainable Solutions website, Transport, searched on 10.4.2021.
<https://kestavahelsinki.hel.fi/en/sustainable-solutions/transport>

²³ ”Taloustilanne on karmeaa” – HSL:n uusi toimitusjohtaja aloitti työnsä lähes pahimmalla mahdollisella hetkellä, mutta lupaa merkittävää parannusta lippujärjestelmään, *Helsingin sanomat*, published on 28.2.2021, searched on 18.4.2021. <https://www.hs.fi/kaupunki/art-2000007830358.html>

pandemic can mean permanent changes in the ways the residents use public transport. Even after the pandemic, most might choose to work increasingly from home and have gotten used to walking or biking. City bikes are another way to monetise smart mobility; if public transport's popularity continues to decline, the City might have to rethink the development of smart mobility services. These documents were published before the pandemic, which shows how unexpected repercussions COVID-19 caused. However, the City frames its position in smart mobility in a competitive manner:

Helsinki is one of the world's leading cities in smart mobility.

Helsinki has established itself as a smart-mobility thought leader and frontline piloting city with the help of agile experiments and new initiatives.²⁴

Smart mobility is also an important factor in mitigating climate change because many smart mobility solutions represent shifts towards low-emission and carbon-free transport²⁵. This introduction makes the framing feel especially powerful. Again, Helsinki is one of the top cities in the world, but this time Helsinki is also a well-known and established thought leader, which gives the impression that other cities and countries must also recognise and acknowledge Helsinki's advances and achievements. In this section, Helsinki is not only claiming itself as one of the best but also that other cities place Helsinki at the top, which makes this framing especially ambitious and imposing. This section states that the specific end – Helsinki as a world leader in smart mobility – is achieved. This sort of imaginary can be used to create a sense of local pride and eagerness to show what the city is capable of since its competitor cities do not reach Helsinki's level.

Competing in social sustainability

The City of Helsinki claims to be famous for its social sustainability, particularly low level of segregation, (gender-)equality and quality of life and overall liveability. In international comparisons, Helsinki is often mentioned as one of the most liveable cities in the world. Therefore, it is expected that these achievements and furthering them were also framed in a competitive manner in my research material:

²⁴ Sustainable Solutions website, Smart Mobility, searched on 10.4.2021.
<https://kestavahelsinki.hel.fi/en/sustainable-solutions/smart-mobility>

²⁵ Sustainable Solutions website, Smart Mobility, searched on 10.4.2021.
<https://kestavahelsinki.hel.fi/en/sustainable-solutions/smart-mobility>

In international comparisons, Helsinki has been more successful in preventing segregation than most of its comparison cities. Helsinki aims to maintain its position as a top example of the prevention of segregation in Europe and in enabling the equality and well-being of its regions.²⁶

By international comparison, Helsinki has managed to control such differentiation better than most peer cities. In the future, too, Helsinki will strive to hold its position as a textbook example in Europe of how to prevent segregation.²⁷

In both sections from different documents, Helsinki's success in preventing segregation is measured by comparing it to other cities. Helsinki is more successful, and it has managed to control differentiation better than most peer cities. It is also said that Helsinki is a 'top example of the prevention of segregation', and it holds a position as 'a textbook example' of how to prevent segregation. It seems that the segregation in the context of Helsinki provokes rich, competitive choices of words. This framing creates the impression that Helsinki is a good city for everyone and offers equal opportunities. It also makes it seem that there are no so-called 'bad areas' in the city. Helsinki may have low levels of segregation, but it does not mean the city does not have problems with segregation. The City of Helsinki has long sought to prevent the segregation of residential areas by implementing a policy of social mixing of residential areas, however, there are clear signs of growing and deepening socio-economic and ethnic disparities between residential areas, especially in the metropolitan area. One of the most worrying features of the development is that various disadvantages (lack of education, low income, unemployment) have accumulated more strongly in the same urban areas. The differentiation is therefore more multi-layered than before. (Vilkama & Hirvonen, 2018.)

As Helsinki's strategic slogan is 'the most functional city in the world', it is only natural that the livableness and quality of life in the city are mentioned in the sustainability goals:

Helsinki's vision is to be the world's most functional city. In pursuing this vision, it seeks to create the best conditions possible for urban life for its residents and for visitors.²⁸

²⁶ The Most Functional City in the World: Helsinki City Strategy 2017–2021

²⁷ The Most Functional City in the World: Helsinki City Strategy 2017–2021

²⁸ The Most Functional City in the World: Helsinki City Strategy 2017–2021

*Helsinki is a modern, dynamic and vibrant city providing world-class opportunities for self-fulfilment and an enjoyable life in a safe, reliable and functional setting.*²⁹

The same types of opportunity painting imaginaries continue in these sections. As the most functional city in the world, Helsinki aims to create the best possible conditions for urban life for both residents and visitors. This framing again differentiates Helsinki from other cities and exemplifies Helsinki's ambitious objectives. For instance, in the latter sentence, Helsinki uses again the word 'world-class' – this time to describe the opportunities the city offers. The section underlines that these opportunities are available in a safe, reliable and functional setting. Safety in this section can mean many things, but we can agree that Helsinki or Finland is not always safe for everyone. It has been reported for many years now that Finland is the second most violent EU country for women; 47 per cent of over 15-year-old women and girls have suffered physical or sexual violence³⁰. Also, according to the *Being Black in the EU report* (2018), Finland is among the most racist countries in the EU; 14 per cent of the black respondents had been a victim of a physical attack, and around 63 per cent of the black respondents had experienced racial harassment and derogatory comments or threats. Both the figures were the highest among all 12 of the countries that participated in the study³¹. In the light of this information, I find the sections somewhat naive because there is still a lot to be achieved in Helsinki's safety and the urban conditions the city offers. These sections could carry more weight if they were framed in a more goal-oriented way.

