



Investigating Employer Branding in Cities

Case: City of Helsinki, Espoo, Vantaa & Oulu

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<p>Abstract:</p> <p>The aim of this thesis is to investigate the significance of employer branding and how employer branding is currently carried out within cities in Finland. The importance of employer branding within the public sector has been brought up by researchers (Ritz and Waldner 2011). However, this area of study is still widely under researched. Therefore, the findings of the research offer crucial information on the current state of employer branding within Helsinki, Espoo, Vantaa and Oulu, for all cities to further develop their practices.</p> <p>The theory section of the thesis examines the definitions, benefits and processes of employer branding within the private sector. Deeper understanding of these areas within the city context are investigated with the empirical section. The research data was collected through qualitative semi-structured interviews with four management level employer branding professionals.</p> <p>The result show that employer branding is often part of the city level strategy and follows the visual identity of the city. In addition, the results suggest that the significance of employer branding is expected to grow in the future. All case cities had multichannel employer branding practices. The respondent and theory highlighted the importance of the employer branding being distinctive. However, the findings do not present major differences between the case cities employer branding practices. The research concludes with discussing the limitations and further research suggestions.</p>	
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1 INTRODUCTION

The thesis starts with an introduction to the background of the research topic, the problem statement, as well as the research aim and questions. Here the importance of branding, the competition for talented worker in the labor market and the public sector are first touched upon. Followed by the limitations of the research. The chapter continues with a brief section that introduces the thesis structure and methods.

1.1 Background

Brands have become a powerful asset for organizations and has bestowed organizations significant commercial power. They are involved in forming and maintaining relationships and are present when communicating with an organization's stakeholders (Mokina 2014). The importance of an organization's brand is widely recognized and is often associated with the private sector (Whelan et al. 2010). With the changing global market, demographics and increasing competition for talented labor the public sector has started to adopt branding practices from the private sector.

More recently it has been acknowledged that leveraging both the internal and external brand of an organization is crucial, as both support each other (Vatsa 2016). As stated by Monika (2014), unlike the corporate brand that is directed towards external audiences, the employer brand is directed towards both internal (internal labor market) and external (external labor market) audiences. A strategically managed employer brand enables an organization to create cohesion between the two.

As stated by Sir Martin Sorrell the CEO of WPP "Building an effective employer brand is increasingly essential to attract scarce talent, provide a focal point during times of change, and support the kind of internal commitment required to genuinely live the brand..." (Temporal 2015) In addition to bringing cohesion, talent attraction, and being an enabler of change, employer branding practices have multiple direct and indirect benefits, such as, employee satisfaction, performance, retention, and organizational profitability.

Both branding and employer branding are immensely important to the public sector that comprises of organizations that are owned and operated by the government, as well as cities. It is often overlooked that cities are significant and large employers in many countries. Especially in countries like Finland that are welfare-states, cities have large state or city-run service sectors. In Finland, the city of Helsinki is the largest employer in the country. Furthermore, in other cities the city is commonly the biggest or one of the biggest employers within the city (Helsingin kaupunki 2019; Kuntatyöntantajat 2017).

1.2 Problem Statement

In today's rapidly changing and increasingly competitive marketplace, also known as the phenomenon of “war for talent”. That was first coined by Steven Hankin of McKinsey & Company in 1997. This phenomenon has made organizations become aware of the importance of their employees. Due to demographic changes the supply of labor is decreasing which results in shortages in human capital. Which in turn leads to increased competition between employers for labor. The effects can already be seen as there are challenging labor shortages in certain sectors. According to the latest statistics published by the Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment of Finland, 20% of Finnish employees report difficulties in finding new labor (Valtioneuvosto 2021). Also, the city of Helsinki, Vantaa, and Espoo have said that the ability to acquire needed talent will be a challenge in the future.

The public sector including cities have started to adopt branding principles from the private sector. However, when carried out they lack effect due to tight budgets, confusion about its branding concepts and application, anticipated effects, and due to the high degree of multidisciplinary (Garg et al. 2018).

In Finland cities are big employers in the health and social services, childcare and education. With the war for skilled talent (Srinivasan 2007; Mosley 2015) especially within the service sector in which majority of city employment focuses in. It would be critical for cities to be able to employ the right people and be able to hold on to them. In addition, to the war for talent and the workforce shortage cities are also facing challenges

in recruitment due to changing demographics (Tilastokeskus 2020). This mean that organizations may not be operating at full capacity as positions go unfilled or are filled by individuals who are not fully qualified for the given position. (Robinet 2019)

The importance of employer branding and developing the employer image within the public sector has been brought up by some researchers (Ritz and Waldner, 2011; Äijälä, 2001; Mäkilä, 2015). However, this area of study is still widely under researched. Therefore, this thesis aspires to contribute to this under researched field by bring more attention to this topic and by providing a view of the current situation that can aid cities in their future employer branding activities.

1.3 Research Aim and Questions

The aim of this thesis is to investigate the significance of employer branding to cities and to investigate how employer branding is currently carried out in cities in Finland. For an any organization to improve their employer brand it is vital to understand the current situation and based on this drive commitment within the organization for the employer branding strategy. This starts by making people aware and highlighting the benefits of employer branding.

The research is structured along the following research questions:

RQ1: What is employer branding and what is its strategical significance for a city?

RQ2: How is employer branding carried out in cities in Finland?

1.4 Limitations

The thesis studies preexisting theories of employer branding and its benefits. In addition to how they can be interpreted in a city context. As the research focuses on the strategical and managerial implications of employer branding the perspectives of current employees and potential future employees are excluded. This ensures that the research stays focused. In addition, the research focuses on investigating the field of employer branding. Not

internal branding, as it does not concentrate on targeting both the internal and external audiences. Therefore, the internal branding is only investigated in relation to employer branding. As a result, literature concerning internal branding that is not linked to employer branding is excluded.

To ensure the research stays focused enough. Four case cities (Helsinki, Espoo, Vantaa and Oulu) in Finland have been chosen, with the following criteria: the city must be a significant employer in Finland and conscious employer branding efforts must be conducted in the city.

1.5 Thesis Structure and Methods

The thesis consists of four main sections: theory, method, results and conclusion. The first part that aims to answer the first research question, is a review of employer branding literature, theories, and practices. The goal of this part is to build a conceptual framework that forms the basis through which, the second part, the empirical section of the thesis is investigated.

