

**Title: Leveraging Social Capital to Catalyse
Post-Pandemic Anti-Fragility: The ‘Vilnius Model’**

ABSTRACT

Purpose

This paper delves into the interdependent connection between place branding and social capital, specifically focusing on how it contributes to uniting a city’s recovery efforts during times of crisis. By utilizing the theoretical frameworks of Social Capital and Cultural Intermediation, the case study of Vilnius, Lithuania, exemplifies how cities can navigate through turbulent periods by prioritizing the work of place marketers and their relationships in their strategic approach.

Design/methodology/approach

A qualitative, mixed method case study approach utilised four different methods of investigation, drawing on multiple sources of evidence including a mix of interviews with key actors, content analysis, netnography and participant observation.

Findings

Go Vilnius, in collaboration with the City of Vilnius Municipality, leveraged existing stakeholder relationships and a strong common identification among political actors, promotional intermediaries, residents, and city institutions to not only adapt to the unfolding crisis but to evolve its marketing, place-making, tourism and community engagement strategies to emerge a more resilient, dynamic and animated city after the pandemic.

Originality

By identifying the ‘network constellations’ that facilitated the institutionalisation of place branding activities in the face of both a local and global shutdown, this paper positions place marketers, acting as cultural intermediaries, at the centre of crisis planning and prevention strategies for antifragile cities of the post-pandemic future.

Key words: anti-fragility, urban resilience, social capital, cultural intermediaries, pandemic, crisis planning

Introduction

The Covid-19 pandemic has proven to be the greatest disrupter on the tourism economy so far experienced globally. As the virus spread quickly across the world in 2020, seemingly overnight entire economies relating to travel, hospitality and ‘business as usual’ were halted in the majority of countries. The World Bank (World Bank, 2020) noted that the impact of Covid-19 on the tourism industry’s ‘entire value chain... spanning airlines, bus and train companies, cruise lines, hotels, restaurants, attractions, travel agencies, tour operators, online travel entities,

and others' was nearly catastrophic. As countries imposed travel bans and closed borders, or introduced strict quarantining rules and regulations, what was previously a \$3.5 trillion industry (World Tourism Organization (UNWTO), 2021) was nearly decimated in a matter of weeks. As the immediate after-shocks of the early days of the pandemic began to wear off, cities were quick to identify both a threat and an opportunity: an entire sector was at a financial standstill, and if local economies had any hope of recovery, new and innovative place promotion and developmental strategies would need to be employed to sustain them.

The notion of the 'anti-fragile city', taken from Esteves (2018), establishes that cities must not only learn from crises but evolve from them. This positions the city as a 'dynamic, plural and adaptive organism' (Bloom Consulting, 2021) that not only weathers the disruption, but transforms positively from it. The magnitude of this crisis and its profound effects on tourism systems, cities, regions and countries is unrivalled. Early research emerging from the pandemic advances the need for open communication among stakeholders, the need to reorganise relationships among key stakeholder groups and create new formulas for collaboration, along with considering how co-creative value can be achieved through digital engagement (Kowalczyk-Anioł et al., 2021; Seshadri et al., 2023; Yeh, 2021). Despite the emphasis on the need to better understand the relational and communicative processes that take place in a crisis, no clear frameworks have emerged. Thus, it is critical to develop new theories, knowledge and insights into how the tourism and place marketing industries improved their operations according to newly emerging customers' needs and wants during the pandemic.

One way to do this is by examining the professional practices and processes employed by marketing and tourism practitioners who largely shouldered the responsibility of communicating with target audiences, working closely with city stakeholders, and managing the message that the city was open for business. Recent scholarship has framed these actors as 'cultural intermediaries' who hold positions of symbolic power, enacting forms of social and cultural capital that bestows upon them a legitimacy as taste-makers, influencers and 'professionals of qualification' in a city's policy value chain (Bourdieu, 1984; Smith Maguire and Matthews, 2014; Warren et al., 2021; Warren and Dinnie, 2018). The work performed by these professionals is largely communicative and promotional in nature; the power they hold over the urban landscape is largely discursive, relational and reputational. Further, they are largely invisible, despite their efforts being intrinsically tied to the resultant place brand that emerges from their impact and influence over meaning, narrative and policy decisions. Thus, by closely examining the interactions between cultural intermediaries and stakeholder organisations through the lens of the outcomes of this work, this paper attempts to answer calls by scholars to explore the strategies deployed by cities in facing the challenges posed by Covid-19 and the potential long-term effects it might have on the profession of place branding (Gössling et al., 2021; Gursoy and Chi, 2020; Zenker and Kock, 2020). Contrary to place marketing, here place branding refers to the deeply integrated function of reputation-management, embedding core values of the brand across myriad stakeholder touchpoints, and having a broader influence on the

vision and policy development of the city, rather than merely marketing or promoting its existing hard and soft assets in the visitor economy (Boisen et al., 2018; Govers and Go, 2009).