Another thing Helsinki finds 'world-class' is the education it offers³². Finland is also famous for its education. Many remember how Finland has topped the worldwide PISA (*Programme for International Student Assessment*) studies in several years. It is no wonder that Helsinki declares many internationally ambitious goals in this field:

*Helsinki wants to be the world's most effective place to learn.*³³

²⁹ The Most Functional City in the World: Helsinki City Strategy 2017–2021

³⁰ Naisiin kohdistuva väkivalta on pandemia, jota ei voi ohittaa, UN Women, published on 24.11.2020, searched on 31.3.2021. <https://unwomen.fi/uutiset/naisiin-kohdistuva-vakivalta-on-pandemia-jota-ei-voi-ohittaa/>

³¹ Finland among most racist countries in EU, study says, Yle.fi, published on 29.11.2018, searched on 10.4.2021. https://yle.fi/uutiset/osasto/news/finland_among_most_racist_countries_in_eu_study_says/10531670

³² The Most Functional City in the World: Helsinki City Strategy 2017–2021

³³ The Implementation of the UN Sustainable Development Goals in Helsinki 2019, p. 15

*Helsinki is the world's most impactful place for learning*³⁴

The word 'impactful' has a deeper meaning in the context of the City of Helsinki. As mentioned before, 'Brand New Helsinki' declared *One Hel of an Impact* as Helsinki's new brand position, which distinguishes the city from its competitors. The expression 'the world's most impactful' therefore has a specific accent and emphasis.

The social dimension of sustainability also suggests that the governments need to work in a certain way to deliver sustainable development; a participatory approach is needed to involve the communities affected by economic development with all its social and environmental consequences. (Rydin, 2011) This definition of social sustainability was leading my focus when I searched for the frames. Topics like the public sector, public and open data, public participation and transparency stood out from the data.

*Besides being a service organization, Helsinki is a platform and the world's most progressive public sector ecosystem. Helsinki develops digital solutions, which make it easy for residents to follow and engage in matters of interest and concern to themselves, regardless of whether they are the city's or other actors'. Helsinki's operating model is based on openness and transparency. Helsinki is the world's leading city in opening up and utilizing public data.*³⁵

Here in this section, the competitive frame manifests itself when Helsinki claims its public sector ecosystem and public data as the best in the world. This framing is further opened in the website Sustainable Solutions:

*Helsinki was one of the first capital cities to start publishing its data as open data. Data is the most valuable resource of the future. — Helsinki was among the first capital cities in the world to start publishing its data as open data. Today, Helsinki is the world's second most progressive city in publishing open data right after New York City.*³⁶

Helsinki has been an early adopter of public data, which is enhanced by the mention 'among the first capital cities in the world'. Not only an early adopter but also a progressive and

³⁴ The Most Functional City in the World: Helsinki City Strategy 2017–2021

³⁵ The Most Functional City in the World: Helsinki City Strategy 2017–2021

³⁶ Sustainable Solutions website, Smart city, searched on 10.4.2021.
<https://kestavahelsinki.hel.fi/en/sustainable-solutions/smart-city>

pioneering one, Helsinki describes itself as the second most progressive city in the world ‘right after New York City’. In this chapter, the competitive framing is strong and multidimensional: being one of the first and one of the best. This is the second time Helsinki uses New York as its peer city, which is also a very competitive choice since New York City is a global metropolis, often described as the world’s cultural, financial, and media capital. The comparison creates an imaginary of a successful Helsinki, where the city is in the same reference group with one of the ‘greatest cities in the world’.

Public and open data makes it easier for the locals to participate and form opinions of institutional matters. Helsinki also frames public participation in its sustainability efforts:

Helsinki is a pioneer in public participation and interaction by global standards.³⁷

Even on an international scale, Helsinki has a comparatively low voting age for participatory budgeting, and anyone over 12 years of age can vote.³⁸

Helsinki is especially known for human-centred and participatory smart city activities. Piloting, experiments and co-creation produce smart solutions that make life easier – they produce the most functional city in the world.³⁹

Pioneering, international comparisons and solutions that produce the most functional city in the world clearly paint a picture that the City of Helsinki is proud of its participation achievements. In a few years, Helsinki has introduced participatory branding and participatory budgeting, and therefore it is expected that the City wants to highlight these experiments and achievements. Nevertheless, Helsinki’s emphasis on participation raises questions: What is the extent of participation as a handover of responsibility to individuals in line with neoliberal governmentality? And how is it related to people’s pressures and exhaustion? Giving a choice to influence your city can be seen as an opportunity or a privilege. Still, it can also be a burden, which causes stress when one must acquire information to make an informed decision about things that affect many people. Therefore, it is good to question whether all participation contributes to social sustainability and how.

³⁷ Sustainable Solutions website, Transparency and citizen engagement, searched on 10.4.2021. <https://kestavahelsinki.hel.fi/en/sustainable-solutions/transparency-and-citizen-engagement>

³⁸ The Most Functional City in the World: Helsinki City Strategy 2017–2021

³⁹ Sustainable solutions website, Smart city, searched on 10.4.2021. <https://kestavahelsinki.hel.fi/en/sustainable-solutions/smart-city>

There were a lot of achievements mentioned in this dimension's competitive framing, but one objective stood out clearly:

Helsinki strengthens its position as an international forerunner in inclusion and transparency. Each resident of Helsinki has the right to feel they are a true Helsinki citizen and to do something significant for their community. In Helsinki, it is easy to be of help to others. The city strives to maintain the trust of residents and companies, to strengthen their real influence and to improve equality, service standards and mutual understanding between population groups through modern models of inclusion. Gender equality is a principle permeating all activities of the city. To promote gender equality, a research-based project is to be launched to assess gender impact in a number of selected services.⁴⁰

The positioning as a forerunner in inclusion and transparency is a bold one. There have been many recent conversations on what kind of participation is allowed. For instance, the police used force on a peaceful demonstration about the environment when copious protests about extreme right politics have been allowed to arrange⁴¹. Gender equality has also been a hot topic for several years, and there is a lot of internalised misogyny in Finland⁴². Helsinki is no exception, even though the city as an organisation is committed to promoting gender-equality. However, it is important that these goals have been framed in such a competitive way, but again, a touch of realism could have sharpened the message.

