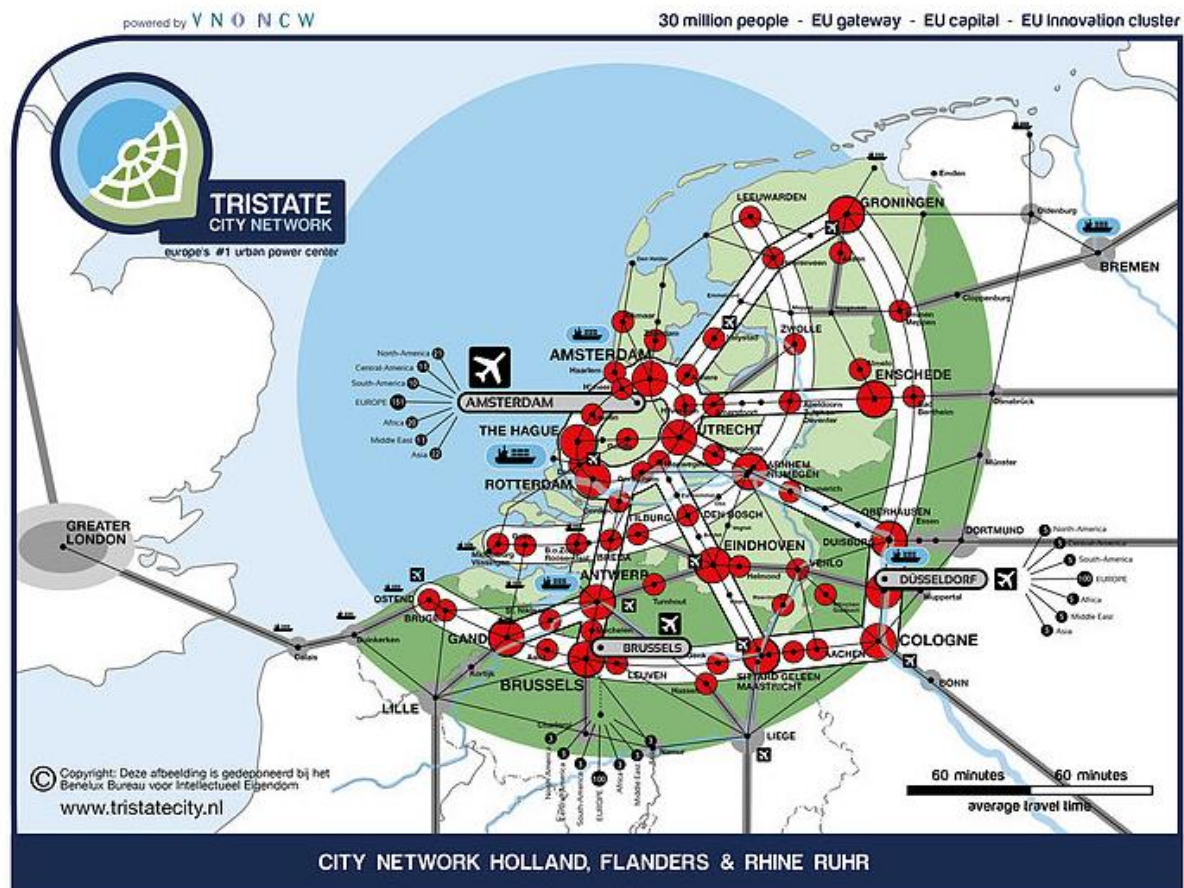


TRISTATECITY, A PRIVATE SECTOR PLACE BRANDING INITIATIVE

AN EXPLORATORY RESEARCH ON THE REASONS BEHIND ENTHUSIASM FOR TRISTATECITY AND THE FUTURE DEVELOPMENTS OF THE CONCEPT



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PREFACE

This BSc thesis has not been easy for me to write. After year break in my studies, I was very happy to have such a friendly and patient supervisor, prof. dr. Leonie Janssen-Jansen. I would like to thank her for her help in finding an interesting and focussed topic for my research, and for guiding me through the process. The consultation moments were always nice and inspiring and gave me a sense of direction. Without her feedback and tips, this thesis would not have been possible.

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Also, I want to thank my mother and brother for allowing me to work at my parent's home for a couple of days, which were some of the more productive days during the research. Thanks for the pampering!

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Rianne de Reus
November 17th, 2016

ABSTRACT

This research aims at exploring the phenomenon 'TristateCity', both in general and as a form of place branding. It focusses on the reasons behind enthusiasm that is shown by the private sector towards the concept and on further developments of TristateCity. Through interviews with representatives of companies that sponsor the concept, knowledge is generated that provides a deeper understanding of TristateCity, in terms of its definition, ambition and intentions. There are different reasons why TristateCity is so attractive for the private sector, including that the ideas behind the concept are similar to their own beliefs, and that the concept is easily incorporated into a company's marketing strategies. The role of the government is still not fully clear, but the research shows that there are several potential responsibilities that could be adopted by governmental organisations. There is also some hesitation in involving the government, as a result of its reputation to be slow and often short-sighted. However, it can be an important step towards success of the concept, together with further development that results in a real strategy and place brand for TristateCity. In the end, TristateCity is a private place branding initiative that should be further developed before it can become a real success.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 INTRODUCING TRISTATECITY

“TristateCity is what every company wants” (Johan Buijs, 2016)

In 2016, TristateCity was presented to three Dutch ministries, the G5, the Randstad provinces and the province of North Brabant. They responded positively (TristateCity, 2016a). The initiator often has such presentations on his concept, and has already gained support from the private sector, of which companies are even willing to become a sponsor of this newly presented TristateCity. So, what exactly is this “TristateCity” that everyone is so enthusiastic about?

TristateCity was initiated and developed by Peter Savelberg, in cooperation with companies in the private sector. Peter Savelberg has a background in spatial development and has worked on several spatial projects in the past, both as an employee and through his own company. Recently, he has visited several countries around the world, and his visit to China in particular inspired him to develop TristateCity.¹

TristateCity is introduced as a marketing strategy that combines The Netherlands, Flanders and North-Rhine Westphalia as one region, labelled “TristateCity”, and promotes this region as a *“large green world city with 30 million inhabitants”* (TristateCity, 2016a, <http://www.tristatecity.nl/onze-visie>, accessed September 15, 2016). It is explained as an umbrella model for local city marketing, in which participation cities are able to maintain their own identity, while simultaneously benefiting from the agglomeration power of The Netherlands as a world city as presented in the concept. The concept focuses on the strong assets that the TristateCity area (Netherlands, Flanders and North-Rhine Westphalia) has to offer: the *European Gateway* (airports and seaports), the *European Capital* (Brussels), a *European Innovation Hotspot* (Eindhoven/Rhine-Ruhr), the knowledge economy, the number of inhabitants, trade and its *“1000 years of history”* (TristateCity, 2016b, <http://www.tristatecity.nl/>, accessed September 15, 2016), and uses these to create a brand for the region. Its purpose: strengthening the Dutch position on the global market by promoting the region as a green world city (TristateCity, 2016c).

The way in which the concept is presented implies that TristateCity is a place branding concept. Unlike most place branding practices, however, it is initiated by the private sector, and not by a

¹ Peter Savelberg spent ten years working for KPN and TNT Post (now PostNL). His job was to assign new destinations to the closed locations of these companies, that were often located in the city centre. Afterwards, he established his own company and worked on several city development projects. The economic crisis resulted in a serious decline of the availability of such projects. Peter Savelberg then decided to travel the world, and talks in his interview about the booming emerging market of China that he has witnessed there. This visit was his inspiration for the development of TristateCity.

governmental organisation, as for example with Randstad (van Brussel et. al., 2006). The website (as accessed in September 2016) offers a collection of informative images that demonstrate the identity of the region: portraying and mapping the assets of the TristateCity region with regard to a varies of different subject – e.g. infrastructure and logisitics, knowlegde, culture and heritage, and distance to other countries or hubs. How TristateCity works as a form of place branding in practice is yet to be revealed. All the website has to offer on this subject is mentioning the ‘umbrella model’ (TristateCity, 2016a).

The private sector (recently joined by the Dutch government) shows a keen interest in TristateCity. They are so enthusiast about the concept that some of them have decided to financially aid further developments through sponsorship. For ‘outsiders’, it seems as though these companies make an investment in a concept that is yet to be fully thought through, as there is little information available on TristateCity. The information on the TristateCity website (as accessed September 2016) provides little to no explanation of the intentions of the concept or how it works in practice – apart from the sponsoring companies, who else are involved and what establishes these relationships? The concept has been presented to a couple of governmental organisations, but it is unknown what is expected from the government in relation to TristateCity. So, TristateCity has a website full of images that give evidence of an ambitious and large-scale project, but important details are missing.

It seems strange that so many corporations are willing put their faith in and invest in a programme which – at this point – seems to be no more than just a concept. On the TristateCity website, the following products are offered: readings and inspiration sessions, workshops for both public and private parties, advice on city development and city marketing and the development of the ‘Online Trade Mission TM’ (TristateCity, 2016d), but that seems to be all. The website is filled with infographics about the region, but it lacks a description or strategy on how to achieve the 2025 vision for this region.

1.2 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

This research is conducted based on the following research question:

WHAT ARE THE REASONS BEHIND THE ENTHUSIASM AND INTEREST IN THE NEWLY PRESENTED TRISTATECITY AND WHAT CAN BE EXPECTED FROM TRISTATECITY IN THE (NEAR) FUTURE?

This question will be answered through addressing the following set of sub questions:

- What is TristateCity?
- Why is TristateCity such an attractive concept for the private sector?
- What is expected from the Dutch government with regard to the TristateCity model?
- What, according to the thought leaders, is essential for TristateCity to become a reality/success?”
- How does TristateCity work as a place branding concept?

How these questions were formed is further discussed in the chapter on the conceptual framework.

1.3 RESEARCH OBJECTIVE

While place branding projects are often used as urban governance strategies by authorities (further explained in the theory), TristateCity was initiated and designed by an individual, sponsored by private parties and has then been presented to governmental organisations, though it is yet unclear what is expected of them. Because TristateCity takes a different approach to place branding, non-availability of information for deeper understanding of the concept and because no other research has yet been conducted on this subject, TristateCity is worth investigating. Assumably, those involved have more knowledge about the concept, but it is also relevant for society to be able to inform themselves about TristateCity through the results of this research, as its region has approximately 30 million inhabitants who might all be affected in some way or another by the implementation of TristateCity as a place branding concept.

The objective of this research then is to further explore TristateCity, both in general as well as with regard to the concept of place branding, in order to fill the blanks that currently appear in the information on the concept. This is done through a set of interviews with representatives of some of the companies that sponsor TristateCity. These interviews serve to gain first-hand knowledge on the subject. In particular, the research seeks to uncover why the private sector is showing so much enthusiasm towards TristateCity, and what can be expected from the concept with regard to further developments and implementation.

1.4 READING GUIDE

Following this introduction is the chapter on the theory behind the research. This theoretic framework includes a further introduction to TristateCity and the theory of place branding. In the next chapter, the conceptual models are introduced, which form the basis of the research. After the conceptual models, the research methodology and methods are discussed, including comments on the data collection through interviews and the method for the interview analysis. This is followed by a description of the interview process. In the next chapter, the results are discussed by first looking at some statistics and then analysing the transcripts from the interviews per topic. In this chapter, there is also some extra attention to TristateCity as a form of place branding. The results chapter is followed by the conclusion and, finally, the discussion.

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

In this research, the TristateCity phenomenon is explored in general as well as in relation to the concept of place branding. Before doing so, it is necessary to acquire a deeper understanding of both TristateCity and place branding. However, as there is a lack of information available on TristateCity, only a few insights can be provided here for introductory purposes. On the other hand, there is quite some literature on place branding, allowing for a more thorough introduction of the concept.

2.1 TRISTATECITY

As already explained in the introduction, TristateCity is a newly introduced concept, developed by Peter Savelberg. The information here is all abstracted from the TristateCity website, which is the only available resource at the beginning of the research. The website explains TristateCity as a marketing strategy. It proposes a vision of a strong economical region consisting of The Netherlands, Flanders and North-Rhine Westphalia, based on the assets that this region currently has at its disposal. The strategy aims to create a stronger and more attractive image of this TristateCity region (though it mainly focusses on the potential benefits for The Netherlands) in order to attract foreign investments and international talent (TristateCity, 2016b). It is a reaction to the increasing number of megacities in the world as a result of the ongoing urbanisation; Dutch cities are too small and too competitive on the international market and must work together if they want to be able to compete in the so-called 'Battle of the Cities' (TristateCity, 2016b). The TristateCity concept has been developed as an umbrella model; without having to discard their own identity, cities can benefit from the proclaimed agglomeration strength of the TristateCity region (TristateCity, 2016b).