Lithuania's capital city of Vilnius offers a notable case study from which to more closely interrogate the practices and processes employed by city marketing professionals in the early days of the pandemic. The city emerged from the pandemic with an overall positive brand image, demonstrating a renewed focus on localism, civic engagement, and animation strategies that engendered a feeling of safety, security and a cautious vibrancy for local residents. A stronger local economy, with renewed inward investment, a strongly rebounded visitor economy, and a reinvigorated social and cultural reputation among both local and international audiences seems to reinforce their improved brand position. This anti-fragility was encouraged through the work of cultural intermediaries who leveraged existing stakeholder relationships and a strong common partnership identification amongst other promotional actors, residents and city institutions to not only adapt to the unfolding crisis but to also evolve its marketing, place-making, tourism and community engagement strategies to emerge a more resilient, dynamic and animated capital city. The strategies employed in this highly relational work included deeper and more proactive collaboration with both local and international partners across both public and private sectors, as well as leveraging existing and emerging relationships with both traditional as well as digital media channels to amplify the impact of their work. They were able to achieve this at scale due to their position at the heart of a 'Network Constellation' that allowed them to interact and engage with organisations across the urban landscape and exert their social capital at community, network and institutional levels (Woolcock and Narayan, 2000).

The intention of this paper is to identify the social capital connections and communicative structures that facilitated the institutionalisation of place marketing and promotion activities in the face of crisis, ultimately contributing to a positive place brand position. It begins with a review of literature that encompasses city branding, tourism resilience and social capital, as well as introducing the theoretical framework of cultural intermediation. The second section introduces Vilnius, Lithuania as an appropriate context for this case study. The methods undertaken to understand how the city reacted during the initial phase of the pandemic follows. The discussion section offers insights on how social capital resilience and the network constellation, with promotional actors at its heart, can offer a practical framework for preparedness for future urban shocks.

Literature Review

Organisational Resilience in Tourism Destinations

Resilience refers to the ability of a system to maintain its identity and adapt its essential structure and function in the face of disturbance (Holling, 1973). Resilience and more recently notions of anti-fragility have emerged as important areas worth investigating in tourism (Becken, 2013; Dahles and Susilowati, 2015; Esteves, 2018) as academics and destination managers attempt to better understand how the tourism system and its component organisational parts can

not only survive but also thrive through inevitable shocks. Tourism differs from other industries in that it is highly sensitive to global trends, with a heavy reliance on inbound visitors, small enterprises and media-derived narratives that impact external perceptions that can linger (Orchiston et al., 2016). Therefore places that feature many tourism-related organisations tend to be under greater pressure to be well prepared to instigate and implement broad recovery strategies when a crisis hits.

Resilient destinations tend to feature a diverse mix of resilient organisations who might take a more pragmatic and structured approach to stakeholder management and communication. Organisational resilience is a critical factor in a city's ability to plan for, respond to, and recover from crises. McManus et al. (2008) define organisational resilience as 'a function of an organisation's overall situation awareness, management of vulnerabilities, and adaptive capacity in a complex, dynamic and interconnected environment.' Whilst a lack of studies on the resilience of tourism organisations has been identified, some studies have pointed to the key attributes of 'planning and culture' and 'collaboration and innovation' as drivers of an effective crisis management system for destinations (Dahles and Susilowati, 2015; Orchiston et al., 2016). Further, considering internal drivers such as organisational culture, strategic human resource management, leadership, decision making, situation awareness, a complex stakeholder environment and the need for comprehensive and consistent communication among stakeholders bring organisational resilience in a tourism context into sharper focus (Chowdhury et al., 2019; Lengnick-Hall et al., 2011; Vargo and Seville, 2011).

City destinations, incorporating a wide range of hospitality businesses, cultural attractions and tourism stakeholders tend to operate as a loosely allied system of private and public sector entities that lack a cohesive blueprint for dealing with shocks, and instead follow their own aims, goals and objectives in the face of a crisis (Hall et al., 2017). The ability of city managers, marketers and policymakers to develop and facilitate more resilient organisations across the urban landscape might be complicated by lack of forward planning, an inability to translate the concept of resilience into day-to-day working functions and a lack of social cohesion among stakeholder groups (Chowdhury et al., 2019).

Managing Reputation and Resilience: The Role of City Branding

A core element in tourism resilience research is the focus on crisis management and the capacity of the industry to 'deal effectively with disasters and self-inflicted crises in order to maintain ... stability ... whilst also ensuring the flexibility and diversity necessary for innovation and further development' (Buultjens et al., 2017). A key part of this is restoring the image and reputation of the destination among various audiences and stakeholders. Some studies have labelled this effort as tourism crisis and disaster management (TCDM) (Jiang et al., 2019). Following a TCDM model, destination managers must first pay attention to safety, physical recovery and business recovery (Khazai et al., 2018). Afterwards, the work focusing on storytelling, media management and promotion can carry the destination forward and through the crisis.

This is where the notion of city branding might intersect and even supersede destination marketing and management. Place branding (related to cities, regions and countries) has both an economic and social dimension; a strong brand reputation can contribute to financial growth through a willingness to visit and invest by external audiences, but it can also mean building a strong sense of local pride and encouraging social cohesion that stems from livability factors that extend beyond economic development (Dinnie, 2016). Beyond tourism, place branding has been conceived as a multi-layered and complicated endeavour that relies on many more factors than the dissemination of promotional messages and compelling imagery; the literature points to city branding as a holistic, community-driven and collaborative stakeholder approach that draws on elements of urban planning, cultural geography, business and economic development, and destination promotion (Anholt, 2007, 2003; Dinnie, 2016; Govers and Go, 2009; Kavartzis, 2004; Landry, 2008). As an academic area of enquiry, it draws from the disciplines including, but not limited to, marketing, public relations, urban development, tourism, public administration, and sociology (Edwards, 2005; Hanna and Rowley, 2011; Lucarelli, 2015; Zavattaro, 2018).