The empirical section of the thesis which aims to answer the second research question, focuses on investigating how employer branding processes are carried out in the selected cities and will be conducted in the form of a case study. The statement by Robert K. Yin (2003) best describes why a case study is the most suitable research method to conduct the research: “In general, case studies are the preferred strategy when "how" questions are being posed, when the investigator has little control over events, and when the focus is on contemporary phenomenon within some real-life context.” A case study allows the researcher to use multiple data sources, both primary and secondary data, to build a comprehensive framework and to bring forth a comprehensive depiction of the area of study.

This research has taken a qualitative approach. The primary data will be collected through in-depth semi-structured interviews with city personnel working with the city’s employer brand and will be supplemented with other secondary data relevant to the research topic.

2 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The second chapter of the thesis comprises of the theoretical framework of the research. In this part earlier studies, literature and research are reviewed by the author to build a comprehensive view on the research topic. The theoretical part is carried out with the research questions always in mind. The theoretical part will also be the base for the context on which the empirical research is conducted. This part will discuss branding, what employer branding is, how it can be defined, its dimensions, as well as processes. In addition, the benefits of employer branding are investigated, as well as how employer branding principles can be adopted in the context of cities.

2.1 Employer Brand and Branding

Before focusing on branding, one must understand what the term brand means and encompasses. “A brand is a name, term, design, symbol, or any other feature that identifies one seller’s good or service as distinct from those of other sellers” (American Marketing Association). However, today a brand is so much more. A brand is often said to be a promise to a customer. An organization’s intellectual capital has become more important as it is viewed to supplies it with a competitive edge. Brands can be categorized under an organization intellectual capital, as well-built and managed brands can have substantial power and can become a significant resource to an organization. A brand is often the most powerful intangible asset of any company. If developed and managed well a brand can gain great emotional value and attachment to people (Kotler 2006). Forbes’ annual “The World's Most Valuable Brands” rankings can attest to this.

Denise Lee Yohn and Jossey-Bass (2014) describes a brand to be “... a bundle of values and attributes that define the value you deliver to people through the entire customer experience, and the unique way of doing business that forms the basis of your company’s relationships with all of its stakeholders.” All its stakeholders, being the key word, as it includes the organizations potential and current employees within this definition.

Employee branding is a subdomain of branding and has similarities to consumer branding. If it has uniqueness and good image, it can form a close association between the brand

and consumers (in this case employees or possible employees) (Pitt et al. 2002; Backhaus and Tikoo 2004). Meaning if a brand is development and managed well it can gain great emotional and perceived value that can outlasts the tangible assets of an organizations (Kotler and Keller 2006).

2.1.1 What is Employer Branding?

Employer branding research touches upon many fields such as corporate branding, marketing, human resources, internal and external corporate communication and has therefore variations in the context and focus it has been studied through (Khandelwal et la. 2021).

The term “employer branding” is viewed to be first introduced by Ambler and Barrows (1996), where they defined the concept as follows “Employer branding represents the totality of the functional, economic and psychological benefits of the job that are offered by the company as an employer”.

According to Backhaus and Tikoo (2004), the employer brand reveals an image that represents the organization as an attractive employer and involves the process of promoting it both inside and outside the organization.

Aggerhol, Andersen & Thompson (2011) conceptualize the employer brand as “communication, building and as a interdisciplinary process that promotes lasting relationships between employees and the employer”.

Zaware and Shinde (2020) suggest that employer branding “acts as a means of communication of organizational characteristics and how the corporation distinguishes from many other companies as an employer and thus offering a competitive advantage”.

To summarize employer branding encompasses multiple functions, signifying what the organization stands for as an employer and gains distinction. Which is then communicated

and promoted to both potential and current employees to set up a base on top of which lasting relationships with relevant stakeholders can be built.

2.1.2 Employer Branding Dimensions

The factors of employer brand that greatly affect the organization can be categorized in many ways and various researchers have introduced various frameworks.

Ambler and Barrow (1996) divided the employer brand into economic, functional and psychological dimensions.

Table 1. The 3 employer branding dimension (Source: Ambler & Barrow, 1996)

Dimension	Include
Economic	salaries/wages and other payments provided by the employer
Functional	potential opportunities e.g., career development and other activities provided by the employer
Psychological	employee perceptions in employment relations e.g., sense of belonging, adaptability and purpose

Berthon et al. (2005) further built on this and suggested that the employer brand comprises of five dimensions: interest value, social value, economic value, development value and application value.

Table 2. Five employer branding dimensions (Source: Berthon et. al 2005)

Dimension	Include
Interest value	assessment of the employer in providing an exciting work environment e.g. market leader, high quality and innovative products or services
Social value	assesses the work environment provided by the employer e.g. good company culture, team atmosphere
Economic value	employer's ability to provide above-average salary, compensation package, job security and opportunities for promotion
Development value	the employer in providing recognition, sense of self-worth, career enhancement experience

Application value	the extent to which an individual is attracted to an employer that provides an opportunity for the employee to apply what they have learned and to teach others
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2.2 Benefits of Employer Branding

The brand is one of the most significant and strongest assets of an organization (Zaware & Shinde 2020). Unlike the corporate brand that heavily focuses on the customer, one of the main aspects of employer branding is that it concentrates on the employee. Allowing the organization to communicate with a broader audience and creating a setting for the organization to communicate its characteristics on how it differs from other organizations. This can become a competitive advantage in the labor market and can also positively impact the higher organizational brand. According to Michington (2016) and Grabara (2013) for an organization to be sustainable it needs to focus on three pillars customers, employees and financial performance. The process of employer branding is the best way to address the second pillar.

The benefits garnered by employer branding can be divided into two, direct benefits and indirect benefits. The direct benefits we may categorize as follows: attraction, employee satisfaction, employee engagement. A strong employer brand enables an employer to stand out and attract more applicants. This result in lower recruitment cost and generally a higher quality of applicants. Employee satisfaction is increased when the employee experience is consistent with the brand promise. This can be done largely by addressing the different dimensions of employer branding.

Employees are generally an essential component in bringing the brand to the customers. Therefore, for employees to convey the brand image correctly to customers, the employees must first experience the brand for themselves (Zaware and Shinde 2020). High employee satisfaction leads to higher employee commitment and performance which is then mirrored to customers (Parmar 2014). In addition, when employees are engaged and committed it can lead to brand advocacy. Meaning that they become

ambassador of the employer brand and subsequently spread positive “word-of-mouth” about their organization (Urbancova and Hudakova 2017).