The concept is sponsored by VNO-NCW, CBRE and IVN, and a number of other Dutch companies. The website also mentions eighteen thought leaders, most of them deputies from the sponsoring companies. The thought leaders assemble twice a year, supporting the developer (Peter Savelberg) in further developments. According to the website, the Economic Board Utrecht as well as other boards and governments are also interested in the project (TristateCity, 2016c).

Being developed as a marketing strategy, promoting the strong and positive characteristics of the region to attract new investments (as described above), TristateCity can be explained as a form of place branding – a concept that will now be further discussed.

2.2 PLACE BRANDING

Place branding can be explained as a reaction against increasing competition between places, caused, at first, by nationalism, and later by globalisation (van Ham, 2008). In essence, place branding is a form of place or city marketing; using the identity and the assets of a place, a brand is created and marketed to attract a certain or several target audiences. Place branding can also be described as an instrument that can be used in urban planning and management (Kavaratzis & Hatch, 2013), and has a strong relation with identity, as will be explained. The exact definition of place branding will be discussed in the next section.

Both globalisation and further integration within the European Union influence countries in working on their brands – which have become an essential tool for promoting a state (van Ham, 2008). In

order to attract investments, residents and tourism, places have to differentiate themselves – offering a different set of qualities and assets. Pearson describes that “A brand is a combination of features (...), customer benefits (...), and value (...). A brand is created when a marketing adds value to a product, and in the process differentiates it from other products with similar features and benefits” (Pearson, 1996, p. 6). This differentiating – the offering of a unique set of assets and qualities - is described by Medway and Warnaby as “the key task of branding” (Medway & Warnaby, 2008, p. 642).

2.2.1 PLACE BRANDING DEFINITIONS

Researchers struggle with defining place branding. Different papers focus on different aspects of the concept, making it difficult to distillate one and complete definition of the concept. As a result, there is no single definition of place branding in scientific literature (Kavaratzis & Ashworth, 2005). Though researches cannot find agreement on the definition of place branding, they do agree that it is connected to value creation in space (Van Assche, Beunen, & Lo, 2016) and that it consists of more than just creating a new logo and slogan to promote a place (Govers & Go, 2009; Kavaratzis & Hatch, 2013). However, because there are many different definitions of place branding, this also results in multiple interpretations of the concept (Kavaratzis & Ashworth, 2005; Van Assche, Beunen, & Lo, 2016). In order to prevent misinterpretations, the following definition of place branding is used for this research:

PLACE BRANDING CAN BE EXPLAINED AS STRATEGIES THAT ARE USED TO CREATE (ECONOMIC) VALUE IN PLACE USING THE PLACE IMAGE OR IDENTITY (KAVARATZIS & ASHWORTH, 2005; VAN ASSCHE, BEUNEN, & LO, 2016).

Apart from an array of definitions and possible interpretations, there are also different types of place branding. Kavaratzis and Ashworth define the following three types (Kavaratzis & Ashworth, 2005):

- *geographical nomenclature* – when a product is named after the region where it is produced or fabricated;
- *product-place co-branding* - when the name of a place is transcribed to a product for its associations with quality; and,
- *branding as place management*,

of which the latter is the type of interest to this research. Adding this attribute of place branding to its definition, one gets the following:

PLACE BRANDING IS A FORM OF PLACE MANAGEMENT IN WHICH THE PLACE ITSELF IS TURNED INTO A PRODUCT WITH THE USE OF A PLACE IMAGE OR IDENTITY IN ORDER TO CREATE (ECONOMIC) VALUE.

This definition is made up of several elements – branding as place management, place image or identity and the idea of turning places into products. Before further discussion of these elements, it is important to take the target groups for place branding with regard to this research into account.

2.2.2 TARGET GROUPS FOR PLACE BRANDING

Branding is used to appeal to a certain target group. In place branding, target groups often compose of investors, new and existing residents, and tourists. Additionally, place branding is often about

accessing a new markets (Andersson, 2014). However, as the TristateCity vision mainly focuses on foreign investments, the theory on place branding presented here will be reduced to a focus on attracting (spatial) investments.

2.2.3 BRANDING AS PLACE MANAGEMENT: AN URBAN GOVERNANCE STRATEGY

According to Kavaratzis and Ashworth, “the concept and methods of branding are employed by cities as an instrument of place marketing in order to associate the place with wider desirable qualities in the perceptions held by relevant target audiences” (Kavaratzis & Ashworth, 2007, p. 16). Using and understanding the power of spatial planning in creating a place branding strategy can be of great importance to the understanding of the market forces in spatial planning (Van Assche, Beunen, & Lo, 2016). It is therefore not strange that policy makers are increasingly looking at place branding as an essential part of their regional development strategies (Andersson, 2014).

Place branding has become an urban governance strategy in a way that it is often used by policy makers to display positive images of their city or region in order to make the place more attractive for their target audiences(s) (Braun, Eshuis, & Klijn, 2014), based on political decisions (Braun & Zenker, 2010). These policy makers are often willing to spend large sums of money on such practices in order to attract new and hold on to existing target groups (Goovaerts, Van Biesbroeck, & Van Tilt, 2014).

Figure 1 visualises the basic process of place branding as initiated by governmental organisations such as provinces or municipalities. These organisations are influenced by the private sector – which is their target audience, as the private sector has the tools that allow for spatial investments in a region. The governmental organisations will initiate place branding (in cooperation with marketing bureaus etc.), which aim to create a better image or reputation for their region, which in turn should result in (spatial) investments. These spatial investments allow for further strengthening of the place brand, in turn encouraging further investments in the area.

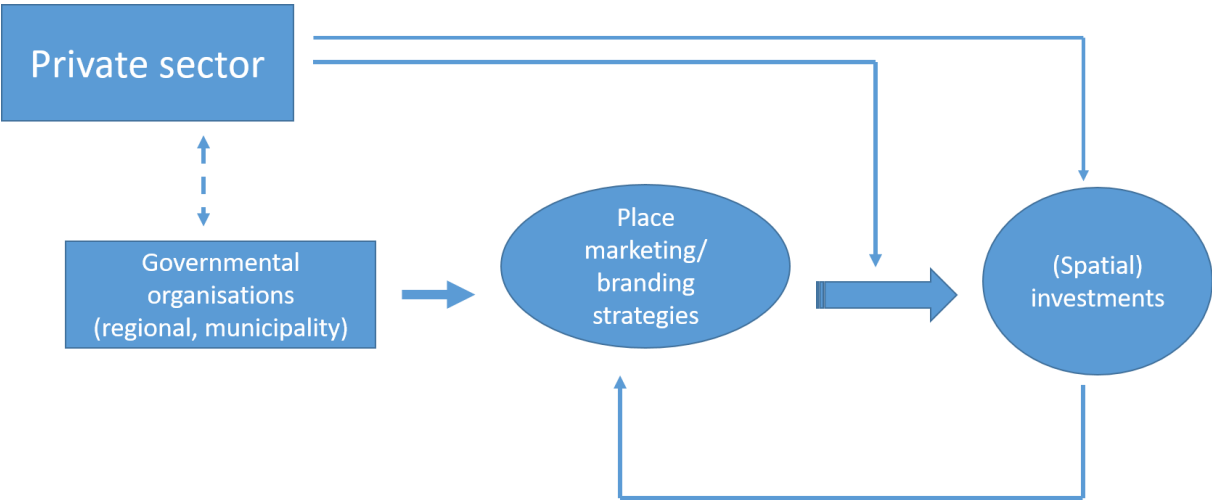


FIGURE 1 PLACE BRANDING AS INITIATED BY GOVERNMENTAL ORGANISATIONS

2.2.4 PLACE BRANDING AND IDENTITY

The reputation of a place, or better, the place brand, is closely linked to the identity of the place. Place branding and the identity of the place are closely linked together: in branding, the identity of the place is used for value generation in space. As Karavatzis and Hatch say, “*branding and identity are interwoven*” (Kavaratzis & Hatch, 2013, p. 71). Though place branding can be perceived as assigning a new identity to a place, this new identity cannot be randomly determined. For one, place branding is much more likely to succeed if the projected brand is based on existing narratives and identities. (Van Assche, Beunen, & Lo, 2016). For this, according to Braun and Zenker, the place physics is the most important factor. The place physics represent the real characteristics of a place and play an important role in the perception of the brand (Braun & Zenker, 2010). Those designing place brands should take care not to disregard the complexity of places, as choosing an inappropriate identity for a brand might result in alienation from the internal audiences – those who are acquainted with the true identity of the place (Kavaratzis & Hatch, 2013).

2.2.6 PLACES AS PRODUCTS

Place branding is closely related to corporate branding strategies (Kavaratzis & Ashworth, 2005). The second definition stated earlier in the theory described the process of place branding turning places into products. Not unexpectedly, this description raises several questions and critiques on place branding in literature. Scientists argue that places cannot simply be branded similarly to corporate products, as they are composed and contested in different ways. They introduce the notion that places are much more complex than ‘regular’ products, mainly because of their spatiality, and should thus be treated in a different manner with regard to branding techniques. Another strategy – one that takes a the characteristics of places into account – should be applied in place branding (Kavaratzis & Ashworth, 2005; Kavaratzis & Hatch, 2013).

3. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

This research on TristateCity has an exploratory nature and aims to discover more about the concept, focussing on how different relationships are formed, what they mean and how the concept is put into practice. To help give the research direction, a base conceptual model is introduced, which portrays the expected relationships within TristateCity, based on the information at hand. This base model is then combined with the theoretical model on governmentally initiated place branding, resulting in a second, more advanced conceptual model that is the base for the research, and from which the research questions are formed at the end of this section.

3.1 BASE CONCEPTUAL MODEL: TRISTATECITY

The TristateCity concept, identified as a form of place branding in the theoretical framework, naturally differs from place branding as initiated by governmental organisations, as it is a private sector initiative. Figure 2 (next page) explains the basic relationships – as far as can be deduced from the available information – for the TristateCity concept. Peter Savelberg is placed in the middle: he is influenced/inspired by the private sector and translates this to TristateCity. The private sector is sponsor of TristateCity, which is in turn specifically designed for the (Dutch) private sector (or rather BV Nederland, as mentioned on their website) (TristateCity, 2016b). Peter Savelberg, in association with companies from the private sector, exposed TristateCity to Dutch governmental organisations. TristateCity envisions a better competitive prospect for The Netherlands by promoting it as ‘one large green world city’ – which should, if successful, result in new (spatial) investments in the TristateCity area.

3.2 ADVANCED CONCEPTUAL MODEL: TRISTATECITY IN RELATION TO GOVERNMENTALLY INITIATED PLACE BRANDING

Figure 3 shows what questions arise when the basic relations from TristateCity are combined with governmentally initiated place branding practices (as presented in the theoretical framework). One of the main questions involves the role of the government in this combined model. TristateCity has been presented to governmental organisations, but there is little insight as to what is expected from the authorities with regard to realisation or further development of TristateCity. It is therefore also unclear if TristateCity is going to interfere with the existing place branding strategies. Even though the website clearly states that TristateCity has been developed for private companies, it is yet to be discovered why many are so willing to invest in a concept that – at this point - appears to be unfinished. Figure 3 – which together with figure 2 will serve as the conceptual model for this research – also illustrates the assumed change in the position of the private sector, which now seems to be involved with both the governmental organisations as well as TristateCity.