Because of its relation to policy making, city branding inherently involves a complex network of stakeholders within which place marketers occupy a central position. The idea that stakeholder involvement enriches a place brand is universally accepted in the literature (Hankinson, 2007; Kavartzis and Hatch, 2013; Klijn et al., 2012; Zavattaro and Adams, 2016). For marketing and branding strategies to be successful, marketers need to actively navigate networks and manage the multi-dimensional interests of a diverse group of stakeholders who are keys to the place's success (Avraham and Ketter, 2008; Kavartzis and Ashworth, 2005; Reynolds et al., 2022; Volgger and Pechlaner, 2014).

This approach centralizes a relational approach to city branding reliant on the development of key stakeholder relationships at local, national and international scale. In particular, taking a participatory approach to place branding (Tøttenborg et al., 2021; Zenker and Erfgen, 2014) means that a complex network of stakeholders – including residents, local businesses, educational institutions, the tourism and hospitality industries – work together to co-create the brand story and emulate it through all the relevant touchpoints. Thus, a collaborative effort is required to both build the brand, as well as leverage the collective efforts of the organisations within it (Eshuis and Klijn, 2012; Zenker et al., 2017).

The Role of Social Capital in Building a Resilient City Brand

City branding practitioners tend to operate in broad, complex stakeholder environments, and their ability to network with a diverse range of actors at both community as well as institutional levels is usually considered a fundamental aspect of employment (Reynolds, 2021). The key element in this environment is the maintenance of quality relationships across a range of diverse organisations.

Using Social Capital Theory (SCT) within organisational studies, Aldrich (2012) has argued that networks and the resources available to firms through their connections is a critical

feature of organisational resilience. Social capital has been defined as ‘the sum of the actual and potential resources embedded within, available through, and derived from the networks of relationships possessed by an individual or social unit’ (Nahapiet and Ghoshal, 1998). After a disaster, social capital acts as a form of recovery insurance, encouraging collective action as a means of strengthening community ties and serving as a core engine of recovery – more so than economic capital (Aldrich, 2012). Organisations that utilise a high level of social capital enjoy an advantage of being more interconnected through their ability to share intellectual capital and can facilitate access to broader resources of high-quality, timely information and practical business advice (Coleman, 1990). Such resources offer opportunities for a quick response, strong identification among networks and offer a sense of collective direction during disruptive and uncertain conditions (Lengnick-Hall et al., 2011).

Social capital can be understood as occurring within three distinct levels of civil society — at a communitarian level, a network level, and at an institutional level (Woolcock and Narayan, 2000). The communitarian perspective examines the relationships that occur at a local, grassroots or community level among civic-minded groups. The network perspective highlights the importance of vertical as well as horizontal associations between both individuals as well as organisations, with relationships offering an important ‘bridging’ function (Gillel and Vidal, 1998). The institutional view on social capital posits that the vitality that can occur between networks is the product of the legal, political and institutional environment — the quality of the institutions determines the quality of the interactions, and the relationships that occur depend on ‘coherence, credibility and competence, and their external accountability to civil society’ (Woolcock and Narayan, 2000: 167). A fourth dimension encompasses networks and institutions together, forming a synergy between the two, and offers a complementarity between the public and private sectors.

Bourdieu’s (1984) sociological perspective on social capital focuses more how people leverage power in society and proposes that networks of relationships are a valuable resource among actors, providing those with it as having a ‘credential’ that gives them a greater degree of power over norms and processes within that culture. ‘Cultural Intermediaries’ leverage the relationships they hold across several fields, utilising social capital to confer upon themselves a greater degree of legitimacy and credibility for a position of power and therefore influence, over broader structures (Matthews and Smith Maguire, 2014). Here social capital can describe the structural principles that show up in interactions between social actors in different fields in social space, and is formed through the amalgam of both personal, digital, and professional interactions with a variety of networks that exist in different fields.

Recent theoretical advancement on the socio-cultural implications of the work of city branding has focused on city marketers as cultural intermediaries, who operate by exerting social and cultural forms of capital as legitimating forces, building credibility for their position in policy-value chains and influencing policy decisions in non-systemic ways (Reynolds et al., 2022; Warren et al., 2021; Warren and Dinnie, 2018). This positioning confers upon them a greater degree of power as the ‘boundary spanners’ and relationship-holders among key

stakeholder groups, and thus playing an important role in the broader strategic brand and policy endeavour that occurs during normal times (Rinaldi et al., 2021). This theoretical framework centres around the professional actors whose occupational function is to actively link up the various stakeholder groups and other organisations within the urban ecosystem, leveraging their social capital to coalesce otherwise disparate actors towards a common goal.

It is in a crisis that these relationships and the links between them become acutely necessary. A city's ability to plan for and to meet the challenges of a crisis such as a pandemic relies heavily on the ability of the key actors within key organisations to operate symbiotically in pursuit of the larger strategic goals that the crisis represents. Whilst promotional messaging and reputation management may not be top of mind when safety, law enforcement and community operations initiatives take priority, it is often those with the greatest degree of social capital within that city structure who can activate the necessary crisis management protocols, followed by community goodwill initiatives, that will have the broadest effect in bridging the gaps between organisations at communitarian, network, and institutional levels. This helps build a level of resilience within the destination that is predicated on strong relationships, communicative action and shared organisational objectives. To date, relatively little research has explored the means by which a social capital framework might be employed to better understand how city marketers might bring together stakeholder groups in a crisis and how that might lead to improved resilience and a more positive reputation for the destination among its target audiences. It is this gap this paper intends to fill.