⁴⁰ The Most Functional City in the World: Helsinki City Strategy 2017–2021

⁴¹ Helsingissä ennätysmäärä äärioikeistolaisia mielenosoituksia – HS listasi itsenäisyyspäivän mahdolliset ruutitynnyrit, *Helsingin sanomat*, published on 28.11.2016, searched on 31.3.2021, <https://www.hs.fi/kaupunki/art-2000004884477.html>

⁴² Naisvihaa ylläpitävät rakenteet ovat syvällä, mutta häirintään puuttuva nainen on edelleen vihervassarisuvakki, sanoo Ylen Instagram-kyselyyn vastannut, Yle.fi, published on 27.3.2021, searched on 31.3.2021, <https://yle.fi/uutiset/3-11858473>

Competing in economic sustainability

In this frame, economic sustainability was not as frequently mentioned as the other dimensions. Still, I came across a handful of examples, all of which were strategic objectives.

The objective is to ensure the attractiveness and international competitiveness of the centre as a location and investment site for companies, as well as a place to live in or to visit. The centre of Helsinki is to be made one of the most attractive economic locations in the world.⁴³

The centre of Helsinki has many office premises and company headquarters, and local and national companies know the benefits of the office spaces in the centre of our capital. There are many other companies, so the odds are that potential cooperative partners have offices nearby. Also, good public transport connections and a wide selection of lunch spots and services can attract potential employees. However, in this particular example, Helsinki aims to attract and compete internationally as a good location for companies. Therefore, pioneering and competitive framing is especially strong in this section. Even though this framing is meant to create an attractive imaginary of the centre, it leaves a monotonous image of the city centre. The city centre is also a centre for culture, and it is famous for its architecture and a beautiful seaside – the centre is not only for business.

The same type of competitive framing is applied when talking about start-ups:

Helsinki's objective is to be one of Europe's most captivating locations for innovative start-ups and the most attractive knowledge hub for companies and individuals wanting to make the world a better place to live in.⁴⁴

The City of Helsinki has been a frequent partner with Slush – a technology and start-up event, which facilitates meetings between the founders of start-ups and investors. With the help of the City of Helsinki, the event has grown into a massive ‘festival’ in the course of a couple of years and attracts many foreign investors and visitors. These types of events are part of the city’s brand work. Nevertheless, it is good to consider if the economic growth and attractiveness of the city are compatible with different forms of sustainability. In fact, capitalism, with its power-relationships, often produces inequality. When Helsinki promotes

⁴³ The Implementation of the UN Sustainable Development Goals in Helsinki 2019, p. 23

⁴⁴ The Most Functional City in the World: Helsinki City Strategy 2017–2021

entrepreneurship and opportunities for business, how does it take into consideration this aspect of the phenomenon? Also, the start-up field is highly competitive and often a launch of a company or product requires months of underpaid work and working overtime, and even that does not guarantee success. Young people especially find start-ups attractive, agile and ‘cool’ places to work, learn and challenge themselves, but the field is notorious for its burnout culture. Just last year, Slush received a lot of critique on its distorted workplace culture; the daily lives of those in paid employment included unpaid overtime, compulsory volunteer work on weekends and burnout⁴⁵. Fortunately, the current CEO strives to abolish the unhealthy workplace culture. Still, we can question whether the romanticisation and hype of start-ups support all dimensions of sustainability.

4.3 The cooperative frame

The City of Helsinki also uses cooperative and ‘do it together’ framing in its documents that deal with sustainability. The cooperative framing believes in the power of striving for common goals together. It emphasises the objectives and achievements that are achieved only in cooperation with some other actors or organisations. In this framing, sustainability is not necessarily a race, but a challenging group work, where there are no slackers. This framing used relatively active forms: we/our-pronouns, which give the impression that the City of Helsinki is not an abstract actor but consists of committed people. This framing also offers an answer to one of my research questions if Helsinki aims to steer behaviour and make citizens responsible for their sustainability actions – and the answer is yes. In the following chapters, I will explore how this action is framed.

Cooperating in all dimensions of sustainability

There were a few sections where Helsinki’s cooperation towards sustainable development concerned all the four dimensions of sustainability. The following section serves as a good example:

Over the past year, we have collaborated with New York City to encourage other cities to take part in voluntary implementation reporting, and this summer, many cities

⁴⁵ Slush sai uuden toimitusjohtajan ja luopui nollatunti-sopimuksista, Helsingin sanomat, published on 3.2.2020, searched on 11.4.2021. <https://www.hs.fi/talous/art-2000006393369.html>

*around the world will submit their own reports to the UN. Our goal is to achieve concrete actions and results – not just to produce reports. The cities’ combined voice is now perhaps louder than ever, and its message is clear: achieving a permanent positive change requires that we all do more than our best. The special characteristics of cities make it possible to bring global responsibility to the level of everyday life. — The information and insight we produce form a basis for steering our resources and operations.*⁴⁶

The City of Helsinki uses the active form ‘we have’ instead of passive ‘the City of Helsinki has collaborated’ as the City would have used in the competitive frame. Helsinki has collaborated with New York City and encouraged other cities to take part in something. This is not the first time Helsinki mentions the collaboration with New York City, which only highlights the collaboration’s signification and discursive power: this megacity is both a companion and a peer city for Helsinki. The section also mentions goals are not ‘the cities’ goals’ but uses the active form ‘our goals’. When Helsinki and New York City have succeeded in bringing other cities together, the combined voice is ‘loud’, and the message ‘clear’. The cities want to achieve change, but to achieve that, ‘we all do more than our best’ – another active form and powerful choice of words enhance the strength of this cooperation. ‘The permanent positive change’ undoubtedly refers to the ‘Sustainable Helsinki’ or ‘Carbon-neutral Helsinki’ imaginary; this section’s alliteration makes it seem like a slogan, which enhances the imaginary’s vision.