This conceptualisation raises a couple of questions. As mentioned before, there is inconclusiveness on the part of governments in TristateCity, as well as on what TristateCity means for the private sector. Additionally, there are questions arising that relate to the workings of TristateCity in practice: as can be seen in the conceptual model, the current information offers no insights as to how the

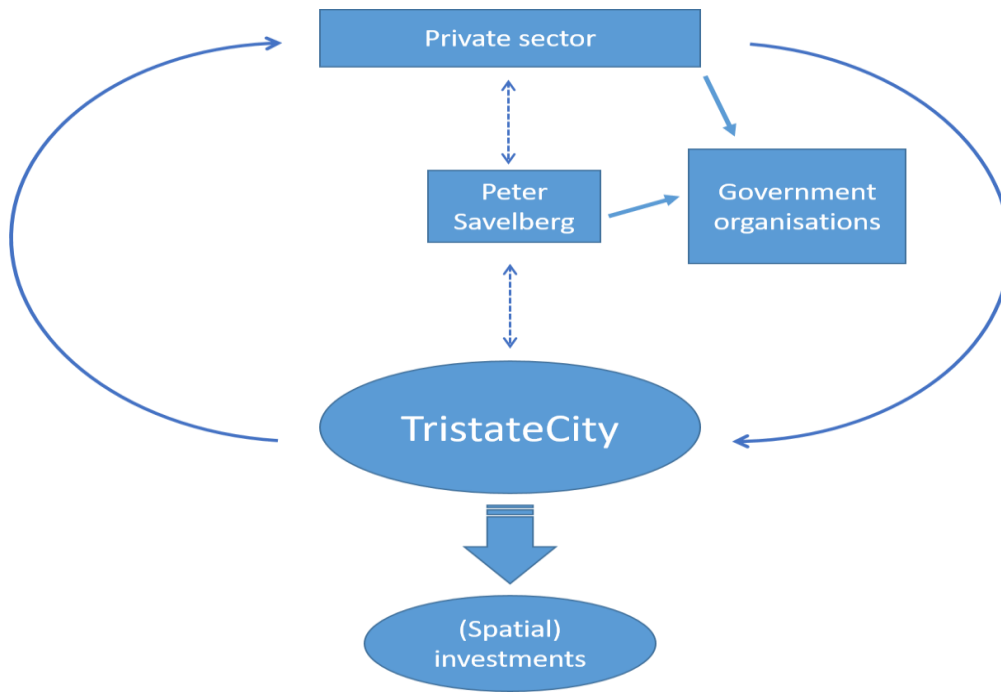


FIGURE 2 BASE CONCEPTUAL MODEL, EXPLAINING THE BASIC RELATIONSHIPS FOR TRISTATECITY

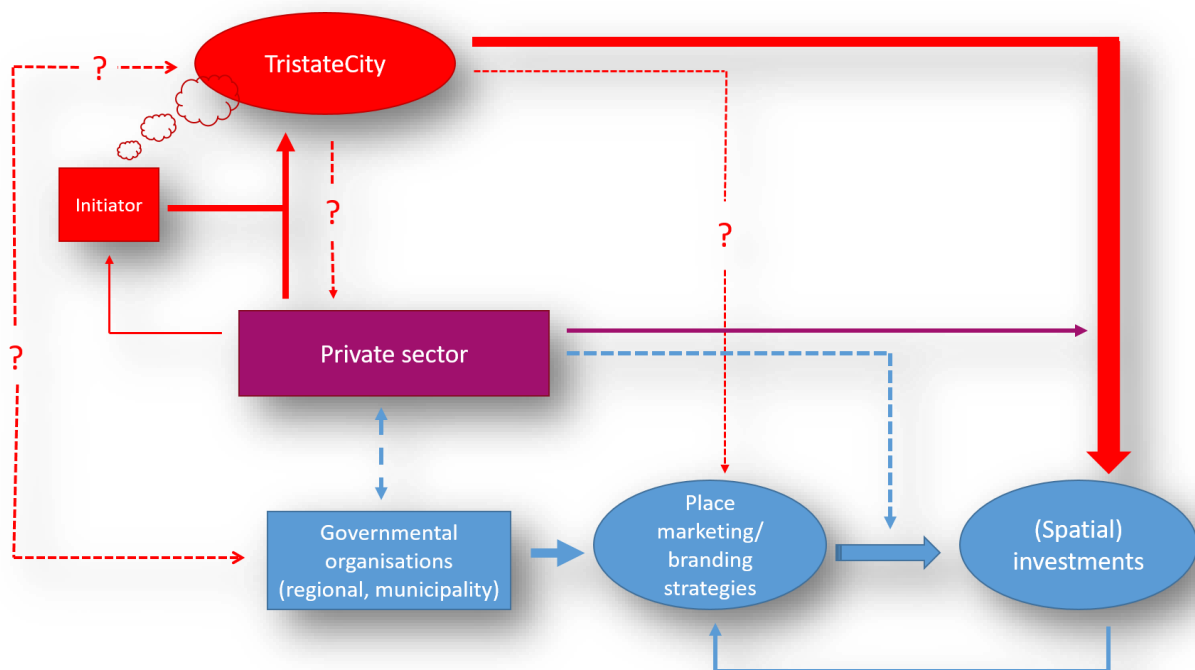


FIGURE 3 ADVANCED CONCEPTUAL MODEL, PROVIDING AN OVERVIEW OF POSSIBLE RELATIONS WHEN THE BASE CONCEPTUAL MODEL FOR TRISTATECITY AND THE MODEL FOR GOVERNMENTALLY INITIATED PLACE BRANDING ARE PUT TOGETHER. THE QUESTION MARKS INDICATE WHERE THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN TWO FACTORS RAISES QUESTIONS.

concept might influence current place branding practices – apart from introducing the term ‘umbrella model’.

3.3 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

In order to better understand the TristateCity phenomenon, this research focusses on finding the answers to the questions that arise from the advanced conceptual model. This leads to the following research questions:

- What is TristateCity?
- Why is TristateCity such an attractive concept for the private sector?
- What is expected from the Dutch government with regard to the TristateCity model?

Not visualised in the conceptual model, but also a very valid question concerns the implementation of TristateCity – the website provides a vision and promotes TristateCity as a strategy (TristateCity, 2016a), however does not explain how the concept is expected to be put into use. Therefore, the next question is also added to the research:

- What, according to the thought leaders, is essential for TristateCity to become a reality/success?”

The conceptual model has been created using the theory of place branding, creating a fundament for the research. It is also interesting to research how TristateCity behaves as a form of place branding in reality. Therefore, the following question is also introduced:

- How does TristateCity work as a place branding concept?

Consequently, the purpose of this research is to find out what TristateCity exactly is, what it means for the private sector and the Dutch government(s), and how all this will be put into practice to realise the future vision as stated on the TristateCity website (The Netherlands as a green megacity). This allows formation of the ultimate research question:

WHAT ARE THE REASONS BEHIND THE ENTHUSIASM AND INTEREST IN THE NEWLY PRESENTED TRISTATECITY AND WHAT CAN BE EXPECTED FROM TRISTATECITY IN THE (NEAR) FUTURE?

4. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

4.1 TYPE OF RESEARCH

This research aims to further explore and define the TristateCity concept with regard to the research questions as introduced in the previous section. As there is little knowledge available, it is appropriate to conduct the research using qualitative research methods (Stern, 1980). More specifically, the research will be exploratory. Exploratory research is normally used for studies with the objective of “*exploring an area where little is known*” (Kumar, 2014, p. 13), which makes it a qualitative approach when compared to the statement of Stern above. Crabtree and Miller identify several aims of scientific inquiry, of which identification, description and explanation-generation together are otherwise known as exploratory research (Crabtree & Miller, 1999).

As there is still little known about the Tristate City concept and this research attempts to create a deeper understanding of the concept, conducting exploratory research is the logical choice/a approach to the problem stated according to the statements above.

4.2 DATA COLLECTION METHOD

The exploratory research will be done through performing semi-structured expert interviews. As Kumar states, qualitative methods such as interviews are flexible and propose a certain freedom for the researcher when it comes to structure and order (Kumar, 2014, p. 177). It would therefore be logical to conduct unstructured interviews. These are characterised as in-depth, without strict boundaries and flexible: when necessary, one can deviate from the original structure of the interviews and they are considered as a very useful tool for exploring and deeper understanding (Kumar, 2014).

The problem with unstructured interviews is that the researcher needs a high level of skill. Additionally, the results from the first interviews may be very different from later interviews as a result of not following a certain structure when collecting data. This may cause problems when comparing and processing the collected data and could thus pose a threat to the quality of the research (Kumar, 2014). To avoid this, the research will be done using semi-structured interviews, with the use of an interview guide. An interview guide can be seen as a “*loosely developed list of issues*” (Kumar, 2014, p. 195); in this case it will also include a list of standard questions. The use of an interview guide should help the research in such a way that data collected from the different interviews is easier to compare and process into conclusions. The interview guide for this research is located in the appendix.

There will be eight expert interviews, of which the first is with Peter Savelberg, who initiated TristateCity. The other interviews are with another seven of the so-called “*thought leaders*” (there are eighteen in total): people who are involved in the TristateCity project. Because these people might have little time, the interviews are to be recorded and processed into written words afterwards. Moreover, the length of the interviews will be limited to thirty minutes, which is expected to be sufficient for extracting the information that the research is after.

4.3 INTERVIEW RESULTS ANALYSIS METHOD

After conducting the interviews, these must be converted to written transcripts. When completed, all are read and important sections are highlighted so they are easy to locate in a later stage. Using memory and through reading the transcripts, a first inventory of recurring themes/topics in the interviews is made up.

When the first inventory has been made, the transcripts are re-read and will be marked on the listed themes and topics discussed. These will then be counted, resulting in an overview of what topics are discussed and/or emphasised in the specific interviews and offering the possibility of abstracting some statistics. Note that this will not be a simple count of word use, but a count of (re-)introducing certain topics or themes. This offers insights in what the interviewee is emphasising and thus what he/she thinks is important. When necessary, new topics or themes are added to the list, making it an iterative process and thus meaning that transcripts already processed have to be revisited in order to complete the data. Microsoft Excel offers enough adequate tools for such input and processing of data and will therefore be used for this part of the research.

Additionally, answers to the recurring questions that are mentioned in the interview guide (see appendix) are listed per question. By doing so, it is easier to find (ir)regularities and contradictions within different interviews. As answers are expected to be lengthy, only the essence will be jotted down and used for the analysis. Relevant details and further explanation when necessary will be added later. The results are processed into the report.

5. DESCRIPTION OF THE INTERVIEWS

5.1 ORGANISATION OF THE INTERVIEWS

The target group for the interviews consisted of the eighteen thought leaders that are mentioned on the TristateCity website (TristateCity, 2016c). It was decided to contact the thought leaders through email as much as possible. Emailing is not always the quickest option, especially when there are no personal email addresses available of the person one tries to contact. However, an email allows for a thorough introduction of the subject and the reason for asking for an interview, making it more attractive for the person contacted to respond to the request. Time for interviews was planned during weeks three to six of the research, allowing the interviewees to choose a time and place most convenient to them, as to further make the interview option attractive for them.

5.2 DESCRIPTION OF THE INTERVIEW PROCESS

The recurring questions (as can be found in the interview guide) were formulated using the conceptual framework and the research questions that follow from this framework. Because very little information was available for non-insiders of the concept, it was important to collect as much information as possible from the stakeholders (the thought leaders) to understand TristateCity. Therefore the first interview was planned with the initiator, Peter Savelberg, who was expected to give a thorough explanation of the concept. After that, another seven interviews with thought leaders were scheduled over the course of four weeks. All interviews were based on the interview guide.

Note that the interviews have a semi-structured form, which means that some parts of the interviews are structured and follow a certain pattern, and other parts are formed around the answers that an interviewee might give, resulting in a different structure for the interview. Some interviews took towards a different approach or focus than others, depending on the background and interests of the interviewee. This is also displayed later on during the statistics analysis, which shows how some interviewees emphasise certain topics in multiple answers.

5.2.1 RECURRING QUESTIONS

Following the interview guide, every interview started with an introduction by the interviewee (either short or long, depending on the respondent). This introduction was done in order to see what kind of people are involved with TristateCity and if there was, for example, a certain correlation within their backgrounds. Often, this question would be followed by asking the respondent how they got involved with TristateCity and/or what their relation with TristateCity is. Sometimes the respondent would explain this in their introduction, without any encouragement. Most of the time, this question would also provide information on the role of their company with regard to TristateCity. If not, the respondent would be asked why and how their company is involved with TristateCity. These questions also appear in the interview guide, as the answers to these questions provided a better insight to what the relationship is between TristateCity and its sponsors, and why companies are inclined to get involved. This was the first step towards discovering why there is so

much enthusiasm in the private sector about this concept, which is one of the main goals of this research.

One of the research questions is actually about the role of the Dutch government in TristateCity, which was not explained on the TristateCity website. During the first interview with the initiator, it was clarified that there was no initial designed role for the government. Nonetheless, it was decided not to take this question out of the interview guide, as answers could help finding out more about what - according to the thought leaders - possible positions there are for the government and what they think is to be expected from it. Follow-up questions on this topic were dependent on the tone of the answer (e.g. negative, doubtful, hopeful, expecting).

Another research question regards what the thought leaders think is essential for realisation of TristateCity. Therefore, the interview guide contained the question “*What, do you think, is necessary to accomplish the 2025 vision/to make TristateCity really ‘happen’?*”. All respondents – apart from one who already answered this clearly within another question – were asked this same question.

Also included in the interview guide was addressing the scale of TristateCity, as place branding is often applied on a smaller scale, e.g. for cities or provinces. TristateCity takes on another type of scale entirely – one that goes across nation borders. Scale was brought up either in relation to place branding or as a result of earlier discussion within the interview.