2.3 The Employer Branding Process

Employer branding can be viewed through different angles. The first being the external and internal employer brand. The first focusing in attracting talent and the latter in employee satisfaction. These may have a direct or indirect effect on employee retention, performance and organizational profitability (see Figure 1. Employer brand model). If external employer branding is done correctly, it will aid an organization in its recruitment processes and possibly brand the organization as an employer of choice in the labor market.

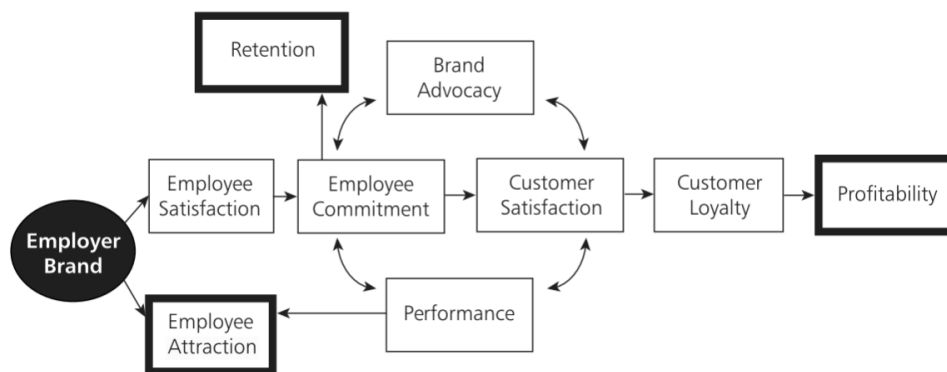


Figure 1. Employer brand model (Source: Gaddam 2008)

Internally, employer brand promotes the relationship between employees, improves employee productivity and loyalty, helps with talent retention, is conducive for organizational performance and enhances competitive advantage. (Tanwar and Prasad 2017, p. 389)

With employer branding principles stemming from traditional branding, just like customers go through a customer life cycle also employees pass through an “employee lifecycle”. This employee life cycle consists of seven stages that are as follows: attracting, hiring, onboarding, engaging, performing and departing. In general, if the employee

experience is managed effectively during all seven stages, this should result in reaching the employer brand goals (Itum et la. 2020).

To help understand how the employee brand performs it is important to set measurement according to the employer brand goals to monitor the process for further development. As stated by Itum et la. (2020) it also helps the organization to understand how the brand performs within the framework of employee values and expectations, and against competing brands. To conclude “employer branding is not just a practice it is more a phenomenon and a process, which sets a context for the growth and development of the best workplaces.” (Itum et la. 2020)

2.3.1 Employee value proposition

An integral part of employer branding is the employer value proposition (EVP). Khandelwal et la. (2021) best described the function of the EVP. It represents the package of rewards or employment advantages offered to employees. This includes the quality of work, learning opportunities, a positive working culture and supportive team members, flexibility and freedom within the workplace. When creating an EVP it is critical to ensure that it is both truthful and reflects the organization but also differentiates the organization as an employer from its competitors.

According to Itum et la. (2020) a key characteristic of meaningful and popular employer brands is that they have an employee value proportion, which is meaningful to the potential and existing employees and can be easily differentiated from other brands. When the EVP matches with the reality of the workplace and comes to life through the employee experience, this result in strengthening the brand (See Figure 2. The building blocks of employer brand, below).

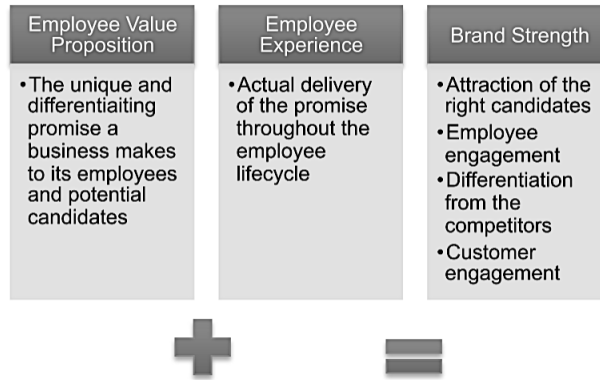


Figure 2. The building blocks of employer brand (Source: Rosethorn 2009)

2.3.2 Touchpoints

Even though the employer brand is a sub-brand of the organizational brand, it has a wide reach and encompasses a multitude of different touchpoint both in the internal and external environment. When executed correctly, employer branding can be leveraged to strengthen the organizational brand (Itum et la. 2020).

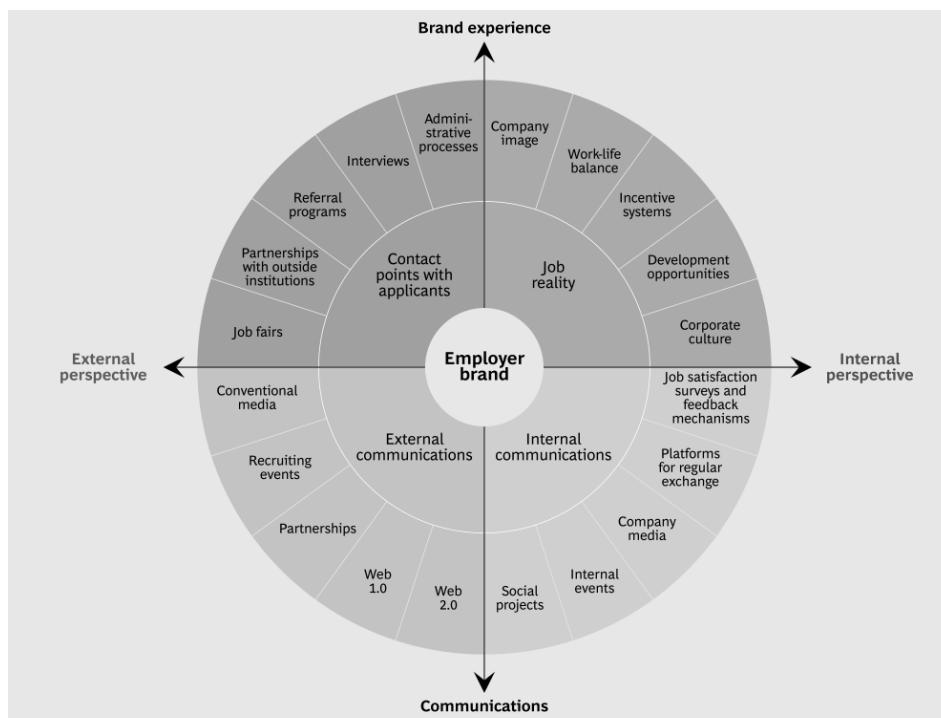


Figure 3. Employer branding combines Internal and External Perspectives (Source: BCG analysis 2014)

2.4 Employer Branding in the Context of Cities

“Successful branding can turn a city into a place where people want to live, work and visit” – Robert Jones, Consultant director at International Brand Consultancy Wolff Olins

Employer branding can offer many benefits for an organization. Ritz and Waldner (2011) suggested a decade ago that employer branding will become one of the most important activities in the public sector due to the decreasing labor force caused by demographic changes. Unfortunately, the studies of employer branding in cities is minimum and employer image of cities are viewed as old fashioned, bureaucratic and often associated with low wages (Mäkilä 2015).