Cooperating in environmental sustainability

Now, I will go through the cooperative framing in sections that deal with environmental sustainability. In this framing, particularly, the City of Helsinki uses the word ‘cooperation’ almost like a slogan. For instance:

*Helsinki can become carbon-neutral through cooperation.*⁴⁷

To achieve a carbon-neutrality, Helsinki will require cooperation between residents, businesses, research centres and the City organisation. The Action Plan cannot succeed without skilled communication and engaging interaction. This is why special focus needs

⁴⁶ The Implementation of the UN Sustainable Development Goals in Helsinki 2019, p. 2

⁴⁷ The Carbon-neutral Helsinki 2035 Action Plan, p. 7

*to be directed at communication and the engagement of interest groups when implementing the Action Plan.*⁴⁸

*We can make Helsinki carbon-neutral through cooperation.*⁴⁹

*The main sources of greenhouse gas emissions in Helsinki include the heating of buildings, electricity consumption and traffic. In addition to the city organization, the climate goals also concern the City's residents and organizations that operate there. Helsinki can become carbon-neutral through cooperation.*⁵⁰

*Carbon neutral Helsinki can only be achieved through cooperation among citizens, the City, businesses and other organizations.*⁵¹

Currently, carbon neutrality is the most significant environmental goal for Helsinki. Consequently, the City has come up with a phrase to frame and emphasise the objective. Indeed, the city's efforts towards environmental sustainability are all for nothing if organisations and locals do not cooperate, which is why intense campaigning is vital. Therefore, Helsinki stresses the significance of communications and engaging interaction. In this section, we see a prime example of how Helsinki is taking a concrete step from branding as representations towards branding as a governance strategy, where branding has a communicative power to shape an image of the place, which can be used to legitimise policy decisions (Joo & Seo, 2018); Helsinki uses the imaginary of a 'Sustainable Helsinki' as a strategic tool to arouse emotions and draw attention by framing it as a shared goal that benefits everyone. Sustainable city creates business opportunities and makes the city liveable and resilient – this powerful imagery pushes people to act. Helsinki names residents, businesses, research centres, other organisations and the city organisation as participants for the cooperation, which implies that the City asserts responsibility also outside itself. The cooperation covers all city's stakeholders, meaning everyone must contribute. The framing is consistent with the neoliberal visions that seek to make citizens responsible for their actions. In other words, the imaginaries serve as tools for governmentality or the technology of governance.

⁴⁸ The Carbon-neutral Helsinki 2035 Action Plan, p. 14

⁴⁹ The Carbon-neutral Helsinki 2035 Action Plan, p. 17

⁵⁰ The Implementation of the UN Sustainable Development Goals in Helsinki 2019, p. 53

⁵¹ Sustainable Solutions website, Carbon neutral Helsinki, searched on 10.4.2021.
<https://kestavahelsinki.hel.fi/en/sustainable-solutions/carbon-neutral-helsinki>

Modern climate responsibility

*Here, Helsinki will need consistent State support to develop solutions to compensate for this.*⁵²

Despite dividing a part of responsibilities to locals, Helsinki relies on the State to carry out the final responsibility for the sustainability actions and develop solutions for compensations as the State ultimately creates the milieu for the City of Helsinki's efforts. With this support working together and cooperating will be possible. Helsinki plans to participate in the business community and residents in its projects concerning environmental sustainability. These projects deal with circular economy and smart city solutions.

*Emission reductions and circular economy projects will be carried out in Helsinki in tandem with the business community and residents.*⁵³

*A smart city is energy-smart and environmentally friendly. Helsinki works with enterprises, research institutes and citizens to develop such smart solutions for climate change mitigation that allow the people of Helsinki to lead good and carbon-neutral lives.*⁵⁴

In this section's framing, Helsinki is confident that both the business community and residents will get involved in carrying out the projects that create sustainable solutions. Also, Helsinki will work with them, which creates an encouraging image of how sustainable development is created – together. This framing where the efforts are made together was actually quite frequent when dealing with environmental sustainability, especially when talking about sharing and circular economy:

Helsinki collaborates with enterprises, neighbouring cities and citizens to promote the sharing economy and the circular economy.

The City cooperates with enterprises, neighbouring cities and citizens.

⁵² The Most Functional City in the World: Helsinki City Strategy 2017–2021

⁵³ The Most Functional City in the World: Helsinki City Strategy 2017–2021

⁵⁴ Sustainable Solutions website, Smart city, searched on 10.4.2021.

<https://kestavahelsinki.hel.fi/en/sustainable-solutions/smart-city>

*Helsinki's role is to serve as a platform for new and potential sharing and circular economy experiments as well as to support them.*⁵⁵

Collaborating and coordinating gives an active image of the City of Helsinki's efforts in this particular area. 'To serve' and 'to support' framings create an impression that the City follows what is happening in sharing and circular economy experiments and actively tries its best to make them successful. In these sections, the cooperation frame paints a picture where the City of Helsinki is 'all in'. According to the City, Helsinki's biggest potential to promote lies in construction, sharing, food production and distribution chains, and energy production. Helsinki aims to save both money and the environment by the smart use of earth materials, food surplus and co-using of supplies, facilities and service. In *The City of Helsinki's Roadmap for Circular and Sharing Economy*⁵⁶, the City particularly underlines the business opportunities in the circular and sharing economy; the field's growth relies on new innovations and collaborations, where Helsinki wants to serve as an 'important platform and facilitator' – a common phrasing of Helsinki's role in urban development. Yet again, the City brings up how economic opportunities and environmental sustainability complement each other. Money can be a powerful incentive, but at times, it can seem a bit crass in the context of achieving environmental sustainability. However, Helsinki also mentions the employment opportunities that the circular and sharing economy can offer, which is a way to take into consideration all the dimensions of sustainable development; sharing and circular economy (environmental), business opportunities (economic), employment opportunities (social).