The last recurring question taken from the semi-structured interview guide was “*describe TristateCity in one sentence*”. As the purpose of this research is to explore the phenomenon ‘TristateCity’, this tool was used to restrict the respondents to explaining the essence of the concept, with the aim of increasing understanding and identifying some elements in the answers that might lead to a proper definition for ‘TristateCity’.

5.2.2 OTHER QUESTIONS

Apart from the recurring questions, there were also some ideas for other questions and topics included in the interview guide, which were introduced depended on the background interviewee or the course of the interview, as mentioned before. These were helpful as additional questions and examples of their usage can be found below. Additionally, short questions for further explanation would often be asked, encouraging the interviewee to further comment on the subject or to confirm the meaning of a given answer. These will not be discussed here to prevent this interview description becoming too detailed. However, some “other questions” (questions that were not listed as ‘recurring’ in the interview guide) are shortly addressed below because of their importance to the research.

Some respondents were asked about the exact goal of TristateCity, in order to find out more about what TristateCity is exactly. This question would be asked when the opportunity presented itself and the answer can help forming a better idea of the concept. Some thought leaders were therefore also asked who the concept is designed for, or who would benefit from it. Whenever the interviewee mentioned already using the concept in their company, they would naturally be asked how it is applied in order to get a clearer idea of how TristateCity is integrated in corporate strategies. This allowed for a better understanding of how TristateCity works in practice.

Another question not listed as recurring, but nonetheless answered in almost every interview in the end, concerned spatial developments in relation to TristateCity. During early research, an opinion piece by Zef Hemel was encountered, in which he criticised TristateCity as a spatial strategy (Hemel, 2016). Peter Savelberg (the initiator) commented on this opinion, explaining that TristateCity is not a spatial strategy. However, after three interviews with quite some remarks on the spatial aspects related to TristateCity, it was decided to pay some more attention to the subject. These potential spatial developments can be related to the spatial investments that are the supposed outcome of TristateCity (as explained in the theory and conceptual frameworks).

6. INTERVIEW RESULTS

In this chapter, the results of the interviews are analysed and used for drawing the first conclusions with regard to the research questions. It will start with a short analysis of the respondents, followed by a statistics analysis of recurring themes taken from the interviews. After this analysis, the results of the interviews will be further presented and analysed in relation to the sub-research questions as presented in the conceptual framework.

6.1 RESPONDENTS

Interviews were conducted with eight of the eighteen thought leaders that are listed on the TristateCity website. Twelve companies were contacted, which resulted in eight appointments for interviews, and the possibility of planning a ninth, but which was declined for planning reasons. Other contact did not lead to any responses.

Only two interviews were with other people than listed on the TristateCity website; in those cases there was someone else within the company of the thought leader who was more involved with TristateCity than the person mentioned on the website. In these cases, the replacing respondents were female, which is remarkable as all the thought leaders listed on the TristateCity website are in fact male.

The following eight people were interviewed:

- Peter Savelberg (initiator/developer)
- Bart Molmans (Jaarbeurs)
- Jacco Bouw (Webpower)
- Wendy Verschoor (CBRE), instead of Marco Hekman
- Linda van Beek (VNO-NCW, MKB Nederland), instead of Cees Oudshoorn
- Bram Verhoeven (Prologis)
- Johan Buijs (NSI)
- Wienke Bodewes (Amvest)

6.1.1 BACKGROUNDS OF RESPONDENTS

As an introductory question, the interviewees would be asked about their background. Six of the respondents replied with a comment about their education, the other two mainly focussed on their professional career. Half of the respondents have an engineering (and closely related area development) background, which is not strange as most of them are working in real estate, or have been in the past. The other two who commented on their education have a backgrounds in IT and business management.

6.2 STATISTICS: ANALYSIS OF RECURRING THEMES

As explained in the interview analysis method, after converting all the recorded interviews into written transcripts, these were read and an inventory of recurring themes was made. During this process, the topics of 'the public-private relationship' and 'population density' were introduced and

therefore all finished interviews had to be revisited. Other topics, such as ‘circular economy’, ‘employment’ and ‘corporate social responsibility’ were also introduced, but taken off the list when it was concluded that they were not really recurring after all. The final twelve themes can be found listed in random order in both Table 1 and 2, and will now be introduced shortly.

6.2.1 INTRODUCING THE RECURRING THEMES

The twelve recurring themes are shortly explained here, based on how the themes are addressed by the thought leaders during the interviews.

EUROPE: Either the European Union, or Europe in general. It is often mentioned in the interviews with regard to the integration and interconnectedness within the region(s) and the political properties of the European Union.

RANDSTAD: The western region of The Netherlands, including main cities Amsterdam, Rotterdam, Utrecht and The Hague. It is the economic and political centre of The Netherlands.

CHINA: People’s Republic of China, but more commonly referred to in relation to its rapidly growing economy and cities.

POLDER MODEL (DUTCH POLITICS): Better described as “*polderen*”. The Dutch government is known for attempting to achieve satisfaction for all stakeholders, thereby creating a lot of compromises. Contacting all potential stakeholders and discussing with them takes a lot of time, slowing down policy development and implementation.

SHORT TERM VIEW POLITICIANS: The political system in The Netherlands is comprised of time slots or terms of usually four years. In these four years, politicians want to achieve as many personal goals as possible – and long-term visions or policies naturally go beyond these four years. Therefore, long-term projects are usually not very urgent on the agenda of politicians.

INFRASTRUCTURE(&LOGISTICS): All types of infrastructure – roads, public transport networks, waterways, etc., and logistic networks and hubs that are present in the Netherlands, for example Schiphol and the harbour of Rotterdam.

‘IGNORING’ COUNTRY BORDERS: Ideas, projects, policies etc. should not be restricted to a certain city, province or country – one should not be ‘afraid’ of country borders when upscaling.

CLUSTERING/SPECIALISATION: Concentrating certain activities in certain (assigned) areas, allowing for agglomeration benefits, e.g. better facilities for that specific activity.

PLACING THE REGION ‘ON THE MAP’: The idea of putting The Netherlands – or better, the TristateCity region – back on the radar of international investors. Making the region attractive and visible within the global economy.

PLACE BRANDING/CITY MARKETING: Addresses the promoting of a place or city, using marketing strategies to attract new companies and investors, or specifically applying branding.

PUBLIC-PRIVATE RELATIONSHIP: In this context, this theme is about the state of cooperation between the public sector/government and the private sector/corporates. It can refer to either a good or bad relationship and communication between the them.

POPULATION DENSITY: Comments on how many people live in either the TristateCity region, the part of Europe where it is located, or just in The Netherlands.

6.2.2 STATISTICS ANALYSIS

Now that the recurring themes have been explained, it is time to look at how often they have been mentioned by the thought leaders during the interviews. These statistics are presented in Table 1 and Table 2. Table 1 provides an overview of the amount of times a specific theme was mentioned by a specific respondent. This representation allows for a slight nuancing of the analysis, as it shows that some of the respondents emphasise certain topics more than others. Table 2 also includes this nuance by presenting the total count of theme introduction with regard to the total amount of respondents who addressed this theme. For Table 2, note that there are eight respondents in total, and that the data therefore seem more dramatic than they actually are.

Count of recurring themes, listed per respondent									
Recurring themes	Respondents								Total
	Peter Savelberg	Jacco Bouw	Wendy Verschoor	Linda Verbeek	Bram Verhoeven	Bart Molmans	Johan Buijs	Wienke Bodewes	
Europe	3	5	1		1	1	1		12
Randstad	2	2	1					1	6
China	2	4	2	2	2		1	1	14
Polder model (Dutch politics)	1	4						1	6
Short term view politicians	1	1	2		1		1		6
Infrastructure (&logistics)	1	5	1	3	1	1	1	1	14
'ignoring' (country) borders		2			1	1	1	3	8
Clustering/ specialisation		1	4	1	1	6	4		17
Placing the region "on the map"	1	2	1		1	2	1		8
Place branding/city marketing	3		1	2		5	1	5	17
Public-private relationship			3	2	1				6
Population density	1				2	1		1	5

TABLE 1 OVERVIEW OF RECURRING THEMES PER RESPONDENT AND THE TOTAL TIMES MENTIONED

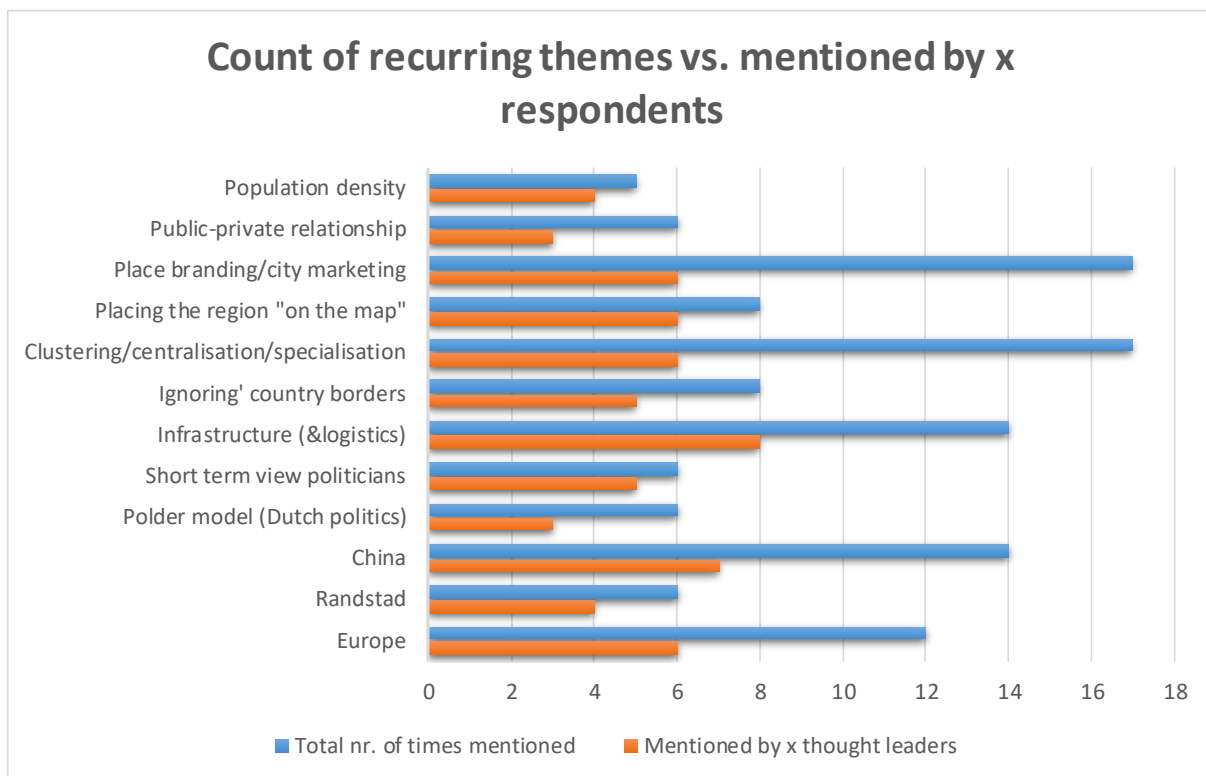


TABLE 2 RECURRING THEMES IN THE INTERVIEWS. NUMBER OF TIMES THAT A THEME IS MENTIONED VS. HOW MANY RESPONDENTS MENTIONED THE THEME. NOTE THAT THERE ARE EIGHT RESPONDENTS IN TOTAL.

What immediately draws attention when looking at Table 2 are the peaks for both place branding/city marketing and clustering/specialisation. These are combined themes: place branding and marketing are closely related and often used simultaneously. This also applies to clustering/specialisation, as both concepts refer to a concentration of certain activities in a certain place (as explained in the introduction of the theme). Combining the themes might have resulted in their high count, but the main reason for the peaks can be accounted to multiple mentions by a few thought leaders. Firstly, for clustering/specialisation, three of the six respondents who mentioned this theme are accountable for the high number of seventeen mentions in total. Apparently, these people think strongly of clustering when TristateCity is involved, and will thus be addressed further on in the results, when the spatial developments in relation to TristateCity are discussed. Secondly, the high number of comments on place branding/city marketing are also accounted for by several more passionate respondents, as can be seen in Table 1. The total number is, however, influenced by the questions that were asked during the interview. In a few cases, the respondent mentioned marketing or branding by themselves. Still, as part of the research focusses on TristateCity in relation to place branding, the respondents were often introduced to the subject by the interviewer, and given a short introduction whenever they were not familiar with place branding. Consequently, they might have been triggered to mention the subject in their answer to a question that involved place branding.