Employer branding has become an important topic for Finnish cities as they are the driving factor of the Finnish welfare state. Unfortunately, Finland, like other countries, is facing a changing labor market driven by technological change and international competition. In the future, the ageing population will pose greater challenges for the Finnish economy. According to Statistics Finland's latest population projection, the population aged 75 and over will increase by 269 000 persons between 2019 and 2030. At the same time, the number of people under 15 will fall by 150 000 and the number of working-age people aged 15-64 will fall by 39 000. (Valtioneuvosto 2021)

The growth in the ageing population has already increased pension expenditure over the last 10 years. In the future, the aging population will put great pressures on public finances, in particular through increased expenditure within health care. Therefore, it is critical for employers to ensure that their employees are able to work as long as possible. In addition, with the current welfare model cities would be responsible to provide needed health care services to the aging population.

3 INTRODUCTION OF CASE CITIES

The parameters for the case city selections was that the cities had to be a significant employer within Finland and conscious employer branding processes needed to be carried out by the city. This chapter consist of introductions on all case cities.

3.1 City of Helsinki

The city of Helsinki is the capital of Finland, housing 653 835 people at the end of 2019 and it is expected to grow to up to approximately 820 000 inhabitants by 2050. Demographic changes the city is expecting to face within the next five years are, a slight decrease in the preprimary school aged children, and a 5500 increase of children needing primary school education. Additionally, the 75-year-old population is expected to grow by 50 percent within the next ten years. (Vuori and Kaasila 2020)

Helsinki is the largest employer in Finland, with approximately 38 000 people under its employment working withing the city's social services and health care, childhood and education, culture and leisure, housing and environment, and the admiration services. With a substantial proportion of employments focused within the first two service sectors (Helsingin kaupunki 2019). In a study conducted by the city of Helsinki in 2019, all sectors stated that the most critical factor causing the service production to deteriorate was the availability of sufficient labor (Henkilöstöraportti 2019, 2020).

The city's vision is to be the most functional city in the world, and this is brought to fruition with its strategic goal. That is doing everything a little better to make life easier and more comfortable for residents of Helsinki. Combined with its primary purpose of providing high-quality services that enable its residents to have an active and fun life. (Helsingin kaupunki 2021) As an employer the city of Helsinki is steered by its personnel policy of being a responsible, ethical and sustainable employer with a focus on large scale commitment and working together (Henkilöstöraportti 2019, 2020).

3.2 City of Vantaa

The city of Vantaa is the fourth largest city in Finland (Kuntaliitto 2019), with an inhabitant of 228 166 people in 2019, and located next to Helsinki in the southern metropolitan area. Since 1960 Vantaa's population continued to grow by 12 to even 79 percent. However, this trend has significantly slowed down within the last decade to an average population growth of 1,6 percent year on year. (Vantaan väestö 2018/2019)

3.3 City of Espoo

Espoo is the second largest city in Finland after Helsinki. It is situated in the southern part of Finland. It employs over 14 000 people, with a large percentage working in the educational and health care sector. However, these are the same sectors that the city is facing challenges in finding employees. (Espoon kaupungin henkilöstökertomus 2019)

The city of Espoo's mission is to be vibrant, growing, developing and a comfortable place to live. (www.espoo.fi)

3.4 City of Oulu

Oulu is one of the top employers in Finland, employing 11 629 people and has a population of 250,000 residents. Oulu has been coined as the "Capital of Northern Scandinavia", and is known for its high IT innovation and for having one of the youngest populations in Europe. As the cities average age is only 38 years. Oulu's city strategy is based on three values: courage, fairness and responsibility. (Oulun henkilöstöraportti 2019)

4 METHODOLOGY

In research it is crucial to adopt the appropriate research method in regards to the research aim and questions. The method chosen by the author for this research is case study, which is a qualitative research method. "Qualitative research is a form of social inquiry that focuses on the way people interpret and make sense of their experiences and the world in which they live" (Holloway and Wheeler 2002). A case study is best suited to answer the

research questions as the purpose of the research is to study the phenomenon of employer branding in the city of Helsinki, Vantaa, Espoo and Oulu. “In general, case studies are the preferred method when “how” or “why” questions are being posed, and when the investigator has little control over events (Yin 2009, p. 2).

4.1 Research method

Case studies are a widely recognized research method in social science disciplines, this includes the fields of both business and marketing, as well as public administration (Yin 2009; Zaidah 2007). Case studies are relatively flexible and may employ a great variety of techniques, which may be both quantitative and qualitative, to gather and analyze evidence (Gerring 2007). Interviews are a technique that are available within the field of case study research. Its strengths lay in that it enables the researcher to ask targeted questions that are directly focused on the case study topics and brings forth answers that are insightful and explanatory (Yin 2009). This allows a researcher to understand the behavioral conditions through the actor’s perspective (Zaidah 2007).

4.1.1 Design

Careful design of a case study is very important, as the research design mainly works as “...the logical sequence that connects the empirical data to the study’s initial research and, ultimately, to its conclusion.” (Yin 2009, p. 27)

As stated, by Robert K. Yin (2009, p. 28) there are five components of the research design that are important, for case studies:

- 1) the study’s questions
- 2) its proportions, if any;
- 3) its unit(s) of analysis;
- 4) the logic linking the data to the proportions; and
- 5) the criteria for interpreting the findings.

The overview of the research design can be seen in Figure 2, below.