Research Context: Vilnius, Lithuania

Vilnius, Lithuania's capital city, sits in the South-eastern part of the country and with a population of nearly 600,000 is the second-largest city in the Baltic region. Lithuania's independence was established after annexing from the USSR in 1990, and the city has undergone a rapid transformation since, emerging as a burgeoning tech economy and popular tourism destination, owing in part to a centralised place brand strategy featuring innovative and award-winning promotional campaigns ("The Vilnius Model," 2021).

The city is celebrated for its Old Town architecture, which was declared a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 1994. This area sits adjacent to its newly renovated business and commercial area known as the New City Centre, home to an evolving economic ecosystem of technology start-ups, financial companies and global business offices. Sitting in the valley at the confluence of the Neris and Vilnia rivers, the city offers a compact, pedestrian-friendly inner city featuring historical architecture, cultural attractions, lively gastronomy and nightlife scenes and is surrounded by an accessible green space. Named a European Capital of Culture (along with Linz, Austria) in 2009, the city has for two decades been actively trying to position itself as a culturally animated, economically dynamic and modern European city (Lukrecijos reklama, 2014).

The Vilnius City Municipality Administration commissioned a study to improve the city's image in 2014. The report by UAB Lukrecijos suggested that the city's strategic goals should coalesce around increased tourism flows, improving Vilnius' international recognition and brand

value, and to capitalise on the complementary dichotomy of historical heritage combined with technological innovation (Lukrecijos reklama, 2014: 5). The study further pointed to three essential features to highlight in the Vilnius city brand: romanticism, recreation and progress, with a focus on business, talent attraction and tourism (Johnson, 2017).

In 2018 the city achieved worldwide notoriety and media attention with a cheeky and innovative promotional campaign, ‘Vilnius, the G-Spot of Europe’ which leveraged timing of a Catholic Papal visit to exponentially increase international exposure and showcase the creativity and commitment of the city’s DMO, Go Vilnius. The campaign was designed to increase awareness of the city among target travel markets in UK and Germany, but due to the increased media attention, it also became a source of pride among local residents and positioned Go Vilnius as an innovative leader among tourism and city branding professionals, winning awards and accolades for Inga Romanovskiene, the head of the organisation, along with her staff (“Vilnius,” 2021).

The Brand Lithuania Group undertook in 2019 a large-scale project to uncover the existing reputation and perceptions of the country among international and domestic audiences and look for opportunities to improve its positioning among comparative Nordic and Central European nation brands (“The strategy for presenting Lithuania abroad,” 2021). A broad, multi-faceted action-plan was strategised at both nation and city brand level, with Go Vilnius occupying a central and strategic role.

Adjacent to this, a Vilnius Brand Strategy was also underway, bringing together a diverse and wide range of stakeholders and participants that included Vilnians with communications experience and expertise; government, business, and civil society leaders; tourism and business development experts; and other interested parties (Alperytė and Išoraitė, 2019). Bringing relevant stakeholders and interested parties into the process from the outset would prove a crucial and vital element less than a year later, when the pandemic struck and the local tourism economy would effectively be decimated.

Post-pandemic, early signs point Vilnius’ recovery and a strong brand reputation among local and international audiences. A recent Eurostat survey indicated that 98 per cent of Vilnians are satisfied with life in the city and outward migration flows are significantly decreased (Statistics Lithuania, 2022).

Strong economic development markers of success also exist – demand for office space in Vilnius rose to a historic high in the third quarter of 2021 (“Vilnius office market demand hits new high amid record quarterly take-up,” 2021) and foreign direct investment (FDI) in Vilnius County rose to €18b (75% of national FDI) for 2020 – up from €13b in 2019 and increasing further in 2021 and 2022 (“Statistics Lithuania - Oficialiosios statistikos portalas,” 2022). The city is experiencing an inward investment FinTech and games design boom, with over 260 companies (and growing) established in Vilnius by the end of 2021 (Clere, 2022).

The visitor economy has also experienced a strong rebound. The reconstruction of the Vilnius Airport aerodrome, the largest infrastructure reconstruction project in the airport’s history, has reached completion, and low-cost direct carriers such as AirBaltic and Ryanair have

expanded their flight offerings to the area (“airBaltic und Hamburg Airport feiern Erstflug nach Vilnius - Hamburg Airport,” 2022; “Ryanair builds in the Baltics with new Vilnius base,” 2021). The MICE (Meetings, Incentives, Conferences, Events) market has bounced back significantly, with over two dozen international science and business conferences committing to events in Vilnius up to 2025, with an expected economic value of over €6m (US\$6.95m) (“Vilnius secures 20 new conferences in pandemic recovery - CMW,” 2021). The Go Vilnius Convention Bureau has worked closely with the city’s academics and industry professionals throughout the pandemic, collaborating with them via an academic ambassador programme to identify key target markets and entice them with a well-rounded offer (P3).