The infrastructure(&logistics) theme is also highly represented during the interviews. This is actually the only theme listed that was mentioned at least once by all of the eight respondents. As explained in the previous chapter, questions about spatial developments with regard to TristateCity were added to the main questions of the interviews, which probably augmented the amount of comments on these spatial themes (infrastructure(&logistics), clustering/specialisation) – but this was also done

because the thought leaders showed interest in these themes in their responses. Therefore, another section will be added at the end of this chapter, where these spatial developments in relation to TristateCity are be shortly discussed.

Continuing the analysis, it is noticed that Europe and China were mentioned respectively twelve and fourteen times, and all respondents mentioned at least one of the two. This is not very odd, as Peter Savelberg mentions China as his inspiration for creating a new strategy for putting The Netherlands back in the competition with megacities during his interview. Also, supposedly companies in the private sector are aware of the rapid developments that happen in China, and are thus likely to mention the subject when talking about the international position of The Netherlands. In the case of Europe, this theme was most often mentioned during the first two interviews (Peter Savelberg and Jacco Bouw). As can be seen in Table 1, Jacco Bouw repeats the Europe and China themes several times during his interview, consequently increasing the total count of mentions for a topic. Nonetheless, the topic of Europe is mentioned in multiple ways, in the form of comments on the success of European-originating companies, the position of Schiphol within Europe and by discussing the level of collaboration within Europe. Peter Savelberg comments on the view of Europe that countries such as the US and China have, as well as the disintegration of Europe. It appears that multiple mentioning of a subject thus not necessarily implies the repetition of arguments that have already been introduced.

The population density of the TristateCity area (listed as the 'population density' in the theme list) was mentioned by half of the respondents, using the theme to give favourable arguments for the choice of scale and the strength of the region. This is not surprising, as this specific explanation for the choice of scale is also offered through one an image on the TristateCity website that shows Europe by night, with a dense illumination of the TristateCity area. Though the Randstad is not mentioned very often either, it is an important theme both with regard to scale as to place branding itself. It may serve as an example for TristateCity in terms of place branding: the Randstad principle met with serious struggling, and TristateCity is even more complex than that, which poses potential difficulties for the concept.

Also related to the scale of TristateCity is the theme 'ignoring' of (country) borders. This theme is about thinking across country borders and other geographical restrictions such as provinces and municipalities. It became clear from the interviews that companies already often disregard such boundaries in their work field, and that the country borders of Belgium and Germany – within the TristateCity scale – should not prevent the joining of forces.

Even though all thought leaders talked about the position of the Netherlands on the international market, not all of them used the words similar to 'placing the region on the map'. Six of them did, which is not surprising, as these are also the words used on the webpage of TristateCity that explains their vision (TristateCity, 2016b).

Finally, the three themes related to politics are also of great importance to the research, as the position of the Dutch government within TristateCity is yet to be unravelled. As one of the questions in all interviews was related to the this, it is not surprising that every respondent mentioned at least one of the three themes; they mentioned either the relationship between the public and private sector, the polder model (Dutch politics) or the short term view of politicians, or a combination of

these. The polder model that the Dutch government continues to pursue does not seem to trouble most of the respondents; Jacco Bouw is the only one emphasising the issue. According to the statistics, most of them are more apprehensive towards the short term view that politicians often pursue. What both themes mean for TristateCity will be discussed later on in the section on TristateCity and the Dutch government. Last but not least, six out of eight comment on the relationship between the private and public sector, implying that this relationship is also definitely of importance to the success of the TristateCity concept.

The next sections present further results from the interviews in relation to the research questions, providing a more in-depth analysis of the collected data.

6.3 THE DEFINITIONS AND AMBITIONS OF TRISTATECITY

One of the research questions plainly asks: “What is TristateCity?”, and thus the interviews were partly designed to uncover a definition for it. Throughout the interviews, often interviewees would explain the concept of TristateCity, or at least part of it. Several characteristics of the concept surfaced, some more tangible than others. For example, TristateCity is referred to as a business model or a technical model to attract business on an international scale: “.. *it is a very logical story that can be used to explain to investors that The Netherlands is certainly indeed an interesting country for investment*” (Johan Buijs), and “.. *this is a sort of large agglomeration, which allows us to be and remain interesting, and to compete with the true large world cities*” (Wendy Verschoor), and Linda van Beek explains that TristateCity is “... *a way of looking at The Netherlands, which enables one to get a better look at what the regions have to offer*” (Linda van Beek). Wendy Verschoor also argues that TristateCity can serve as a foundation for bringing public and private together.

“It is not a building plan, absolutely not”
(Peter Savelberg, TristateCity)

Alternatively, the initiator - Peter Savelberg - also takes great care to emphasise what TristateCity is not: “*It is not a building plan, absolutely not, some people think that I want to turn The Netherlands into China city*” (Peter Savelberg), blaming such ideas on the pictures that resemble the different circles of urban areas, which are used when presenting and explaining the concept. He also stresses that TristateCity does not have any bureaucratic ambitions.

Peter Savelberg and Bart Molmans also comment on the approach that is adopted by the concept. They explain that TristateCity has been developed using an outside-in approach: ‘what is it that others want us to offer?’, instead of ‘what do we have to offer?’. “*One of the building blocks is bringing supply and demand together*”, Bart Molmans explains.

6.3.1 INTENTIONS AND GOALS

TristateCity was developed as a reaction towards the ongoing urbanisation in the world, resulting in megacities that The Netherlands as a country does not have the capacity to compete with on the international market. The Netherlands as a country is unknown: e.g. people from China and the Americas are familiar with Amsterdam, but not the country itself. As it is, The Netherlands has a strong economy and facilities such as infrastructure and a stable political environment, but our small scale is not interesting enough for international investors. Johan Buijs puts this very clearly: “... *The Netherlands seems to have fallen of the radar of foreign investors*”, and: “... *we are genuinely*

performing very well but somehow everyone has been neglecting us". The Netherlands does not offer projects on a scale that is interesting for these foreign investors. According to Peter Savelberg, we

"Eventually, TristateCity is about employment for The Netherlands. (...) Investments result in employment"
(Bart Molmans, Jaarbeurs)

used to have such projects in the past – think for example about the Betuwelijn and de Maasvlakte – but there have been none since the economic crisis. The only way to have such large scale projects again, is by combining small scale projects and turning them into one large scale project. This is essentially what he has tried to do with TristateCity, too: combining three smaller regions with the purpose of becoming more attractive for investors. Its ambition is to put The Netherlands (in combination with Flanders and North Rhine Westphalia) back on the map.

And new investments eventually effect the Dutch employment rate – something that was not often used as an argument by the thought leaders, but presumably may be of importance to the private sector.

TristateCity is also a reaction against the current city marketing behaviour within the Netherlands. The thought leaders confirm that currently, cities are indeed competing with each other for attention on the global market. According to Wendy Verschoor, the goal of TristateCity is to create awareness that such individualism not the favourable and that instead, the public and private sector should collaborate in marketing the entire region. Jacco Bouw also stresses this: *"... no more pigeontholing!"* (Jacco Bouw). So, TristateCity is all about connecting and becomes stronger while working together – which Peter Savelberg also describes as being one of the main goals.

Though the collaboration of public and private are mentioned as a success factor for Tristate, the concept has initially been developed for the private sector: it has the ability to create a display in which the MKB is also able to internationally present themselves. It can help Dutch MKBs grow and be able to expand their working area to the emerging markets, an opportunity that is not always available in the current trade climate. As Jacco Bouw explains, the concept can built a connection between Tristate and the overseas countries; it can leave footprints for further business.

The concept seems to be very ambitious: the website is filled with images of what TristateCity has to offer and states a clear visionary of the future, in which The Netherlands (or better, the TristateCity region) is featured as a green megacity. Peter Savelberg argues that because 'our megacity' has grown over a period of 500 years, TristateCity does have to deal with problems that often arise in rapidly growing megacities, such as health, safety and infrastructure, or already has solutions for them. He states that if we are in fact able to successfully portray our region as a megacity, then it could serve as a worldwide example of 'how to build a megacity'.

"We have the chance to become the ultimate showcase in the world of how one builds, maintains and encourages growth of megacities."
(Peter Savelberg, TristateCity)

Such messages create the idea that TristateCity is a new spatial concept, and that the structure of it must be used in future spatial strategies. However, as already stressed by the initiator, TristateCity was not developed as a building plan, nor is it meant to become a bureaucratic program. The

seemingly high ambitions of the concept are further declined by his next statement: *“If we succeed in creating some sort of international marketing vehicle in the form of an interactive website and game environment, and we reach the world with that, then that is enough”*. This seems an odd statement, but by reaching the world, TristateCity will have achieved its goal of putting the region on the map.

Summarising, TristateCity aims to put The Netherlands back on the map of foreign investors by placing the country in a strong region with a scale that is of interest to these investors, but without becoming a spatial strategy.

6.3.2 CHOICE OF SCALE

An interesting feature of the TristateCity concept is its scale. As the name already implies, the scope of the concept covers three different countries (‘states’): The Netherlands plus parts of Belgium (Flanders) and Germany (North Rhine Westphalia). Though some of the respondents cautiously address the complexity of the scale (with regard to the Randstad principle, a much smaller region), all of them are enthusiastic about it. As already mentioned before, in the statistics analysis, a recurring argument for this is that this is supposedly the most densely populated area of Europe. It also has (according to the developer) a massive trade volume. Some respondents mentioned possible expansion of the scale and discussed whether or not Scandinavia, the United Kingdom or the Hamburg region should be included. Overall, though, the thought leaders agree that the scale is appropriate for what TristateCity is trying to achieve: the designated scale allows it to differentiate itself from other regions. Wendy Verschoor stresses again that distinguishing the region from others is essential for attracting interest. If we want to stand a chance on the international market, there is no choice, and TristateCity offers the idea of a large agglomeration that is big enough to compete on the global scale.

6.3.3 TRISTATECITY IN ONE SENTENCE

As this is an exploratory research on TristateCity, it was important to ensure that every interviewee would give their opinion or vision on Tristate in a similar fashion so that they could be compared. Therefore, at the end of every interview, the interviewees were asked to “explain TristateCity in one sentence”. Whereas most people had already conducted clear definitions in their answers to other questions, this last question often proved to be a challenge for the person asked to fabricate a one-sentence definition of TristateCity. The results are listed below.

PETER SAVELBERG (INITIATOR/DEVELOPER):

“TristateCity is the repositioning of the Netherlands as a large, green and open world city. A network city would be a better name.”

BART MOLMANS (JAARBEURS):

“TristateCity is about the competitiveness (and the strength of this competitiveness) of the TristateCity region on the international scale”.

JACCO BOUW (WEBPOWER):

“TristateCity is the bridge towards worldwide business that erases country borders and is a logic first step for (business) people. The first connection to worldwide business.”

WENDY VERSCHOOR (CBRE):

“A good thinking instrument for encouraging the public and private sectors to think about the future of The Netherlands.”

LINDA VAN BEEK (VNO-NCW/MKB NEDERLAND):

“A modern and effective way of marketing the Dutch economy.”

BRAM VERHOEVEN (PROLOGIS):

“A mode for urban cooperation to be able to compete on an international scale.”

JOHAN BUIJS (NSI):

“A very good explanation of the strength of the region Netherlands – Flanders – North Rhine Westphalia.”

WIENKE BODEWES (AMVEST):

“A platform for collecting relevant data that demonstrates coherence in a region.”

The first thing to be mentioned here is the difference between the definition of the developer, and the definitions of the other thought leaders. Peter Savelberg explains TristateCity in a very creative and visionary manner. The thought leaders, on the other hand, have more practical definitions, often describing how TristateCity can or should be used in practice. This difference can be explained: Peter Savelberg created the concept with a vision, whereas the thought leaders are those who (may) use the concept in practice.

As expected, many of these definitions of TristateCity are built around the same elements: either the strength or competitiveness of the region, or the international scale at which TristateCity aims to reach. Half of the definitions include either one or both of these elements, though their exact focus varies. So the first conclusion would be that TristateCity indeed is about the competitiveness of the region on the international scale, but urban cooperation and exceeding borders.

The other four definitions have a slightly different approach. They do not necessarily address the two elements of competition and international scale, but focus on other possible ways of applying the concept to practice. For example, Wendy Verschoor sees the possibility of using TristateCity to strengthen the collaboration between the public and private sector and encouraging them to create a long term vision for The Netherlands. Wienke Bodewes, who explains in his interview that companies often see the coherence in a region before others do, sees the concept as a platform that helps to explain this coherence so others might understand, too. Hence, TristateCity apparently has more to offer than a good position on the international market.