Cooperating in social sustainability

Especially the cooperative framing of social sustainability used active forms of verbs, which creates an impression that the City is active as well. For instance, in *The Implementation of the UN Sustainable Development Goals in Helsinki 2019*, Helsinki City Strategy Objectives were listed as follows:

- *Pleasant and safe: We will make Helsinki safer and more pleasant.*
- *Learning: We will enable lifelong learning.*

⁵⁵ Sustainable Solutions website, The sharing economy and circular economy, searched on 10.4.2021. <https://kestavahelsinki.hel.fi/en/sustainable-solutions/sharing-economy-and-circular-economy>

⁵⁶ The City of Helsinki's Roadmap for Circular and Sharing Economy, 4/2020, searched on 18.4.2021. <https://circulareconomy.europa.eu/platform/sites/default/files/the-city-of-helsinki-roadmap-for-circular-and-sharing-economy.pdf>

- *Minds the wellbeing of children and young people: We will take care of the wellbeing of children and youth, as well as prevent marginalization.*

Helsinki states that it will execute the goals and ‘do it together’ as the pronoun ‘we’ suggests. Here, the City says that it will make Helsinki ‘safer’, which leaves room to imply that there, in fact, are safety problems in the city. Safety and children and young people’s mental health and well-being became a boiling issue this winter when in Koskela, Helsinki, a group of teenagers tortured and killed their peer who had been placed in a group home.⁵⁷ There has also been an increase in Helsinki and Finland’s violent crimes, where the offender has been a teenager.⁵⁸ Therefore, in the light of these realities, it is imperative that Helsinki frames firmly the objectives that concern young people. In its strategy, the City of Helsinki acknowledges the vicious circle of social exclusion that causes many serious problems, especially when a young person is in question – the Koskela murder was an extreme example of this development. When the exclusion happens from education or employment, it causes social polarisation and segregation. While applying cooperative framing, Helsinki ensures that it considers both the human and economic perspective in alleviating the problem.

We support every young person and prevent social exclusion

Together with relevant partners, Helsinki will launch an extensive and comprehensive project to find systemic solutions to the challenge of disaffected youth.⁵⁹

Again, Helsinki takes an active stand against the social problems of the young. Helsinki claims to fight against the problem ‘together with relevant partners’ and with ‘an extensive and comprehensive project’, which gives the impression that Helsinki is highly committed to this serious issue. In *The Implementation of the UN Sustainable Development Goals in Helsinki 2019*, Helsinki goes into detail, how it will help and support the young in need; the solutions vary from education projects to employment services. Since social issues are heavy and challenging and require professional help, it is good that the City is not trying to involve citizens themselves in the realisation of this objective, but other relevant partners, such as businesses and other organisations.

⁵⁷ Ylen tiedot: Viranomaiset pettivät Koskelan surman uhrin – lastenkoti ei etsinyt poikaa vaikka vanhemmat pyysivät, koulusta paljastui puutteita, Yle.fi, published on 12.2.2021, searched on 31.3.2021. <https://yle.fi/uutiset/3-11778420>

⁵⁸ Alaikäiset syyllistyneet vakavaan väkivaltaan tänä syksynä poikkeuksellisen paljon – lastensuojeluun kaivataan lisää järeitä keinoja, Yle.fi, published on 2.11.2020, searched on 31.3.2021. <https://yle.fi/uutiset/3-11627229>

⁵⁹ The Most Functional City in the World: Helsinki City Strategy 2017–2021

The City of Helsinki wants to initiate cooperation when education is concerned. As mentioned in the competitive framing, Helsinki wants to become the most impactful place to learn. In the cooperative frame, Helsinki creates an imaginary of an innovative and experimental city for lifelong learning:

Collaboration with leading Finnish and international universities, cultural institutions, developers and companies will promote the creation of a new ecosystem of experimenting.⁶⁰

The city cooperates closely with the universities, other institutes of higher education, and students networks in the Helsinki Metropolitan Area to promote both the conditions for international-level tuition and research and the city's strategic goals.⁶¹

Through collaborating and cooperating, Helsinki strives to be an excellent place for studies and science. Enhancing education's importance is especially needed since the Finnish government has made cuts from education's funding in several years⁶². Helsinki cannot abolish those decisions, but it can contribute in other ways – like here, cooperating – to increase Finnish education's profile. In these sections, the cooperation frame creates a hopeful and optimistic imaginary of the future. It does not oblige the locals, but local institutions and companies, which undoubtedly work in the field of education already in some way or another. Raising the profile and reputation of Finnish education is also a way to bring skilled labour to the country, both teachers and students.

In the cooperative frame, Helsinki was obliging the locals to act when living and participating in decision making were concerned. For instance, when the City wants to create 'living, distinctive and safe neighbourhoods':

Helsinki is a city where all neighbourhoods are living, pleasant and distinctive and in which residents feel they are at home. In Helsinki, diversified and vital neighbourhoods are built by increasing residents' influence over matters in their living environment. The

⁶⁰ The Most Functional City in the World: Helsinki City Strategy 2017–2021

⁶¹ The Most Functional City in the World: Helsinki City Strategy 2017–2021

⁶² Puolueet uskovat, että koulutusleikkausten aika on ohi – Opiskelija: "Opetus on muuttunut enemmän massaluennoiksi, professoreilla on vähemmän aikaa", Yle.fi, published on 24.3.2019, searched on 14.4.2021. <https://yle.fi/uutiset/3-10701842>

city invests both in infrastructure and in residents all around the city. Helsinki supports local initiative and cooperation among residents and communities. Residents' ways of influencing are seen to, and democratic management is secured in city owned rental apartments.⁶³