The city’s global reputation appears strong across several areas that contribute to a positive brand image. The Global Remote Work Index voted Lithuania, and Vilnius in particular, as the #5 city for best remote working conditions (“Best countries to work remotely | NordLayer,” 2022). In 2021 the city was named UNESCO City of Literature, a top-25 fDi’s ‘Global Cities of the Future’ and was shortlisted for 2021 European Capital of Innovation Awards (Intelligence fDI, 2022). *National Geographic Magazine* recently listed it as a top-35 destination for culture for 2023, heralding the city’s 700th birthday celebrations as a key reason to visit (@NatGeoUK, 2022). The Go Vilnius LinkedIn profile (2022) recently shared that nearly half a million tourists visited Vilnius in the first half of 2022, with 25 per cent more tourists from the USA than in their previously record-breaking year of 2019. Another post (2022b) announced that their latest international tourism campaign ‘Vilnius – Amazing Wherever You Think It Is’ has won several awards for innovation, such as the Epica Awards, ADC*E, European Excellence Awards and the CIFFT World Tourism Film Awards with the campaign’s video was named as the best in the world.

Throughout the pandemic, the teams at Go Vilnius, the Vilnius City Municipality and Visit Lithuania continued to work on long-term strategies for brand building post-pandemic. Seeing an opportunity to build on the goodwill and profile they had achieved during those first few crisis months, the team finalised a strategy for 2020-2030 that draws on the collaboration and expertise of an inter-institutional team representing city and national stakeholders from both the private and public sectors and is guided by overarching brand objectives (“The strategy for presenting Lithuania abroad,” 2021).

Methodology

This study employed an in-depth, qualitative single-case approach (Yin, 2003). For the case study, the researchers of this paper implemented four different methods of investigation, drawing on multiple sources of evidence including a mix of interviews with key actors, content analysis, netnography and participant observation. Interview participants for this research phase are listed in Table 1; the documents that were consulted are listed in Table 2, and the social media accounts that were scraped and analysed are listed in Table 3.

It was necessary to collect ‘rich’ data through a variety of sources and methods to demonstrate a holistic picture of events as well as ensure the validity of the research through the triangulation of gathered data (Onwuegbuzie and Collins, 2007). The single case approach is one that is predominantly used in tourism resilience studies, for example (Aleffi and Cavicchi, 2020; Buultjens et al., 2017; Ntounis et al., 2021; Orchiston, 2013; Sydnor-Bouso et al., 2011) and has also been used extensively to better understand the role of cultural intermediaries in a variety of cultural and socioeconomic contexts (Cronin, 2004; Hadley, 2021; Hodges, 2006; Warren and Dinnie, 2018). A focus on one city’s efforts during a pandemic that affected nearly all cities globally offers an opportunity to observe how the techniques used in one location might be applied to other similarly sized and geographically placed destinations should future shocks occur.

A qualitative approach was adopted using semi-structured interviews to better understand the key stakeholder relationships that had been formed and nurtured pre-pandemic, and to identify the ways these relationships were leveraged through communicative action during the crisis. Interviews allow for deeper engagement with the perceptions, perspectives, and personal experiences of the subjects, and is a useful tool for gaining insight into such personal topics as social capital and relationship management (Bryman and Bell, 2015). This mirrors a similar approach taken by Le Feuvre et al., (2016) where it was observed that efforts to understand urban partnerships were hampered by categorising them as separate entities, and that classifying them in terms of the quality of their interactions – this data gleaned from first-person account – proved a more effective way of understanding how those partnerships occurred.

Senior marketing and communication professionals working for Vilnius tourism, the city municipality and economic development agencies were interviewed. The first round of interviews occurred in March 2021 and were conducted in Lithuanian, via Zoom. Subjects were targeted and solicited for their participation via LinkedIn and email. The interviews were recorded and transcribed in Lithuanian, and later translated to English for data accuracy. Further interviews occurred via email in December 2021 to clarify key themes, gather updated data and reinforce preliminary findings.

Sampling occurred through a sequential and purposive approach, which allowed the researchers to choose participants strategically, with a focus on those who would be most relevant to the research questions being posed and the data being gathered (Bryman and Bell, 2015). In total, five interviews were conducted with key personnel working in Vilnius tourism, economic development and government administration.

Table 1: Vilnius Interview Participants

Title	Sector	M/F	Age	Years of Experience	Reference Name
Director of Communications	Vilnius City Municipality	M	35-45	4	P1

Head of Marketing	Vilnius City Municipality	F	30-40	5	P2
Project Manager	Vilnius Tourism DMO	F	30-40	2	P3
Public Relations Officer	Vilnius Tourism DMO	M	35-45	3	P4
Head of Public Relations	Vilnius Tourism DMO	F	30-40	6	P5

One of the researchers was living in Vilnius for the duration of the pandemic and leveraged this opportunity to complement interview data in the following ways: through participant observation, attending the local public events offered by the Municipality, and observing the local population at various points during the summer and autumn of 2020. Various public documents and those offered freely by the interview participants were also consulted, offering more detailed accounts of policies and plans that were undertaken during the time in question. These documents were published in both Lithuanian and English; the researcher, being fluently bilingual, documented key findings and themes that arose from these documents that complemented the interview data.