6.3.4 TRISTATECITY: A VISION AND A TOOL

Capturing the different elements that make up the definitions and taking the goals and ambitions of the concept into account results in the conclusion that TristateCity is both a vision and a tool. It portrays a vision of a comprehensive region composed of three (parts of) countries and sheds a light on all the positive features. Though this region already exists as it is, it has not been established or organised as such, and thus the idea sketched by TristateCity is purely visionary; another way of looking at the region. TristateCity is also a tool; thought leaders call it a thinking instrument, a way of marketing, a mode for urban cooperation, and a platform for collecting data and demonstrating coherence in a region. So TristateCity is both a vision and something that can be used to accomplish part of that vision: a stronger position of the TristateCity region on the international market.

6.4 THE ATTRACTIVENESS OF TRISTATECITY

One of the most important questions for this research was why the private sector is showing such enthusiasm towards a concept that seems unfinished and which has little information available. From the information collected from the website (being the only source at the time), it was unclear what the role between the private sector and TristateCity was and what companies would gain from participation and/or sponsorship. These questions are also portrayed in the conceptual framework (see figure 3).

During the interviews, though, it became clear that the thought leaders had a knowledge and understanding of TristateCity that went quite beyond the supplied information on the website. For instance, they had more knowledge about the current state of affairs. Moreover, they were able to provide examples of how TristateCity is already showing its value in practice. When the interviewees were asked why TristateCity is such an attractive concept for the private sector and/or why companies are so positive towards the idea, none of them had difficulty explaining its attractiveness. However, before further investigating the charisma of TristateCity, it is important to understand the position of the private sector and companies in the concept.

6.4.1 THE POSITION OF THE PRIVATE SECTOR IN TRISTATECITY

In order to be able to interpret the enthusiasm of companies in the private sector, it is important to gain some knowledge about what part they play and what they get in return with regard to TristateCity, as this might influence their opinion on the concept.

Apart from Mr. Savelberg, who initiated the project, all respondents were employees at companies that are listed as TristateCity sponsors. These are financial sponsors, but also contribute in other ways. Some have facilitating roles, such as Jaarbeurs: which has access to a large amount of data on Dutch companies, and Webpower, which can be of service in a way of distributing and programming for TristateCity. The public involvement of VNO-NCW and CBRE can help generate more attention and make it more successful, both companies also try to collaborate with the initiator for advice on and further development of the concept. In return for their sponsorship, companies get the rights to use the TristateCity material and the thought leadership also offers them a way to be a part of further development of the concept. This is, in return, beneficial for TristateCity as it allows for further input of the parties that the concept is initially designed for, making it easier to meet their

requirements. Apart from that, supporting the TristateCity concept also serves as promotion for the company.

Thus, TristateCity offers the private sector the opportunity of reaching and attracting foreign investors that are interested a larger scale to the TristateCity region, and in return gets both financial aid and inside knowledge from the private sector, as well as increased publicity.

6.4.2 TRISTATECITY: THE DREAM OF EVERY COMPANY

The most important reason behind the enthusiasm of the private sector is the fact that the ideas behind TristateCity are in accordance with strategies and the ideas and goals of many companies in the private sector. Much like the TristateCity concept, these companies are looking at the bigger picture and are reaching for the international markets. Among the private sector, the awareness that a renovation is in order is increasing; although performing quite well, the Dutch economy often acts as the 'underdog'. Current marketing strategies are still effective, but they realise that improvement is much needed if The Netherlands really wants to take part in the global economy. For them, TristateCity can be the solution to their problem. As so boldly declared by Johan Buijs, *"TristateCity is what every company wants"* (Johan Buijs). He defends this argument by explaining that TristateCity offers a strong region to be established in. Additionally, it simplifies the process of explaining the location of one's company to the world, and what this location has to offer, thus creating the opportunity of attracting new markets and thereby enabling The Netherlands to be a player on the international market.

Secondly, current trade promotion (initiated by the government) is taking place on an insufficiently internationally oriented base and scale. Many companies work in a field that stretches across borders, both within The Netherlands and Europe. These companies already have the knowledge to recognise certain coherence within regions and are therefore able to understand the value that TristateCity has to offer: a better position in the competition on the international market. Furthermore, the thought leaders agree on the choice of scale, which they think is large enough to be competitive, but is sufficiently manageable at the same time.

"TristateCity is what every company wants."
(Johan Buijs, NSI)

Another reason for enthusiasm is the way in which the concept has been initiated. Bram Verhoeven explains: *"It's finally something different; it's not a government initiative, but a private sector initiative"* (Bram Verhoeven). Companies in the private sector are much more aware of the negative influences that the ongoing competition between cities in The Netherlands creates and thus are more likely to think positive towards a concept such as TristateCity, which actively addresses this issue. Wendy Verschoor argues that positive responses are triggered by the fact that this is the first time looking at the greater good, and talks about how TristateCity may become of influence for future government policies and programmes. What the exact role of the government is in this private sector initiative will be discussed in the next section.

Though TristateCity does not offer direct results for the companies involved, it has the ability to create an indirect positive effect. At the moment, the companies involved are mostly pension funds and multinationals – i.e. large companies which have often already entered the international market.

However, their supply chain partially consists of Dutch MKBs (Dutch: Midden- en Kleinbedrijven, which are the middle and smaller companies), which may directly benefit from TristateCity, as it allows them to promote their company as based in an economically strong region. In turn, their success is beneficial for the larger companies in the private sector. Moreover, if a region is successful, this has certain benefits for the companies in that region, too, as a strong region is prone to attract more investments.

Very specifically, Wienke Bodewes addresses his appreciation for the concept by explaining that its foundations are built with data, unlike a lot of other similar plans that are based on an ideal world as imagined by spatial economists.

Wienke Bodewes specifically addresses his appreciation for the concept by explaining that, unlike other such plans, its foundations are built with data – and are not based on an ideal world imagined by spatial economists, and because tries to automate the coherence within a network city. As a result of this automation, he says, it becomes possible to make predictions and this can be an advantage for the private sector in a sense that it leads to a deeper understanding of the market.

Last but not least, TristateCity offers the private sector a clear and structured story that is easily embedded into corporate strategies. Apart from using TristateCity as a marketing tool, it can also be used to critically examine the portfolio of a company, Wendy Verschoor explains, criticising whether a company is sufficiently focussed on the economically active regions within TristateCity.

In conclusion, it is clear that there are multiple reasons for the enthusiast response from the private sector towards TristateCity. The main reason is that it offers ideas that correspond with the wishes of the Dutch private sector by offering a way to create new opportunities for attracting international investors by creating a region that is interesting for the global market. Apart from that, the concept can be used in multiple ways by companies to their own benefit. Being sponsor allows them to use the TristateCity material, which is easy planted into strategies, and gives the company the right to be part of the discussion on further developments of TristateCity, allowing them to mould the concept as they see appropriate. Though it is true that many questions about the concept are yet to be answered, those that are involved see the opportunities and added value of the concept and are therefore willing to take it on.

6.5 TRISTATECITY AND THE DUTCH GOVERNMENT

The position of the Dutch government in TristateCity is a complicated matter: involving the government has both advantages and disadvantages. Before continuing, it should be clarified that initially, there was do designed role for the government in the TristateCity concept. According to Peter Savelberg, the different governmental organisations are merely invited to join in on the umbrella model and use it in their strategies and policies. Nonetheless, the thought leaders seemed to have enough ideas of what the role of the government could or should be with regard to TristateCity.

6.5.1 THE GOVERNMENT AS A STIMULATOR

However low their expectations, the thought leaders did have some insights as to what the government should so, were they to join in on the concept. The government, for one, should be

stimulating the concept by using it as a guideline for new policies. As Johan Buijs states, *“one would actually expect very big leading role from the government, because of the Dutch business sector. (...) It is of significance for The Netherlands”* (Johan Buijs), because in the end, TristateCity is not only beneficial for the private sector, but for everyone: if effective, *“the general economy strengthens, which impacts everything and everyone”* (Bram Verhoeven). If it were to take up the vision of TristateCity, the government could have a very important part to play in the regulation of how the concept is applied in practice, as it has, for example, the ability to stimulate certain activities in certain areas – which could strengthen the visionary of TristateCity.

6.5.2 THE GOVERNMENT AS A FACILITATOR

Apart from stimulating the use of TristateCity, the thought leaders agree that the government can also play an important role as a facilitator. It should adopt the ideas and put them into use – and, very importantly, should collaborate with the private sector on a closer level. Moreover, it would be beneficial to add some government employees or more permanent ministers to the range of thought leaders, in order to establish this closer relationship. The government is the only body with the tools to create the right circumstances that allow TristateCity to flourish: they have the bureaucratic tools for maintaining the right business climate and performing the necessary infrastructural improvements, as well as providing the necessities for further specialisation and making the decisions about how to disperse these specialisations within the TristateCity area.

“I struggle with the short-cycle way of thinking of governmental directors. (...) This is really a medium or long term vision.”
(Peter Savelberg, TristateCity)

6.5.3 LOW EXPECTATIONS AND A SHORT-TERM VIEW

“We always expect but we know that they do nothing” (Wendy Verschoor). This seems to be the general opinion with regard to the expectations on government involvement in TristateCity, even though it could be of great contribution – not only in a stimulating or facilitating role, but also in terms of financing, spreading and exercising the concept. The question is, what fuels these expectations?

As can be concluded from the statistics, the thought leaders are more than aware that politicians often only have four years to make accomplishments. Their short-sightedness makes it hard to interest them in promoting a concept such as TristateCity; as this is a more long term view, it does not allow them to personal triumphs. Such long term visions are often thus not very high up on their agenda, if even on the agenda at all.

In general, the government has a reputation of slowing things down – and some of the thought leaders express their concerns on how this might influence the implementation and results of TristateCity if the government were involved in the organisation. Additionally, Wienke Bodewes argues that the government focusses too much on sectional interests. These arguments, along with knowledge that politicians are not likely to look to far ahead, make that the expectations of the government taking up the TristateCity concept are often not very expectant at all.

6.5.4 CURRENT STATE OF AFFAIRS

Despite these doubts, different governments within the Netherlands have actually shown interest in TristateCity. The municipality of Utrecht, for example, already put the concept into practice. Peter

Savelberg explains that both Economic Affairs and Foreign Affairs are willing to be added to the project in terms of thought leadership. So, in the end, the government might yet take up an important position in TristateCity as either facilitator or stimulator, or maybe even more than that.

6.6 CREATING SUCCESS FOR TRISTATECITY: FURTHER DEVELOPMENTS

As concluded earlier, TristateCity is both a tool and a vision. Its website boasts a vision in which the Netherlands is turned into a large green world city (TristateCity, 2016b). However, the website lacks any more information on how to achieve this vision of The Netherlands being part of a strong, international region. There seemed to be no action plan or agenda. It was expected that if such an action plan were there, the thought leaders would know more about it, and thus the question of what would be necessary to make TristateCity a reality was introduced to the interview guide. 'Reality' might not be the right word for it though, depending on how it is referred to. It is important to remember that the ambition of TristateCity is not a spatial one, in order to prevent confusion. 'Successful' might be therefore a better alternative.

6.6.1 AN INTERACTIVE WEBSITE

The first interview, with the initiator, already revealed that there is indeed no real planning for TristateCity. Peter Savelberg explains that it would be hard to create such an agenda, as the progress of development is momentarily entirely dependent on the response that the concept gets and the financial aid from sponsors. The idea is to eventually create an interactive, game-like website, but this idea is financially demanding. In order to solve this problem, the initiator is currently negotiating with some companies to look at the possibility of creating a non-profit business model that is self-sufficient. In order for this to have any effect on the success of TristateCity, this website should be attractive and continue reaching new people, companies and organisations that might be interested.

"In the end, it depends entirely on the capacity of the businesspeople"

(Linda van Beek (VNO-NCW/MKB Nederland) on the success of TristateCity)

6.6.2 OTHER NECESSITIES

The different thought leaders each have their own opinion of what they think is important for TristateCity to become successful. It is often mentioned that a very simple but effective step towards success is actually starting to use the concept: integrating it in corporate strategies and talking about the concept to others. Generating publicity is then the first step towards success. So, *"in the end, it depends entirely on the capacity of the business people"* (Linda van Beek), hereby addressing the reach of the social and professional networks of business people.

Secondly, apart from turning the vision into a strategy, the success of TristateCity is also influenced by whether or not the developers are able to turn the concept into a real brand, Wienke Bodewes argues. Establishing TristateCity as a strong place brand and creating publicity for the concept go hand in hand. Further discussion on TristateCity and place branding will follow in the next section.