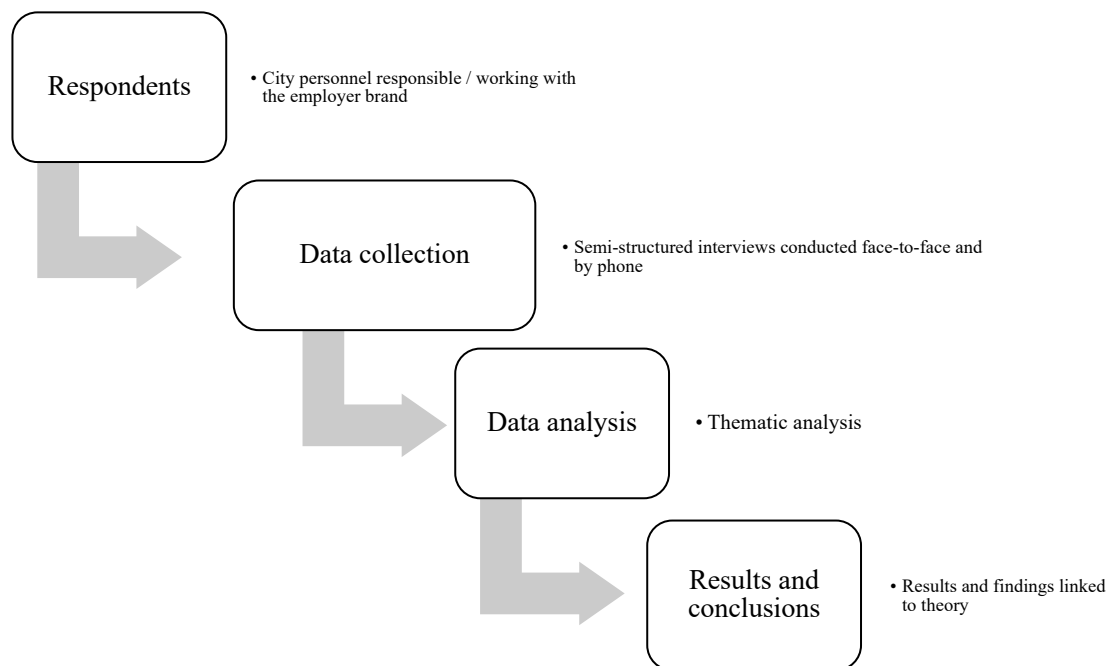


Figure 4. Research design

4.2 Respondents

All respondents were carefully selected by the author so that relevant information could be collected to answer all research questions. All respondents had to be involved in the management of the employer brand within their respective case city. One respondent per case city was selected and their suitability was confirmed before the interview time was scheduled. Recording permission, data security and anonymity were collected and covered with all respondents before the interview started.

4.3 Interview questions

With the interviews the researcher aims to gather enough data that extensive results and conclusion can be drawn to fulfill the research aim. The interview questions were based on the theoretical framework. Six underlying themes were identified around which the interview questions were formed. These themes were as follows: employer branding concepts and definitions, background and context, employer branding benefits and

objectives, employer brand management, the employer branding process and the future of employer branding. For further details see appendix for full interview guide.

4.4 Data collection and analysis

In this thesis, both primary and secondary data was used to analyze the research topic. Secondary data is collected from reliable sources like the city website, annual reports and other printed and digital material published by the case cities. The primary data has been collected in the form of semi-structured interviews. These consist of a combination of general set questions and open-ended questions, that focus on explaining the functional links of employer branding within the case organizations, as well as, to bring forth a descriptive image of its occurrence within the real-life context. When needed, these questions were followed by undetermined follow up questions that where often phrased “why?”. This aiming to bring deeper understanding of the answers. The benefit of semi-structured interviews is that it allows the interviewer to explore further information depending on the answers of the interviewee. However, it is crucial to remain on topic, follow the research design, and base everything on the theoretical framework.

The interviews were conducted face to face or by telephone between October 2019 and February 2020. All interviews were held in Finnish as this was the preferred language for all interviewees. The interview duration varied between 30 minutes to over 1 hour. All interviews were recorded with the approval of the interviewee. After, all interviews were conducted transcriptions were carefully made before recordings were destroyed to ensure data privacy.

Interview transcriptions were used to conduct data analysis in the form of thematic analysis. This process started with highlighting and finding codes within the data in Word. That were then organized under themes within Excel.

4.5 Reliability and quality

The reliability of the interview data heavily relies on its quality. Therefore, to ensure the quality of the interview the author carefully constructed the interview guide. In addition, the interview guide was sent to all respondent a few days prior to the interview to allow respondent to prepare for the interview. Thus, ensuring that all responses were of superior quality and well thought out. In addition, when an interviewee's answers were unclear additional questions were asked to ensure correctness of the responses.

5 RESULTS & FINDINGS

This chapter presents the results of the interviews that focus on answering the research questions. The result will be presented through three different themes, and its subheadings, and will start with a background and context section to make clear from what perspective the interviewees approached the interview questions. During the coding process differing themes become clear. Therefore, themes were modified from the original ones that were set when drafting the interview guide.

The interviews were conducted in Finnish by the request of the interviewees. Therefore, all results have been translated from Finnish to English. The respondent names have been withheld to ensure confidentiality, and will be referred to as interviewee A, B, C and D. However, the cities in question will be referred to by name. See table below for further clarification on which interviewee represented which case city.

Table 3. Interviewed cities

Interviewed cities	Shortly referred to as	Respondents
City of Espoo	Espoo	Interviewee A
City of Vantaa	Vantaa	Interviewee B
City of Oulu	Oulu	Interviewee C
City of Helsinki	Helsinki	Interviewee D

5.1 Background and context

The interviews started with asking the interviewees how they would define the concept of employer branding and what does employer branding mean for their city? In addition, this section will discuss when the need for employer branding was recognized in the case cities and what differences the respondents say between employer branding in cities versus in the private sector.

5.1.1 Defining employer branding and its meaning to case cities

Interviewee A described the employer brand to be simply the image of what kind of an employer one is as an organization, emphasizing this to be a subjective perception. Meaning that how the employer brand is viewed is heavily influenced by one's personal feelings, tastes, and opinions. Interviewee A described that employer branding for Espoo refers to the communication of the employer branding experience and bringing to light the values that are appreciated. In addition, interviewee A highlighted the importance of recognizing current trends and the ability to adapt to them.