Here in this section, the City starts to add responsibility to the locals by 'increasing their influence', supporting 'local initiative and cooperation' and seeing to 'residents' ways of influencing'. I'm sure everyone has an opinion about their place of residence: why it is good, what does not work and what they would like to have there. That is why giving the locals influence over their neighbourhood is a good thing per se. In order to encourage participation, the city paints an imaginary of a desirable neighbourhood, which can be achieved through active resident participation. To facilitate citizen participation, Helsinki nowadays has borough liaisons:

The City cooperates closely with local resident associations in city districts. Each district is served by a borough liaison tasked to promote public participation. Borough liaisons advance citizen initiatives, make the voices of people in the district heard, and help local networks to link with each other. The citizens of Helsinki can also participate electronically.⁶⁴

The borough liaisons work to ensure that the preparation of area-specific projects is carried out in 'a multivoiced and equal manner'⁶⁵. The goal is to get the locals to participate and voice their diverse opinions. By advising the citizens in the matters that affect them, the liaisons lower the threshold for participation. In this section, the cooperation frame has a friendly light; the City is interested in the citizens' opinions and wants to help them to voice their opinions so that the city officials can take them into consideration. Electronic participation is one of the ways to lower the threshold to participate, but of course, the technology itself does not necessarily solve everything.

Helsinki supports and enables citizen activities and creates equal opportunities for all to participate. According to the principles of service design, City operations and services

⁶³ The Most Functional City in the World: Helsinki City Strategy 2017–2021

⁶⁴ Sustainable Solutions website, searched on 4.4.2021. <https://kestavahelsinki.hel.fi/en/sustainable-solutions/transparency-and-citizen-engagement>

⁶⁵ Neighbourhoods get own borough liaisons, Hel.fi, published on 1.6.2018, searched on 4.4.2021. <https://www.hel.fi/uutiset/en/kaupunginkanslia/neighborhoods-get-own-borough-liaisons>

are developed by making use of the competencies and expertise of citizens and the users of City services.⁶⁶

The city claims to create equal opportunities for ‘all’ to participate. At present, Helsinki’s web pages take into consideration all special needs⁶⁷. Nevertheless, all demographic groups still don’t use or understand the internet. Also, even participating online can seem like a stressful burden for some – finding time and energy can be impossible in some life situations. This is why this framing is a bit of an ambitious stretch. In this section, Helsinki also discusses the development of its services according to service design principles. Service design has become a huge trend during the last few years. It aims to create user-friendly services, which is why the users often participate in creating and/or assessing the services. Here, the cooperation frame does not necessarily present a burden but an opportunity to create something that benefits the locals – functional services.

*The citizens will participate in developing services and the service network
The citizens’ knowledge and competence form the basis for the Helsinki participation model. A better Helsinki is built together. Helsinki invites all the citizens and all its partners to develop the city, its services and its different regions. Meidän Stadi (‘Our Helsinki’) is a place for community, effective actions and meetings. The city’s decision-making is open and encourages participation.⁶⁸*

In *The Implementation of the UN Sustainable Development Goals in Helsinki 2019* the cooperative frame expects a bit more from the residents. Their knowledge and competence are key in the development of the city as well as developing its services and regions. The section has a catchy slogan-like framing, ‘a better Helsinki is built together’, which here acts as an imaginary of the desired future. Open decision-making is the City’s method to encourage participation. In the same section, Helsinki also talks about its participation principles, which are written in the City’s rules of procedure: the principles of participation are utilising individuals and communities’ knowledge and expertise, enabling volunteer activities and creating equal participation opportunities.⁶⁹ This utilisation of knowledge and individuals

⁶⁶ Sustainable Solutions website, Transparency and citizen engagement, searched on 3.4.2021. <https://kestavahelsinki.hel.fi/en/sustainable-solutions/transparency-and-citizen-engagement>

⁶⁷ Accessibility statement for the Hel.fi website, Hel.fi, searched on 3.2.2021. <https://www.hel.fi/helsinki/en/administration/information/accessibility/accessibility-on-the-helfi/>

⁶⁸ The Implementation of the UN Sustainable Development Goals in Helsinki 2019

⁶⁹ The Implementation of the UN Sustainable Development Goals in Helsinki 2019

resulted in 2019 in participatory budgeting, which happened on a digital platform, where even 12-year-olds could participate in the allocation of 4.4 million euros on implementation of different kinds of plans proposed by the residents. The City has created an OmaStadi website, where the realisation of these plans can be followed. Most of the plans are very hands-on: a new grass to a football field, 3D printers to libraries, more benches to public areas⁷⁰.

Helsinki increasingly understands its role as the creator and enabler of possibilities.

*Helsinki actively forms partnerships with residents' organizations and with everyone interested in developing and vitalizing the city.*⁷¹

In its city strategy, Helsinki expands on citizen participation. Here, the City acts as a facilitator in a process where the citizens develop and vitalise Helsinki to their liking. In this section's cooperative frame, the primary responsibility lies on the City's shoulders as a 'creator and enabler of possibilities'. Still, the citizens also play an essential role: Helsinki creates the solutions, which attract the residents to follow and engage in the matters that need to be developed. Since the City's plans include many participatory projects, it would be beneficial to consider options for situations if the projects do not take off. On the OmaStadi website, people can comment on the participatory budgeting projects, and they had already left comments that asked to specify the stage and schedule of some projects⁷². When people participate, they expect to see changes. If the City lacks the means of implementing the plans, it can cause participation fatigue and frustration among the citizens and decrease future participation.