Table 2: Documents Analysed

Title of the Document	Date Published	Key information collected	Origin	Pages
PUBLIC INSTITUTION VILNIUS CINEMA OFFICE 2020 ACTIVITY REPORT	11-05-2021	Activities of the Vilnius Cinema Office during the first Covid wave and collaboration with the Vilnius City Municipality ("Aero cinema" and "Holidays in Vilnius" campaigns)	Vilnius Cinema Office	14-17
Go Vilnius 2020 activity report	30-04-2021	Activities of Go Vilnius during the first covid wave and collaboration with Vilnius City Municipality, Vilnius artists ("Open air gallery"), Expansion of tourism among the people of Vilnius, and all the campaigns that Go Vilnius organized in 2020.	Go Vilnius	1-48
Potential Vilnius City Tourist Segmentation Study 2019	10-2019	The knowledge of tourists about Vilnius and its attractiveness after the "Vilnius G-spot" campaign.	Research and analytics company Inspired	1-60

State Enterprise Lithuanian Airports Strategic Business Plan for 2021-2024	05-2021	“Aero cinema” event in Vilnius Airport and its success and new possibilities to use Vilnius Airport in organising unique events.	State-Owned Lithuanian airports	16-18
Go Vilnius 2018 activity report	05-2019	Evaluation of the “Vilnius – Europe’s G spot” marketing campaign and its success.	Go Vilnius	11-13 24-28
Economic Impacts of the Vilnius City Events in 2020	05-2021	The economic impact of international events which took part in during Covid.	Go Vilnius	2-11
Vilnius Tourism Statistics of 2020 IIIQ	01-2021		Go Vilnius	1-3
Vilnius Tourism Statistics of 2020 IIQ	11-2020		Go Vilnius	1-3
Purchases made by VšĮ "GO VILNIUS" in 2020	03-2021	It shows us how Go Vilnius established relationships with different businesses and artists during Covid. Also, how Go Vilnius was preparing for the events and what they hired for it.	Go Vilnius	2-6

The researcher also performed netnographic analysis of the social media accounts managed by both the Vilnius Tourism DMO (GO Vilnius) as well as the Vilnius City Municipality and collected samples of their online correspondence.

Table 3: Social Media Accounts

Social media account	Channel	Dates	Number of Posts combined	Key information
@GoVilnius and Go Vilnius (Official Go Vilnius account)	Instagram and Facebook	From March 30, 2020, till August 31 2020	68	Advertising and informing people about Vilnius's special campaigns during Covid. For example: “Holidays in Vilnius”, “Open Beach”, “Art Needs No Roof”, and mannequins in restaurants.
@I_am_Vilnius and Vilniaus Miesto Savivaldybė (Official Vilnius Municipality account)	Instagram and Facebook	From March 24, 2020, till August 20 2020	49	It demonstrated that Go Vilnius collaborated with Vilnius Municipality and advertised their special events during Covid. Vilnius

				Municipality Instagram focused more on Covid restrictions than Go Vilnius.
@Lithuanian_airports and Vilnius Airport (official Lithuanian airports account)	Instagram and Facebook	April 30, 2020, May 21, 2020, June 5 2020	6	Lithuanian airport's social media accounts advertised "Aero Cinema" events that took place in the airport.
@kinopavasaris and Kino pavasaris (official account of Vilnius International Film Festival)	Instagram and Facebook	From April 27, 2020, till May 31 2020	32	These Instagram posts demonstrated the preparation of organising "Aero Cinema" how they collaborated with Go Vilnius and Vilnius Airport
@LRT.lt and LRT (official account of Lithuanian National Radio and Television (LRT))	Instagram and Facebook	From April 30, 2020, till August 28, 2020	13	Lithuania's national radio and television invited people to visit Vilnius during these events: "Holidays in Vilnius", "Open Beach" and "Aero Cinema".
@remigijussimasius (official account of Vilnius Mayor Remigijus Simasius)	Instagram, Instagram stories and Facebook	From April 05, 2020, till August 30, 2020)	25	Vilnius Mayor advertised all the events that took place in Vilnius during the first Covid wave. He personally participated in these events and talked about them in the interviews.

Finally, documentation and media coverage relating to Vilnius's post-pandemic economic recovery was collected by both researchers throughout 2021 and early 2022 to augment the data collected through other means.

Initially, the data was interpreted through objective documentation – identifying themes that emerged as they related to straightforward communications of safety and Covid restrictions, but also observing the proactive approach taken with regards to city animation initiatives and tourism promotion. Key themes surrounding localism and resident engagement, along with stakeholder relations, soon became apparent; the frequency with which collaboration and partnership was highlighted in both traditional and digital communication then became a lens through which this case was analysed. This furthers the idea that examining the shifting and fluid interplay of stakeholder interactions is as important as understanding the individual and organisational characteristics of the actors themselves (Le Feuvre et al., 2016). Introducing the theoretical framework of social capital and cultural intermediation allowed the researchers to more deeply interrogate the activities of the promotional actors via these interactions; and an initial analysis of the data was thus further thematically contextualised via NVIVO coding, identifying such themes as partnerships, collaborations, stakeholder management, resident engagement and media relations.

Findings

This study points to the ways that the marketing and communications team at Go Vilnius, along with governmental and stakeholder organisations including the Vilnius City Municipality and the Lithuanian Central Government, activated their existing networks and relational channels to undertake a series of innovative campaigns, animations and partnerships when the crisis hit. Specifically, the interactions that occurred between the above organisations and the broader stakeholder environment are listed in terms of the outcomes that were achieved. What later became known as ‘The Vilnius Model’ would prove advantageous to the city and would not only see it survive the pandemic relatively unscathed but would also set a foundation for post-pandemic growth and development – a potential model for anti-fragility that may prove worth examining more closely over the long term.