Interviewee B defined employer brand as the image of Vantaa as an employer, both among future employees and the city's current staff, as well as, among other stakeholders. Interviewee B described employer branding to be a long-term strategic way for the city of Vantaa to make sure that they have skilled and good employees in the future, and that they are an attractive employer.

Interviewee C defined employer brand to be the image of what the city of Oulu is like as an employer. Adding that this image varies from person to person due to their personal experiences. Interviewee C sees that this image can be influenced. The internal employer brand refers to the image within the organization and the external employer brand is evident during recruitment activities. However, highlighting that the employer brand is realized through the experiences offered to employees and jobseekers. Interviewee C stated employer branding to be important to the city, as brand is the feeling that the city evokes in people's minds.

Interviewee D described employer branding as simply the organizations power of attraction. For their city employer branding consisted of communicating about the city organization, about the opportunities they had to offer, and positioning Helsinki as a good and responsible employer. Interviewee D defined brand as “how people talk about you when you exit a space”.

5.1.2 The emergence of employer branding in cities

Interviewee A viewed that Espoo had started conscious work on their employer brand and recruitment image over ten years ago. Interviewee A described that before this recruitment ads within the public sector generally consisted of a message with the city’s seal. Therefore, the aim was to become visually distinctive through marketing. Another motivation for this that interviewee A mentioned was future trend of increased retirements and the aim to differentiate Espoo from the other cities within the capital region.

Interviewee B could not provide a definite answer to when the need for employer branding was recognized as they had been working within Vantaa for only a couple of years. However, added that that employer branding practices have been conducts for many years.

Interviewee C reported that one of the main drivers for employer branding has been the labor shortages within the public sector. Adding that the same trend that has been evident in the southern cities of Finland has started to emerge in the northern part of Finland as well. Interviewee C noted that a couple of years ago when an extensive new urban strategy was built the importance of employer branding was also highlighted as part of the strategy.

Interviewee D saw that employer branding has been carried out within Helsinki to some degree for many years. But believed that it had been mainly driven by the separate sectors to counter their labor shortages. Interviewee D described that the groundwork for a central and marketing focused employer branding perspective was started in 2013. As this was when a central job notice system was set up and marketing activities surrounding this followed.

5.1.3 Employer branding in cities vs. the private sector

Interviewee A reported to see major differences between public sector and private sector employer branding. Characteristics highlighted by interviewee A was the different starting points, as Espoo focuses on promoting the relevance of the work and the funding that enables employer branding within the city. Adding that employer branding needs to be subtle and truthful as the city is liable to the tax paying citizens.

Interviewee B saw that both companies and cities are fighting to attract skilled talent from the same labour market. However, interviewee B added that people who value social wellbeing may be more included towards the public sector. Also mentioning that private sector is generally more commercial oriented.

Interviewee C did not see any differences between employer branding in cities and the private sector and added that more and more the public sector is going in the same direction as the private sector. Interviewee C also mentioned that the public sector cannot compete with the private sector on salaries. Therefore, interviewee C also emphasised the importance of employer branding to the public sector and noted how critical it is to have a distinguished employer brand that highlights the positives.

Interviewee D saw similarities between the two sectors. Interviewee D described that the public sector and private sector differences could be seen in quality, capability, and highlighted the multitude of industries the city represents and encompasses. However, the most significant difference is that the city does not pursue to generate profits for shareholders. In addition, interviewee D noted that the city of Helsinki has a principle that no full-time employees can be laid off.

5.2 Theme one: Employer branding motives

Interviewees were asked to describe the benefits employer branding offers their city and objectives the city has set for employer branding. In addition, during the interviews it became evident that one of the driving forces for employer branding for all case cities was to challenge to recruit skilled workers in the fields of health care and social services.

5.2.1 Challenge's cities face and significance of employer branding

Interviewee A described that they have challenges in finding skilled workers in certain sectors. Example of these professions are social workers, teachers in early childhood education, as well as nurses and doctors. Interviewee A reported that employer branding practices need to adapt when legislative changes are made within the professional field. An example of this is how people with a degree in sociology do not fulfill the new requirements to work as substitute teachers. In addition, interviewee A described how the needs of local residents are growing and noted how employer branding practices must adapt accordingly to ensure these needs are met. Interviewee A characterized that the main benefit employee branding provides is distinctiveness. This was noted to be significant both externally and internally. It also allows the city to internally communicate to its employees their importance and how they are valued and grows employee pride towards their workplace.

Interviewee B described how employer branding aids in being an attractive and popular employer, which provides a competitive advantage. Meaning that employer branding is important during recruitment to ensure vacant positions are filled. Adding that employer branding also allows the city to positively affect the commitment of current employees. Which results in reduced turnover. Interviewee B also stated that “a good brand protects one against reputational damages”.

Interviewee C stated that without employer branding recruitment would be considerably more difficult. Interviewee C also described how employer branding allows an organization to attract potential employees but also aids in maintaining existing employment relationships, as well as to be an attractive partner in other networks. This ensures that people want to work in the city of Oulu, but also that Oulu is able to keep a good and skilled personnel. This quote from interviewee C best describes the significance of employer branding for the city: “When you strengthen the employer brand or the employer image, you strengthen the city brand too.”

Interviewee D reported employer branding to have a direct effect on how attractive the city is as an employer and seen as an employer. “We have so many vacant positions. Therefore, we must be an attractive employer”. Interviewee D noted that (as being the capital of Finland) people know the city but with employer branding the city pursues that

people have a positive image of Helsinki. In addition, interviewee D described how the city needs to utilize employer branding practices to build interest within the critical fields that struggle due to lack of workers. To ensure that the city of Helsinki and the public sector is able to fill critical positions, and ensures that the city is able to provide the services that the government requires be provided to citizens.

5.2.2 Objectives and requirements set for employer branding

Interviewee A described that Espoo's objective is to be a competitive employer for all their employees and potential employees. Therefore, the employer brand needs to be distinctive. However, as the city is accountable to its citizens employer branding practices must be authentic, factual and professional.

Interviewee B noted that a successful employer brand supports the organizational strategy and requires that the communicated values and organizational culture are present and practiced day-to-day.

Interviewee C stated that the employer brand must be authentic and needs to communicate the values of the city but also provide a positive employee experiences for all personnel. This requires that distinctive benefits are communicated, and long-term work is carried out to realize the employee expectations.

Interviewee D reported that due to changes in leadership official employer branding objective were not defined. However, interviewee D described that as Helsinki's vision is to be the most functional city in the world, employer branding objectives need to support this vision. Adding that this required concrete actions and skilled employees.