Cooperating in economic sustainability

The cooperative frame was not used a lot to frame economic sustainability but in a couple of instances. The main focus in this framing was to vitalise the city for tourists and businesses and get the residents to cooperate to realise this goal. Helsinki wants to provide conditions for the creation of interesting destinations and events:

⁷⁰ OmaStadi website, searched on 4.4.2021. <https://omastadi.hel.fi/results>

⁷¹ The Most Functional City in the World: Helsinki City Strategy 2017–2021

⁷² Oma Stadi website, searched on 15.4. <https://omastadi.hel.fi/processes/osbu-2019/f/173/results/8>

*The city boosts the advancement of viable big events and invests in attracting and creating major cultural and sports events, as well as congresses and conferences. Helsinki is committed to promoting tourism, and encourages everyone to come up with ideas to make the city even more attractive.*⁷³

Here the participation is framed relatively lightly as ‘coming up with ideas’. The frame makes it seem that the City has this area covered in its strategy, but just in case that someone can think of something out of the box, they have an opportunity to participate by coming up with the idea that the City will then execute according to its methods. However, in the second section, the cooperative framing dives a little deeper:

*An attractive city centre is a calling card and a must for Helsinki. The central business district of Helsinki is an attractive venue for commercial services, events, leisure and civic participation. The vitality of the city centre is being developed in collaboration with the local business community.*⁷⁴

In this section, Helsinki invites the local business community to develop the vitality of the city centre. Businesses are of course key to the city centre, and many small business owners rent the city centre’s spaces. Still, I wonder if this business-centred vitalisation of the centre is appropriate when considering all other dimensions of sustainable development. At least the City mentions that the collaboration is with the local business community, so we can assume that big foreign investors are not the ones pulling the strings. Still, as I mentioned earlier, the city centre’s attractiveness has to do with so much more than just the businesses.

Lately, there have been a lot of discussions, who has the power to develop the city. This spring, a group of experts in urban planning, architecture and urban environments published a pamphlet *Kenen kaupunki? Helsingin kaupunkisuunnittelu ja kulttuuriympäristö törmäyskurssilla*, where they claim that Helsinki’s urban planning has been outsourced to real estate investors, construction companies, and that is why urban planning has become secretive⁷⁵. The publication presents over ten destinations, which according to the writers, are controversial and a threat to Helsinki’s invaluable characteristics. The book characterises Helsinki’s land

⁷³ The Most Functional City in the World: Helsinki City Strategy 2017–2021

⁷⁴ The Most Functional City in the World: Helsinki City Strategy 2017–2021

⁷⁵ Joukko arkkitehteja syyttää Helsinkiä rakentamisen salamyhkäisyydestä ja “uuskorporatismista” – tuore kirja: tulevaan jättiareenaan liittyy kytkykaupat, Yle.fi, published on 11.3.2021, searched on 4.4.2021. <https://yle.fi/uutiset/3-11829138>

use policy as a kind of ‘slow transition to liberal-clad neo-corporatism, where decision-making power is shifting to a few real estate investors, politicians, and politically appointed leadership’. The publication, therefore, contradicts the cooperative framing the City is using in its strategy.

Moreover, in September 2020, the City published a strategy on developing the centre called *Keskustavisio*, which was prepared as a basis for land use and traffic planning specifying the zoning plan. The vision states that the city centre, its visitors and area of influence are increasing, and that the capital’s centre will be an internationally attractive centre of business, Finland’s most attractive place to work and a leading centre of culture in the Nordic countries. However, Vaattovaara has presented a critique of this vision, stating that even though Helsinki has declared that the centre should be vitalised, the City does not take action⁷⁶. According to Vaattovaara, the centre has become ‘an open-air museum’; boutiques are closing down one after the other, and in the centre street Aleksanterinkatu, department stores are in financial difficulties. *Keskustavisio* was produced before the coronavirus pandemic, which quickly silenced the city centre. However, the vision addresses the situation by stating that the state of emergency has only increased the city centre’s social, economic and cultural significance. According to the vision, the pandemic can permanently alter some things, but the crisis does not stop urbanism. The vision states that the city centre’s long-term vitality requires consistency, resilience, flexibility, and foresight. However, the vision does not specify why and how is the significance of the centre unchanged. Also, the vision presents a paradox when it claims that the pandemic presented unexpected challenges, but long-span urban planning and foresight will secure the vitality of the dense urban environment. On the other hand, the pandemic gave a lesson from the school of hard knocks for all the cities. It remains to be seen if the imaginaries in *Keskustavisio* and overall city strategy are powerful enough to produce action that enlivens the city centre.

⁷⁶ Kokenut kaupunkitutkija jyrähtää Helsingin tilasta: ”Ydinkeskustasta on tullut ulkoilmamuseo”, *Helsingin sanomat*, published on 6.12.2020, searched on 4.4.2021. <https://www.hs.fi/kaupunki/art-2000007663754.html>

5 Conclusions and discussion

In my thesis, my research objective was to study the relationship between place branding and sustainable development. More precisely, I wanted to see if cities can, through place branding, activate both citizens and organisations towards sustainability actions. I used my hometown, Helsinki, as my case study and was interested in finding out how the city organisation portrays itself in sustainable development. As the relationship between place brands and sustainable development is an under-researched topic, and there are no similar researches made in Helsinki or elsewhere, I found my research both challenging and rewarding. Since my research was multidisciplinary, I enjoyed diving into different types of research and theories.

My research findings confirm the increasingly common perception in place branding research according to which place branding can be used as a comprehensive strategic tool in urban development (for ex., Joo & Seo, 2018, Eshuis & Klijn, 2012). In Helsinki, place branding has moved over from mere representation-based city marketing towards a governance strategy whose objective is to manage perceptions about places (Eshuis & Edwards 2013). Place branding has transformative qualities that can shape the place into something new according to the city strategies or policies as they also further the creation of imaginaries (Jokela, 2019). In Helsinki's case, place branding is used to further the strategies, including highlighting Helsinki as a forward-thinking and unbureaucratic city – the most functional city in the world – with opportunities for both businesses and people and to encourage everyone to participate and make 'actions with impact'.

I found that as I continued my research, I would have liked to expand my research material. The strategic documents and a website gave a fine viewpoint to research how Helsinki frames sustainability. Still, it would have been interesting to add, for instance, the City of Helsinki's social media channels to my research data. In social media, the City is in direct communication with the citizens and tourists, and very often, the messages include branded content. The documents I studied are most likely meant as an internal motivator and accountability tool for the City and its many employees, but of course, the city strategy is also used for external communications as it illustrates the city's values, objectives and aspirations. The website Sustainable Solutions falls in the same category as it is targeted for locals and others interested in Helsinki or sustainable development in general. Therefore, I

argue that my data was very suitable for my research, and it brought out all the relevant findings.