Thirdly, it is important to further develop the business case and prove its efficiency in practice. The database must be completed and the vision turned into a strategy. Bart Molmans explains that momentarily, the concept has arrived at a point at which questions are asked about necessity, support, what parties should be involved, how to organise them and how to fund all this - which

partly reflects what the Peter Savelberg explained about the ongoing negotiations. Wendy Verschoor also addresses the need for connecting people and creating or finding a facilitating party that can help think of the next steps that must be made, and make a real plan for the concept.

Linda van Beek stresses that in the meantime, it is of great importance to keep up or even improve the current business climate in The Netherlands: for example, it is essential to remain fiscally attractive and to allow developments in infrastructure. Additionally, there should be a continuous effort to stay ahead of others – keep working on the strength of the triple helix (business, education, government) to preserve and improve the knowledge economy of The Netherlands. She also explains that The Netherlands is at an advantage: *“The Netherlands is one big liveable enclave, a liveable city”* (Linda van Beek). Whereas upcoming countries struggle with the liveability of their cities, both Peter Savelberg and Linda van Beek verify that The Netherlands does not: our business sector already has solutions for such problems. She stresses that the focus should therefore also be on discovering how to market these qualities effectively.

As far as the government is concerned, even though involving them in further development of the project may slow down the processes, it provides the opportunity to complete implement TristateCity in the policies and strategies pursued by both governmental organisations and the private sector. However, and Wendy Verschoor also stresses this, it is important to get the right people involved: not necessarily the ministers. It would be better to ask influential bureaucrats to join the conversation, as they have the ability to focus more on long term projects.

6.6.3 THINK BIG, ACT BIG

Last but not unimportant, if TristateCity is to be a success, it should not be afraid to think and act big – otherwise it does not have a chance at competing with the rapidly growing emerging markets. In sum, the success of TristateCity is dependent on multiple aspects. It starts with the establishment of a self-sufficient website-based business and then further success heavily relies on the attention that the website and the story of TristateCity get. Meanwhile, it is important to maintain and improve the qualities of the region as they are, as well as finding out an effective way of marketing them to further establish the TristateCity brand. Finding the right people and parties to realise this should be a priority.

The results from the interviews give the impression that it is time to start making more concrete plans for the future development of TristateCity if it is to become a successful brand for the region. It would not be unnecessary to assign certain groups of representatives to specific elements in which they have the opportunity to be most influential. Involving the government should definitely – if done properly, with the right people and organisations – be an important ambition to pursue.

6.7 TRISTATECITY AND PLACE BRANDING

In the theory, TristateCity is identified as a form of large scale place branding. During the interviews, sometimes place branding or marketing was introduced by the interviewee, sometimes by the interviewer. When asked about place branding, not all the respondents were familiar with the concept. This aside, the theme of marketing/(place) branding was definitely a recurring one in the interviews, though more strongly in some interviews than others.

During the first interview, the concept is shortly explained to the initiator who replies to this in a confirmative manner: “... *that is actually exactly what TristateCity tries to do on a bigger scale*” (Peter Savelberg, TristateCity). In the theory, the connection between place branding and TristateCity had already been made, but this definitely strengthens it. Linda van Beek also describes it as “... *an innovator concept, using modern techniques, it’s some form of branding...*”, and explains that TristateCity can be a new way of looking at the Netherlands and what the regions within have to offer.

However, the interviews also clarify that TristateCity is not a regular form of place branding. As explained in the theory, TristateCity is about attracting (spatial) investments, and therefore other possible target groups of place branding practices are put aside for this research. This is also emphasised by Jacco Bouw, who says the following about TristateCity and place branding: “*Tristate does not operate on a level of bringing life to the city and e.g. attracting large universities to a city. ... It is about distributing (economic) activity in the region*”, emphasising that TristateCity is necessarily meant for attracting businesses. The initiator additionally mentions that it is not the goal of TristateCity to strengthen a places brand, but that it is indirectly doing so as a result of better local economies.

6.7.1 THE UMBRELLA MODEL

The umbrella model is demonstrated by Peter Savelberg (the initiator). to the information on their website, TristateCity is an umbrella model for local city marketing, in which the participation Dutch cities can regain their own identity while having access to the benefits of the agglomeration that the TristateCity region has to offer (TristateCity, 2016b). No further information on how this works in practice was available. The initiator explains that cities have often already invested in marketing for years, and therefore are not easily persuaded to discard their branding strategies. The idea of Tristate, though, is not to discard these strategies, but to add a layer to them. This means that the users of TristateCity should work from the top down. Bram Verhoeven clarifies this by explaining that first, the concept of TristateCity should be used to attract new investors to the Tristate region. Only then, when the client has decided to establish themselves in the region because of all its assets, the question of what location within the region is best is relevant.

The use of local place branding practices is also pictured in figure 4 in two slightly different ways, as it was explained in the interviews. The left image shows how TristateCity forms a shell around the local place branding. By marketing the entire TristateCity region, the regions within are indirectly promoted, too. Once the TristateCity marketing is effective, the local place branding practices are set in motion. The initiator explains it as being a ‘peel model’ (“*afpel-model*”). The right image shows the TristateCity concept in a similar fashion, working literally from the top down with regard to the branding: first use TristateCity for marketing, and then zoom in towards the local place branding practices. This means that cities and regions are indeed able to use the TristateCity concept without discarding their own brand.

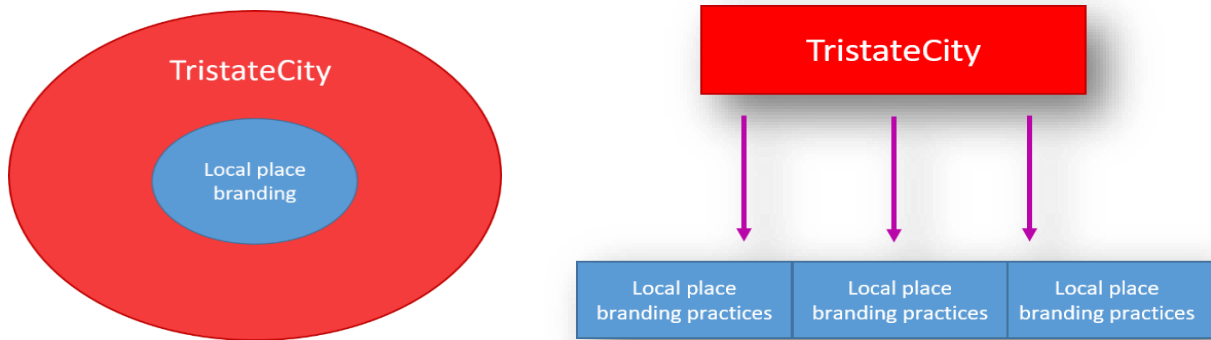


FIGURE 4 THE USE OF LOCAL PLACE BRANDING WITHIN THE TRISTATECITY CONCEPT. LEFT: TRISTATECITY FORMS A SHELL AROUND LOCAL PLACE BRANDING PRACTICES. RIGHT: TOP-DOWN APPROACH: FIRST PRESENTING TRISTATECITY, THEN ZOOMING IN TO THE DIFFERENT AREAS WITHIN THE REGION.

7.6.2 APPLYING RESULTS TO CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK AND DEFINITION OF PLACE BRANDING

The results from the interviews allow for resolving the questions that arise in the advanced conceptual model (see figure 3). The knowledge from the interviews makes it possible to create a new model that represents how TristateCity works as a form of place branding. This is presented in Figure 5 below.

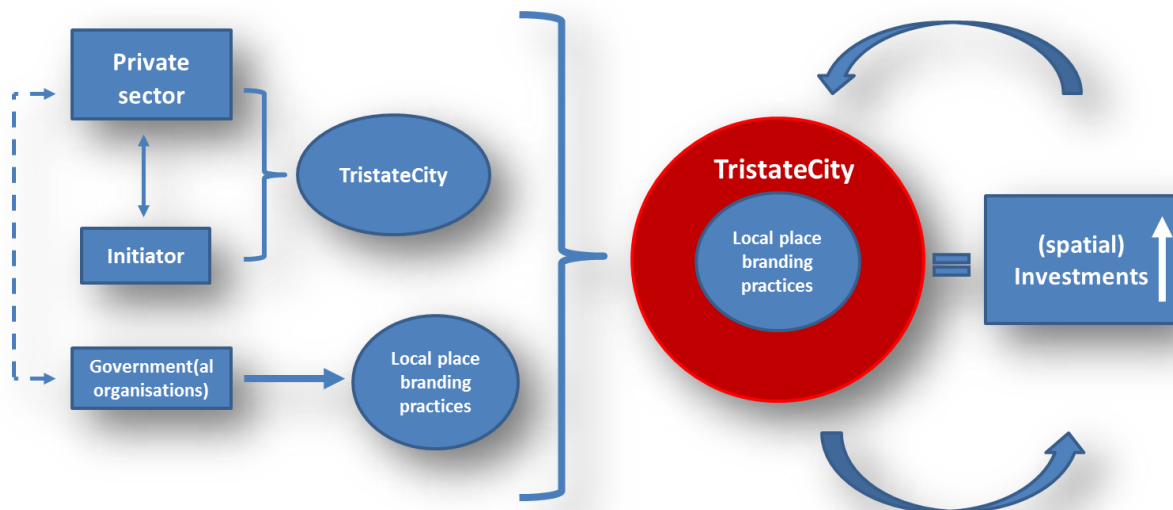


FIGURE 5 REPRESENTATION OF TRISTATECITY AS PLACE BRANDING, PRESENTING THE RELATIONS BETWEEN DIFFERENT ACTORS.

Figure 5 shows how TristateCity works as a place branding concept in cooperation with other place branding practices, which have originally been initiated by governmental organisations such as municipalities or provinces. There is a strong relationship between the private sector and the initiator of the concept: together they decide how TristateCity is developed and promoted. The private sector provides money, ideas and publicity for TristateCity, and the private sector in return has the

opportunity to benefit from the potential of TristateCity to generate new spatial investments in the region.

The relationship between the government and the private sector is not yet fully established: there is no clarity on what role the government is going to have in this structure. Governmental organisations can continue to initiate and/or coordinate local place branding. Instead of erasing all local place branding, this is 'added' the TristateCity concept, as visualised in the scheme. TristateCity forms a shell around local place branding: first the entire region is promoted, and later there is the possibility of zooming in and showing what different areas within the region have to offer. This is then expected to result in more spatial developments as a result of attracting new investors to the region. This, in turn, enhances the story of TristateCity, further increasing the strength of the assets that it uses for the establishing of its brand.

If the outcomes of the interviews are compared with the definitions given for place branding in the theory, it can be concluded that TristateCity does indeed comply. It promotes the region through a constituted identity; apart from social and economic elements, it also draws upon the physics of the place (infrastructural corridors and built, urbanised environment), which Braun and Zenker (2010) see as the most important elements for the brand identity. However, it is important to note that the identity that has been 'assigned' to TristateCity mainly focusses on the economically interesting aspects for the target audience. Through the promotion of the identity and assets of the region, TristateCity tries to add value to the region, making it more attractive for foreign investors. This also aligns with Andersson (2014), who states that place branding is often about attracting new markets, and this is in essence also what TristateCity tries to do: creating a strong brand for its region so that investors from all over the world – and especially new markets who are not yet familiar with The Netherlands – may become familiar with the place.

6.7.3 PROBLEMS FOR TRISTATECITY AS A PLACE BRAND

Arguing from the theory and the results from the interviews, it is safe to treat TristateCity as a place branding practice. However, this poses some problems with regard to the brand name and identity. As explained in the theory, the embedding of the identity of a place is determinative of the success of the place brand. Wienke Bodewes justly notes that the name for the concept was chosen from the model, and is not based on something that gives the brand value. He is right. TristateCity is merely descriptive; three regions that are put together to form one city, but it holds no connection to the identity of the region. It does not include any topographical reference either, apart from the fact that it entails 'three states'.

Wienke Bodewes discusses this more in-depth in his interview, arguing that TristateCity has yet to become a brand, as at this stage it is a working technical model without a good name (TristateCity being just the title). According to him, often it is the most influential and powerful place that gives a region its name, e.g. New York. He explains that it is very difficult to give this region a name, because it is composed of a number of different core cities that probably are reluctant to give up their identity for another one, and advises to look into the creation of the Silicon Valley brand, which is very successful but has no name with a link to its geographical location. The theory behind branding of amorphous areas is beyond the scope of this research, though. Once TristateCity has obtained

some publicity, changing the name would be risky as it may cause confusion and consequently damage the concept as a whole.