5.3 Theme two: Employer branding management and processes in cities

To gain a deeper understanding of the employer branding practices in the case cities the interviewees were asked different questions about the management and employer branding process.

5.3.1 Responsibility

Interviewee A stated that the ultimate responsibility for the employer brand has the city mayor. Meaning that the higher-level employer branding strategy is approved by the mayor. However, the human resource and recruitment department carries the responsibility on all practical and day to day matters.

Interviewee B reported that on the city level the human resource department is responsible for the employer brand. Adding that the recruitment teams are responsible for the recruitment activities of employer branding. Interviewee B emphasized that the employer brand is not managed by only one person or department but that the different sectors and their communication departments support and build the employer brands with their activities.

Interviewee C described that everyone within the city is responsible for the employer brand. However, the management responsibility lies with the human resource department, as well as with the city policy makers, leaders and supervisors. Interviewee C added that management of the employer brand closely cooperates with the city's communications department.

Interviewee D noted that the Chief Human Resource officer and her department are responsible for the city level employer brand management and strategy. This includes the [Helsinkirekry.fi](https://www.helsinkirekry.fi) portal and other big cross sector events. However, interview D emphasised that the different sectors are responsible for the employer branding on their level.

5.3.2 The Employer Branding process

Interviewees were asked to describe the employer branding process in their city. Some small differences became evident mostly caused by the different organizational structures. However, within all case cities employer branding was in line with the city level strategy and followed the general brand guidelines of the city.

Interviewee A described that the human resource department devises a yearly employer branding strategy which includes initial budget, the target audiences and the best media match combinations to reach these audiences. Focus target audiences often are the sectors that suffer from labour shortages. This plan is sent for approval to the mayor and once approved the human resource department together with the recruitment team start implementing it. Interviewee A also reported that recruitment follows an annual calendar. Describing that for example recruitment for teachers opens in January, followed by recruitment for early childhood education personnel in March or April. This is done to ensure that sufficient quotas are fulfilled to carry out services in the autumn. Interviewee A added that they view the summer job positions that are offered to the youth as proactive employer branding. With the aim of offering great summer job experiences that could guide the youngsters to choose a study or career path within the public sector.

Interviewee B describe that an annual city level marketing strategy is made which includes a strategy for employer branding and recruitment. The human resource department devises the yearly execution plan based on this. Interviewee B noted that even though the human resource department is responsible for the planning, they highlighted that everyone within the city is taking part in building and executing the employer brand. This includes the communications and marketing departments, as well as the various sectors.

Interviewee C did not see employer branding to be a process. However, interviewee C noted that the human resource department devises a strategy for employer branding which is based on the city level strategy. Adding that the strategy involves other departments and the various sectors within the city and emphasized its collaborative nature. In addition, interviewee C reported that the external employer brand is present heavily in recruitment. Interviewee C also describe that the city of Oulu has an informal focus group that consist of people from different departments from the city that reflects on the city's employer brand and devises development ideas within different employer branding areas.

Interviewee D could not describe the current employer branding process as the city of Helsinki was going through large changes, recruitments and a reorganization to improve the employer branding practices. However, interviewee D noted that they did not agree

with the term “process” and preferred terms like employee journey and employee lifecycle.

5.3.3 Measurements

Interviewees were asked on how the employer branding (activities) are measured and on any key performance indicators (KPIs) that are monitored. All interviewees mentioned the number of suitable applicants per job notice, as well as the nationwide Kunta10 study conducted by the Finnish Institute of Occupational Health that all case cities partake in. The Kunta10 survey is conducted every second years and monitors the staff experience in terms of engagement, job management, openness to change, social capital, empowerment and leadership, among others.

Interviewee A described that they follow relevant studies on perceptions and attitudes, and the sectors that have labor shortage. In addition, to this Espoo measures how attractive of they are as a summer job employer among the young. Interviewee A noted that many of the KPIs are in the external sphere. Internal KPIs that were describe by interviewee A included the nationwide Kunta10 study and exit interviews.

Interviewee B reported that Vantaa measures and follows employee turnover and well-being. In addition to this the city follows how attractive and popular they are among students, as well as their popularity as a work practice place and as summer jobs employer.

Interviewee C described the main metrics that are followed to be the number of applicants, employment durations, employee turnover and the Kunta10 study. In addition, interviewee C mentioned that sometimes they follow how well Oulu performs against other cities. However, interviewee C highlighted that the employer brand is something that cannot be monitored with short term metrics.

Interviewee D listed many touchpoints and metrics that are followed in regards to employer branding. These include different studies, such as the Kunta10 and Universium, as well as, following mentions, and going through summer job feedbacks. In addition to

this interviewee D mention different marketing campaign metrics that are followed, such as traffic and engagement.

5.4 Employer branding communications

The interviewees were asked to describe their most significant communication channels for employer branding.

5.4.1 Channels and audience

Interviewee A reported that the Espoo's recruitment department manages Twitter and Instagram accounts and that the city's Facebook account is sometimes used. However, ownership of the channel is with the city's communications department. Interviewee A emphasized that the significance of digital channels has grown and mentioned the city's on webpages as well as other digital channel partners such as Monster, Oikotie, Kuntarekry, Duunitori, and highlighted Mol.fi. Also, some sector specific channels like Terveysportti was mentioned. Adding that they have automated the listings to all mentioned channels. Interview A described non digital channels like local newspapers, fairs, events, trainings and cooperations with different educational institutes.

Interviewee B described important employer branding communication channels to be the city's own web and internal pages, the employee magazine, Oikotie and other newspapers. Interviewee B noted that fairs are a significant channel to build and communicate the employer brand. Interviewee B added that the city maintains good relationships with educational institutes. This provides a good communication channel to reach students. However, reaching external audiences interviewee B emphasized social media to be the number one channel.

Interviewee C reported important employer branding channels to be the Oulu website, traditional newspapers, different networks and emphasized that the usage of social media, such as Instagram and LinkedIn has grown.

Interviewee D underlined the most important employer branding communication channel to be “the channel you do not pay for”, meaning the city employees themselves. Adding that employee or past employee referrals to “probably be the most relevant and best recruitment channel” Helsinki has. Followed by the city’s own channels, where large efforts have been made to ensure the sites usability, visual appeal and content. Interviewee D added that the Helsinki employer brand is also nowadays more evidently present internally during orientation day of new employees. Interviewee D reported that employer branding communications are multi-channel. Including recruitment fairs and other events, social media, print ads in some degree and outdoor display ads around the city and within public transportation. Interviewee D stated that it is important that “we are visible and present on the brand level to our citizen every day when they are commuting”. In addition, interviewee D highlighted the importance of the Kesäduuni (summer job) campaign and Yrityskylä, when communicating about the employer brand to the younger demographic.