In my first research question, I asked how does Helsinki frame itself in sustainable development through place branding. I found out two different frames that the City used when discussing its operations, goals, or achievements: competitive and cooperative. Frame analysis brought out interesting notions of how Helsinki portrays itself in striving for sustainability and succeeding in intercity competition. In both frames, the City used imaginaries of 'Sustainable Helsinki' and framed them in an ambitious and aspiring way. In many of these imaginaries, Helsinki either already was or was to become a forerunner in implementing sustainable development or, as the city strategy states, 'the most functional city in the world'.

Even though my data consisted of different types of documents and a website, both frames alternated in all the texts, demonstrating how the place branding cuts through all content the City produces. It further confirms how Helsinki's place branding is a part of urban governance; it is present in framing all the policies and strategies as the goal is to manage the perceptions of the city, the city organisation, and its projects and plans.

The competitive frame was especially prevalent when discussing on a strategic level. Most of the sections where the competitive framing was used were either achievements or objectives; Helsinki was aiming to the top or striving to hold its position there. In this way, the frame put Helsinki on a pedestal and separated it from other cities by making indirect or direct comparisons, especially on an international scale. The frame used strong language and created mental images in which the city was succeeding in sustainability. This type of framing can be seen as positioning through place branding; by highlighting accomplishments and comparing the city to others or choosing some cities over others as peers, the cities gear up in the international competition over tourists, investments, events and skilled labour.

The City of Helsinki used cooperative framing, especially when the objective was to get people, businesses and other organisations to participate in sustainability actions and the development of the city. In this frame, Helsinki often assigned itself to the role of a platform and facilitator, giving the impression that even though the City pulls the strings, the sustainability actions are made together and in cooperation, and everyone must do their part. This framing took a step further in the neoliberal branding, where the citizens are given an

opportunity to participate. Still, at the same time, they are steered to take responsibility for building better and more attractive Helsinki – ‘the actions that make an impact’ are written in the city strategy, not something the citizens necessarily come up with themselves. Some scholars (for ex., Rose & Miller, 1992) claim that this sort of participation is a means of controlling citizens at a distance and that the participation can be seen as a technology that ‘enrols citizens in neoliberal policy programmes’ (Eshuis & Edwards, 2013).

As an answer to my second research question, if there were any behaviour-steering imaginaries – yes, there were. The imaginaries were used to paint the ‘big picture’ and give a concrete vision of the preferred future. In its strategies, Helsinki used ‘neoliberal visions’, for example, ‘Sustainable Helsinki’ imaginary to make citizens responsible for their actions. For instance, in the competitive framing, Helsinki mentioned that the City will, as an international forerunner in inclusion and transparency, guarantee that each resident of Helsinki has the right to feel they are a true Helsinki citizen and to do something significant for their community⁷⁷. The framing steers the citizens towards making actions that have an impact by implying that a ‘true citizen’ can do something significant for their community. Therefore, the imaginaries acted as tools for the technology of governance. As can be seen in the example, in the competitive framing, the delegation of responsibility was more implying and indirect since the focus was on the objective, not the process. In cooperative framing, the imaginaries were more straightforward. For instance, when Helsinki claims it can become carbon-neutral through cooperation, it also mentions that the collaboration happens with citizens, the City, businesses and other organisations. Thus, the cooperative imaginaries were more open and transparent.

In order to find out more about how Helsinki’s city branding affects people and sustainable lifestyles, we would need to wait and see how the strategy period progresses. Changes in lifestyles and ideologies do not happen overnight but gradually over time. However, based on my research, we can learn that there are different ways to guide people. It can be culturally specific what ways work in which places, but in Helsinki, the City is appealing to the freedom and independence of its locals; they have the opportunity and choice to make the actions that make a difference. This sort of framing also appeals to the citizens local pride and sense of belonging. The effects of Helsinki’s place branding would make interesting follow-up research. Also, it would be interesting to compare Helsinki’s imaginaries to other capital cities

⁷⁷ The Most Functional City in the World – Helsinki City Strategy 2017–2021

– for instance, Stockholm or Oslo or Moscow – to see the ways other cities strive to steer their citizens or if they try to steer them at all.

I also wanted to find out what Helsinki's tone of voice discloses about the City's approach to furthering sustainability. Helsinki uses an optimistic and even assuring tone of voice in both competitive and cooperative frames when discussing global challenges. The City creates an impression that everything is under control. This type of approach to fostering sustainability is very much in line with Hajer and Versteeg's (2019) perception of imaginaries; how they produce a conception of what is possible and consequently affect decision-making. For instance, by announcing that the city could go carbon-neutral by 2035, Helsinki creates an imaginary of what is possible. With a corresponding strategy, Helsinki strives to steer locals, organisations and the city organisation towards sustainable choices. However, the ambitious objectives sometimes seem to exaggerate some achievements in which Helsinki still has miles to go. As the documents are not purely city marketing but strategies, a touch of realism could be more effective than glossing over important issues.

I chose to study the data through the dimensions of sustainability, which was very beneficial and rewarding since it helped discover the emphasises the City put on each dimension and if there were contradictions between the dimensions. What stood out was the emphasis on economic sustainability, which was visible even in sections that addressed the other two dimensions. Although sustainable development is not an anti-economic concept, this finding highlights how Helsinki's place branding is heavily influenced by the common narratives of economic success and international competition. These sorts of contradictions make studying place branding so intriguing as it cuts across social and economic disciplines, thus offering a broad spectrum of perceptions, actors and processes. As the relationship between place branding and sustainable development has received little attention, it deserves more research. My thesis serves as one of the first endeavours to study the topic in the context of Helsinki.

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