Local Businesses, Artists, Community Organisations

Activating the various stakeholders involved in the economic, cultural and social well-being of the city is crucial in a crisis (Avraham and Ketter, 2008). During the first wave of the pandemic, Lithuania had one of the lowest transmission rates worldwide, which allowed Go Vilnius to work quickly with stakeholders throughout the city to provide local activations that would encourage Vilnians to leave their homes and participate in the local economy fairly quickly (“Inovacijų agentūra: 5 Adaptable Innovative Solution Lithuania Used To Overcome First Wave Covid-19,” 2020). As one participant noted, *‘One important lesson from this period was that we needed to keep close contact with the local community – artists, activists, businesspeople, event organisers, performers, programmers, volunteers. Feeling the pulse of the city was very important and helps us share the authentic success stories that matter’* (P5).

Summing up the efforts, an official with Go Vilnius shared in an online published interview that *“We have a team of trained volunteer greeters who are out and about in the city during the summer helping visitors and being good ambassadors for our city in general. Similar volunteer ambassadors help us with outreach to the meetings industry, and a board of volunteer advisors helps us understand the needs of businesses and talent. The volunteer group “Brand for Vilnius” continues to serve as a focus group for our branding and marketing ideas and efforts. It’s important to establish multiple channels that engage the public and provide valuable and necessary feedback that keeps us attuned to realities.’* (Johnson, 2017; “The Vilnius Model,” 2021).

An early campaign in collaboration with local artists featured an open air ‘Mask Fashion Week’ which was advertised throughout the city on specialised promotional stands throughout the city and in outdoor billboards and transit posters (“Vilniuje – kaukių mados savaitė,” 2020). A specialised thematic map was created, encouraging Vilnius residents to walk around the city, displaying their unique and fashionable masks. The event gained media coverage in over 170 publications worldwide and set the stage for more creative animations to follow (P3).



Image 1: Mask Fashion Week,
GO Vilnius, 2020

With restaurants and bars closed due to safety regulations, Go Vilnius worked with the municipality to close several streets in the Old Town city centre to cars, creating a pedestrianised zone that acted as the world's largest 'Open-Air Café' that moved the city's gastronomy and nightlife offering outside. The initiative soon attracted worldwide media attention and provided much-needed animation to the city-centre, helping to keep local business afloat. The scheme was originally planned to start in 2021 but was moved up a year due to the economic necessity of the pandemic. In total, more than 450 local businesses participated; surveyed afterwards, 85 per cent of local businesses requested that the pedestrian zones remain in place and the Open Air Café has become a permanent fixture of Vilnius' summertime offer (P5).

With inward and outbound flights into Lithuania grounded, a partnership between Go Vilnius, the City of Vilnius, the Vilnius International Airport and the Cinema Spring Festival transformed the under-used airport runways into an outdoor drive-in movie theatre in an innovative festival entitled 'Aero Cinema'. The first car cinema in history to open in such an unusual location and offering the Baltic's biggest outdoor LED screen, Aero Cinema offered over 60 events, attracting 13,500 Vilnians to participate ("Fenomenas visame pasaulyje AEROKINAS," 2020). Interviewees were quick to herald the event, touting the international coverage it received on social media, and the fact that it '*presented Vilnius as a strong, creative and innovative city in the face of a crisis*' (P1).

Further collaborations with a leading Lithuanian telecommunications company Telia, resulted in Go Vilnius working with City officials to introduce an 'Open Beach' in the city centre that summer. The Lukiskes Square was filled with sand, beach volleyball courts, a massive TV screen showing popular films, and a free WiFi zone designed to entice locals out of their homes during summer days and evenings (MadeInVilnius.lt, 2020). The initiative gained a lot of

traction on Go Vilnius' social media sites, with hundreds of posts, comments and likes throughout the campaign. The initiative was not without controversy, as some local politicians and community groups protested the use of a protected heritage site, for such an irreverent purpose; debates surged in local media (“Vilniuje – kaukių mados savaitė,” 2020). In the end, as one interviewee stated, *‘while the project was controversial, Go Vilnius and the City benefited from the publicity it generated, and the residents reacted very positively overall’* (P5).

Keeping the attention of local stakeholders and innovating with new offers and initiatives is crucial in a crisis, as citizens and businesses might become fatigued (Avraham and Ketter, 2008). As summer turned to autumn and restrictions remained in place, Go Vilnius worked closely with local businesses in the town centre to look for ways to continue to entice locals into the city's streets. A competition was created to beautify the shops and buildings on walking routes and pedestrianized zones, with over 25 participants decorating their facades in unique and thematic ways. The campaign had social media appeal, with photographs of the facades being shared widely on social media throughout Lithuania, and the winner receiving a prize of €6,500 (ELTA, 2020).



Image 2: Christmas facade in Vilnius (Go Vilnius, 2020)

Prioritising Local Residents

Under normal conditions, a strong city branding strategy will centralise resident engagement and communication with citizens as fundamental (Gilboa and Jaffe, 2021). Under crisis conditions, whilst the nature of the message might change, the ability to access immediate communication channels with residents can often act as a stabilising force, educating the public about changing regulations, safety measures and available services and support (Orchiston, 2013).

The City of Vilnius, in conjunction with Go Vilnius and the central government of Lithuania, immediately halted promotional campaign messages in favour of pandemic-specific messaging such as stay-at-home orders, safety regulations, and preparations for potential worsening conditions. The City set up a telephone hotline for residents, encouraging them to call with questions or request assistance – particularly seniors who needed access to food or pharmacy supplies (ELTA, 2020). Teaming up with ‘Maisto Bankas’ a non-profit charity and support fund, the City also provided food packages to those in need, promoting the services via its social media channels and posters across the city.