Apart from the name issue in relation to the TristateCity brand, there are also other difficulties. TristateCity has been developed as a place brand that has foreign investors as a target group, and therefore portrays an identity that is only focussed on the economically interesting assets that the region has to offer. Of course such economic assets are also linked to the social and cultural identity of a place. However, one could ask if TristateCity is just a place for doing business, or is it also a place where people want to live and with which they can have an emotional bond? If the government gets involved, such discussions are important to keep in mind as the government is also responsible for the well-being of citizens, and should not merely focus on the economic attractiveness of The Netherlands.

6.8 POTENTIAL SPATIAL DEVELOPMENTS RELATED TO TRISTATECITY

During the interviews, there was often time to discuss the spatial implications of TristateCity. Regarding this, the statistics analysis of the interviews showed a keen interest of thought leaders in both infrastructure and clustering or specialisation. Therefore it seems no more than appropriate to shortly address the comments on these potential spatial developments, even though it is beyond the scope of this research.

Despite the fact that TristateCity is not designed as a building plan or spatial ambition, the concept is partially based on the structure of the built environment within the TristateCity region. This can easily be recognised when looking at the images that portray the corridors within the region, and which show the present clustering of activities. These images might have influenced the answers of the respondents when asked about the potential spatial developments that might result from TristateCity. Many of them spoke about clustering and specialisation, and the agglomeration benefits that result from such concentration of activity. Others expected developments in infrastructure, arguing that even though we already have a very good infrastructure network in The Netherlands, they expected this to expand even further. Bart Molmans expects a change in the locations of companies: under pressure from the young talents that TristateCity attracts, businesses will move back into city centres, as this is where these people -who want both work and amenities close to home – live.

So, even though TristateCity was not designed as a spatial ambition, an array of possible spatial developments to be expected are introduced here. Which developments, and how these develop exactly, are however questions for another research.

7. CONCLUSION

When TristateCity was first presented to Dutch governmental organisations, the response was positive, and there was already quite some positive response from the private sector. Throughout this research, this apparent attractiveness of TristateCity has been explored using the knowledge extracted through interviews with several ‘thought leaders’, who are involved with TristateCity through their company. Using this information, it is now possible to answer the question: *“What are the reasons behind the enthusiasm and interest in the newly presented ‘TristateCity’, and what can we expect from it in the (near) future?”*.

7.1 TRISTATECITY: A PRIVATE PLACE BRANDING INITIATIVE

As can be concluded from the research, TristateCity is many things, but it is best described as both a vision and a tool to increase the economic potential of The Netherlands through creating a brand for the TristateCity region that allows the region to differentiate itself from others in a globalising world and economy.

This ‘tool for differentiation’ is precisely what the private sector finds so attractive about the concept. The results from the interviews show that there is this wish among the private sector in The Netherlands to be able to explain where they work and why this would be a good place to be established as a company. TristateCity offers them a strong and potentially competitive region to be established in – and all the company has to do to benefit from this, is to integrate the TristateCity storytelling in their marketing strategies. The ideas that formed TristateCity already correspond with their own strategies and beliefs, which is the result of the fact that the concept has been developed as a private sector initiative. It is a reaction towards current city marketing in the Netherlands, which is very fragmented at the moment, with cities competing with each other on the international market. One of the main goals of TristateCity is also to connect and become stronger while working together instead of competing – it can create awareness that both the public and private sector should work together to strengthen the marketing position of the Netherlands.

How the public and private sector should or could work together in TristateCity has also been addressed in the research. Involving the government could be a great contribution towards the concept in terms of finance and implementation. However, there is no designed role for the Dutch government within TristateCity. Nonetheless, the thought leaders agreed that the government should take up a facilitating and stimulating role, as only the government possesses the tools necessary for further implementation and because TristateCity is potentially beneficial for the entire country. On the other hand, there is also some hesitation towards including politicians in the further development of the concept. This is caused by the often short-term view that politicians adopt. Therefore, the thought leaders do not expect the government to really take up TristateCity anytime soon. They are also concerned about the bureaucratic system slowing down the process. Nonetheless, despite these fears, involving the government highly increased the chance of TristateCity becoming successful.

TristateCity has in this research successfully been identified as a form of place branding: it promotes its region by presenting its assets and potential, and draws on the integrated identity of the place. It forms a shell around local place branding, allowing both to exist at the same time and can even

strengthen each other. Its ambition is to make the region interesting for foreign investors, who are more interested in large-scale projects, and by attracting these foreign investors the concept thus potentially creates economic value for the region. Being able to position oneself in such a strong region particularly creates opportunities for the MKBs on the emerging world markets. However, the fact that the identity presented by TristateCity draws mainly on the economic aspects of the region may pose some problems in the future. Even though it is an economic place brand, citizens might feel as if their presence is not valued, were the concept to be fully implemented in The Netherlands.

7.2 WHAT WE CAN (OR SHOULD) EXPECT FROM TRISTATECITY IN THE (NEAR) FUTURE

Recently, there are some government organisations that have shown interest and which will be part of future discussions on how to further develop TristateCity, meaning that government support for the concept can possibly be expected after all. This leads to the question what else can be expected with regard to TristateCity in the (near) future. Peter Savelberg, who 'invented' TristateCity, reveals that there is no real plan for the concept, at least not at the moment. Yet there are some ideas for the future and success of TristateCity, including the idea of creating an interactive website, run by a self-sufficient business. The success of this website is dependent on how many people visit and use it. So publicity is a very important factor for the success of TristateCity; the concept will only be successful if enough people know about it and actually use it. So we may expect further publicity for TristateCity.

Additionally, the concept should be transformed into a strategy and the right parties for doing so must be found. If the concept really becomes a strategy, it might be more attractive to take up for companies. Apart from that, it is also very important for TristateCity to further develop its brand. Even though this research has already established that TristateCity is a form of place branding, it has not yet been established as a real place brand. In the meantime, it is important to keep up the quality of the TristateCity region, is not further improve it, to maintain an attractive climate for investors.

If TristateCity is fully incorporated in the Dutch economic marketing strategy and adopted by both government and private sector, then TristateCity could become the new economic identity of The Netherlands. It could also lead to some changes in spatial developments. For example, as TristateCity uses the current infrastructure networks and e.g. logistics hubs to portray certain corridors, this might influence how new activities and investments are distributed among different areas in The Netherlands, Flanders and North-Rhine Westphalia.

To conclude, even though there are still a lot of blanks to fill out in TristateCity, the companies in the private sector see the potential value of the concept and have good reasons for supporting it. It will be interesting to see how TristateCity develops over the next couple of years, whether it will gain enough publicity to become a success, which additional parties will be involved and to what extent the government and the private sector are going to further incorporate the TristateCity strategies in their own strategies and policies.

8. DISCUSSION

Any research is subject to discussion, and therefore, so is this thesis. There is always a set of limitations that influences and sometimes compromises the outcome of the research. As a researcher, it is important to be aware of these limitations.

The time frame for this research was limited to approximately two months, and therefore some compromises with regard to the width and depth of the research had to be made. To give an example, only eight out of the eighteen thought leaders were interviewed. The interviews themselves also had a limited time frame, and more information or a deeper understanding of certain elements of TristateCity might have been better understood had they been longer than thirty minutes. Importantly, the research is also just based on the results from interviews with those who are already involved with TristateCity and thus give biased answers and are prone to have a positive view on the concept. This has of course influenced the outcome of the research, which is predominantly positive. It would therefore be interesting to explore the topics of research with TristateCity critics and sceptics, in order to get an insight in their point of view and set their arguments against those of the thought leaders. Additionally, this research focusses on those involved through the private sector and it is therefore also advised to take governmental stakeholders into account in further research, as well, especially because the government is increasingly involved in further development of the TristateCity model.

Following from this research, there are many more questions that can be asked. For example, will cities with a strong brand, such as Amsterdam, be prepared to apply the TristateCity model over their own branding practices? And what happens to the success of TristateCity if such large and important places are not willing to cooperate? If fully adopted by the government, what will TristateCity mean for the public? It has been designed for the private sector and therefore does not take the identity of the region as assigned by the people into account – and so this raises questions in relation to place-making. Is TristateCity also a place where you want to live as a person? Can you live in TristateCity, or is it just a place for doing business? The name of the concept is also a topic for further discussion, and Wienke Bodewes suggested that it would be good to look at how amorphous places such as Silicon Valley have obtained their name.

It could also be interesting to see how TristateCity develops under the influence of the recent developments within the European Union (the Brexit, for example). Could this maybe be an opportunity for TristateCity? Additionally, as already shortly discussed in the interview results, the spatial implications and relations of TristateCity are also an interesting topic for further research.

If fully adopted and implemented as a policy in The Netherlands, it is important to take these questions into consideration and the developers should take care to think of complications and potential solutions. So far, there is no way of knowing whether TristateCity will become a success or not, even though the main opinion of the thought leaders is that it will be. It is therefore suggested to look at TristateCity again in maybe three or five years and see how it has developed by then. TristateCity seems like a very ambitious project, and one might wonder if it will not turn out to be another failed attempt at an economic vision that is related to the spatiality of a place. It is difficult to assign the right identities to places, to find a concept that really works for a region. The next

question to ask in light of this is thus whether TristateCity really is appealing enough for the private sector and the government, and not unimportantly: the outside world, and if it will be sufficiently pursued over the years to really become established as a place brand.

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All interview results are based on transcripts of interviews with the thought leader. These transcripts are property of the author and are not provided with this report.

Peter Savelberg, TristateCity (2016, September 19th). Personal interview.

Bart Molmans, Jaarbeurs (2016). Personal interview.

Jacco Bouw, Webpower (2016). Personal interview.

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Johan Buijs, NSI (2016). Personal interview.

Wienke Bodewes, Amvest (2016). Personal interview.

Source image front page: <http://www.tristatecity.nl/>, accessed November 17th, 2016.

Note: it is not allowed to reproduce this image without consent from TristateCity.

APPENDIX

INTERVIEW GUIDE

PROCEDURE

Duration of interview

Max. 30 minutes (aim for approx. 25 minutes)

Before interview

Check date, time & public traffic options

Prepare questions – using this guide and with previous interviews in mind

Check background company/institution

Just before interview/bring along

Print prepared questions for interview

Voice recorder (check battery)

During interview

Ask permission to record the interview

Ask if interviewed wants to receive transcript/final report

Hold track of time and adjust questions (or question order) when necessary

Explain the next step (recording becomes transcript, all combined are compared for drawing conclusions)

Collect necessary contact info (e.g. email address)

After interview

Make a back-up recording

Convert recorded interview into written transcript

If necessary: send transcript to the interviewed person

INTERVIEW

Introduction

My background (BSc student Spatial Planning @ Wageningen UR, currently working on BSc thesis about TristateCity)

What am I interested in (exploratory research, what is TristateCity, who are involved and what role do they play, why the positive response etc.)

The reason for approaching the interviewed (interviewing thought leaders)

Standard/recurring questions

- To start off with: can you tell me something about your background?

- What is your relationship with TristateCity/how did you get involved with TristateCity?
- Why is your company involved with TristateCity and how exactly?
- What is expected from the government/what role does the government have?
- What is the reason behind this choice of scale?/What is your opinion on the choice of scale?
- What, do you think, is necessary to accomplish the 2025 vision/to make TristateCity really 'happen'?
- Why is there such a positive response from the private sector towards TristateCity?
- Please explain TristateCity in one sentence.

Other ideas for questions/topics

- Are there also negative responses or sceptics?
- Are you familiar with place branding? (explain how place branding is incorporated into the research for a different angle in the interview if necessary)
- Which actors can play a large role in TristateCity (in the future)?
- What spatial developments do you expect as a result of TristateCity?
- Who has TristateCity been developed for? (Public, private, government?) For who can TristateCity be beneficial?
- How does the umbrella model work in practice?
- What is the ultimate goal for TristateCity?
- What is the exact role of the thought leaders?
- What is your opinion about the fact that normally such branding techniques are initiated by governmental organisations and that TristateCity was initiated/designed within the private sector?
- What are your expectations for the future?

USING THE RESULTS

When making a transcript

Highlight important or remarkable sections for easy access later

Keep an eye out for recurring keywords or themes

Check for irregularities within interview

When comparing/processing data

Check for repeatedly unanswered questions

Make overview of all answers to "TristateCity in one sentence"

Check for (ir)regular answers

Make a mind map of recurring themes in answers, for every theme/question

Try to make a new overview of the relationships with regard to place branding and TristateCity

Make an analysis of themes and keywords, per question/theme addressed in the interviews

COMMENTS

Use different questions for interview with initiator (Peter Savelberg)

Add relevance to the order of questions – no random asking, adjust to the topics discussed

Skip questions when already addressed by interviewed (e.g. when answering another (often related) question)

Mind not to ask leading questions!