5.4.2 Messaging

The case cities employer branding messaging results were congruent. During data analysis five messaging types were recognised:

1. General employer brand messaging
2. Messaging of city values
3. Employee ambassadorship
4. Job notices
5. Stories, articles, interviews and videos from various sectors

To support the recognized messaging types respondents’ quotes have been summarized below:

- “General employer brand image messaging is carried out extensively in print.”
(Interviewee A, Espoo)
- “The city values are communicated across the entire organization... for example ease and courage are part of the employer branding communications.”
(Interviewee B, Vantaa)

- “We still have job notices in newspapers, as well as stories and employee interviews.” & “We have made multiple videos to YouTube about the city and different sectors”.
(Interviewee C, Oulu)
- “We have alumni that go (to events) and talk about working here.”
(Interviewee D, Helsinki)

5.5 Theme three: Improvement areas and the future of employer branding in cities

Interviewee A emphasised that the significance of employer branding will only grow in the future and confirmed that it needs to build more distinction with its values and actions. Interviewee A predicts that citizens’ needs for public services will grow but also change, meaning that employer branding practices need to adapt and change accordingly. Interviewee A also described that sustainability and digitalization are areas that employer branding needs to focus on. Adding that these should be viewed as opportunities for development and not threats.

Interviewee B suggested that reputation management will be one of the future challenges for employer branding and sees that these efforts should be increased within their city. Interviewee B also predicts that the need for employer branding will only grows as the competition for workers intensifies between both cities and the private sector.

Interviewee C saw that in the future the labour shortages will worsen and result in a bigger significance being put towards employer branding activities within the city of Oulu. Improvement areas interviewee C described was to have the city values more evidently present in the daily activities of the city, as well as the necessity of mapping out the employer branding process in greater detail.

Interviewee D stated that in the future employer branding will be vital for the existence of the city. However, interviewee D suggested that employer brand, the employee experience and diversity should be improved on all level of the city organization. Describing that this could be driven by supplying suitable training to supervisors.

Interviewee D also added that the employer brand should continuously develop and always reach higher, but also be truthful and aim to be consistent throughout the city.

6 CONCLUSIONS

In this chapter the research result and research theory will be discussed. Additionally, any research limitations covered. With the chapter concluding with recommendations for further research.

6.1 Key findings

The thesis investigates the significance of employer branding to cities, as well as how employer branding is currently being conducted in the case cities of Helsinki, Vantaa, Espoo and Oulu. The author examined the employer branding communications, benefits, management and processes within the case cities, to answer the research questions.

The first research question was:

What is employer branding and what is its strategical significance for a city?

And the second research question was:

How is employer branding carried out in cities in Finland?

As stated by Zaware and Shinde (2020) the brand is one of the most significant and strongest assets of an organization. Based on the results and findings it is evident that employer branding is a significant part of the city strategy. In addition, it is expected that its significance will grow in the future. However, many of the employer branding activities focused on recruitment and attracting and this can be explained by the major labors shortages in some sectors. However, this may also explain why distinctive employer branding processes were not described, when compared to Gaddam's (2008) employer brand model.

Compared to the private sector cities are liable to both the government and their citizens. And unlike the private sector are not driven by profits. This possible resulting in why the

ability to affect an organizations financial performance with employer branding was not mentioned.

The respondent and theory highlighted the importance of the employer branding being distinctive. However, the findings do not present major differences between the case cities' employer branding practices.

When examining the employer branding messaging types and employee brand responsibilities a pattern was found. When the messaging concerns general city level messaging, this fell under the responsibility of higher-level management and when sector specific and job notices were concerned the responsibility move lower within the organization.

TYPE OF MESSAGING	RESPONSIBILITY FALLS UNDER
1. General employer brand messaging	City level & management
2. Messaging of city values	
3. Employee ambassadorship	
4. Job notices	
5. Stories, articles, interviews and videos from various sectors	
	Sector level

6.2 Limitations of research

The thesis includes all sections required from academical research. The chosen research method and analysis were suitable to examine the research topic. Actions were taken to ensure data quality and the suitability of respondents. However, as different themes emerged during the data analysis process this would suggest that the researcher was not

able to manage the interview process well enough. Or then that the interview guide or theoretical framework were deficient.

Even though the researcher carefully translated result from Finnish. The translations process has added a possible margin of discrepancy as the data was collected in a different language than the research was conducted in. In addition, as the duration of time between the data collection and the completion of the research may have added another margin of error. As the interviews were held before March 2020, when the World Health Organization has declared the Covid-19 to have begun this area investigation has been unfortunately excluded.

6.3 Recommendations for future research

For future research the author suggest replicating the city within another country or broadening the perspective to smaller cities. As this research focused on management and city perspective of employer branding, the investigation of the employee perspective is highly recommended to build a comprehensive overview on the topic. Additionally, during the Covid-19 other themes may have emerged. Therefore, the author suggests that the study be repeated. This may also bring to light new topics and shed light to how the employer branding practices within cities have developed.

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APPENDIX

Interview guide

Semi-structured interview

Employer branding in cities

Concept of employer branding

- What does employer branding mean for your city organization?
- How would you define the concept of employer brand?

Background

- Who are responsible of employer branding in your organization?
- What is the current situation and role of employer branding in your city organization?
- When the need for employer branding was recognized?

Benefits and objectives

- In your opinion, what are the benefits of employer branding for a city?
- Briefly describe, what are the main employer branding objectives for your city organization?
- How are employer branding (activities) measured, what are their KPIs?

Management of employer branding

- How is employer branding managed in your city organization?
- What are the most significant communication channels for employer branding in your city organization?
- Do you see employer branding concerning the whole city organization? How is the employer brand of the city is aligned with the city's brand?

Employer branding process

- Does your city organization see employer branding as a process? Could you briefly describe this?
- Briefly describe, what is your EVP (employer value proposition)? How is it communicated?
- (What would you say are your main employer branding channels?)

Future

- What are the challenges for employer branding in the future?
- What will be the significance of employer branding for your city organization in the future?