One interviewee stated, *‘because we had clear and direct communication with the central and municipal governments, we were in a strong position to demonstrate leadership in our communication and provide quick and logical solutions to residents’* (P3). Another identified that close relations with local politicians was extremely advantageous in those early days: *‘We worked intensively with politicians at both the municipal and national level as well as business leaders and business and civic associations to push for improvements so that Vilnius lived up to its brand promise’* (P5). Go Vilnius was thus able to transform its primary objective of city branding and tourism promotion quickly into one more focused on the safety and security of Vilnius residents, owing largely to its role as a ‘boundary spanner’, acting as a bridge between government and citizens (Rinaldi et al., 2021).

As lockdown measures wore on and the initial need for safety and stay-at-home measures waned, the marketers at Go Vilnius recognized the opportunity to utilise their direct communication channels to promote a more lively, positive message designed to keep local spirits high. They changed their communication style on social media, becoming more friendly, irreverent and upbeat, encouraging citizens to ‘experience’ Lithuania staying at home (P2). Go Vilnius strengthened the gamification function on their website, inviting residents to play puzzles and quizzes designed to highlight the future opportunities to travel throughout Lithuania, and sharing information about local places to visit once lockdown ended (P1). They also created a series of thematic maps and itineraries, which not only piqued the interest of domestic tourists, but also foreign markets – *Reuters* made a special report covering the story about the Cold Beet Root Soup Map, and *Deutsche Welle* highlighted the Ice Cream Map in its pandemic coverage (P4; (“The secret to Lithuania’s domestic tourism success,” 2020). This was part of a larger strategy that had already been underway since 2014, when Go Vilnius started taking an active role in promoting local tourism and ‘staycations’ among Lithuanians. This meant that, while Vilnians were free to leave their homes but not necessarily able to travel outside the country, there was a clear promotional strategy in place to encourage them to participate more fully in

local offerings, proving advantageous for the local economy whilst inbound tourism travel remained non-existent.

Collaborations with International Partners

With international travel inaccessible during the first summer of the pandemic, Vilnius city authorities needed to focus on the domestic market and residents to boost the tourism economy. According to one informant, Lithuania, like most European countries, usually experiences large tourism inflows throughout the summer peak season. In Vilnius however, domestic and inbound tourism numbers are roughly equal – meaning that half of the visitors to the city come from within Lithuania, with the other half arriving from abroad (P5).

Go Vilnius, in partnership with the Vilnius City Municipality, decided early on to capitalise on this market, enhancing their local offer with a unique proposition: ‘Holidays in Vilnius’. For seven weekends throughout summer 2020, the city was ‘transformed’ into a far-flung destination with events, concerts, art exhibits, educational experiences for children and restaurant promotions featuring the culture, cuisine and curated experiences from a variety of countries including Italy, India, the USA, France, Spain, Germany and Japan (P4). Go Vilnius collaborated with the embassies, consulates and cultural institutes from the represented countries to highlight specific cultural and educational experiences, and restaurant owners and hoteliers agreed to offer discounted rates and thematic experiences for guests. Further collaboration with travel partners, including Lietuvos Geležinkeliai, Kautra, BusTuras and Citybee offered discounted trips from throughout Lithuania to the capital and Unipark provided cheap parking at the city centre arriving by car (City Administration, 2020). In total, over 200 partners both at home and abroad participated in the campaign (P3).

As restrictions lessened slightly near the beginning of the summer, Go Vilnius spotted an opportunity to create a ‘Travel Bubble’ with neighbouring Latvia and Estonia (Systas, 2020). These Baltic states were the first to establish this bubble, as they were the European countries with the lowest number of Covid-19 cases at the time. Go Vilnius announced the partnership on May 15, 2020, identifying it as the first step in the lifting of lock-down restrictions (P4). It was estimated that the tourism and open travel collaboration among these countries would help alleviate the expected economic shrinkage of eight per cent that the countries were facing at the height of the pandemic (“Coronavirus,” 2020).

An out-of-market advertising campaign via newspapers and billboards in Riga and Tallinn invited Latvians and Estonians to visit Vilnius, and a dedicated website was developed that offered discounts, products and experiences tailored to that specific audience (P2). Go Vilnius worked with Latvian influencers and journalists on a series of press junkets and focused their social media efforts on Latvian celebrities and other notable personnel in a very targeted campaign.



Image 3. Go Vilnius paid Facebook advertisement (Go Vilnius, 2020).

Leveraging Traditional and Social Media

In any crisis, media will always play an integral role in both covering the hard news stories, as well as providing a conduit for positive interest stories that might boost morale, and city officials are often tasked with finding the reporters who are willing to do so (Avraham, 2021). The extensive network of collaborations and events that occurred in and around Vilnius during those early days and months of the pandemic resulted in over 2,000 international media mentions and has since been nicknamed 'The Vilnius Model' (Skorwid, 2020). The teams at Go Vilnius and the Vilnius City Municipality worked with *CNN Travel*, *The New York Post*, *The Guardian*, *The BBC*, *The Independent*, *The Daily Mail* and other prominent news sources from around the world, reporting on their partnerships and the animations that stemmed from them.

The quirkiness of some of the projects garnered particular attention: international food celebrities took note of a local restaurateur's idea to feature mannequins in empty café seats to support local designers and maintain physical distance, while the Art Needs No Roof project was featured in the international arts media (P4). The existing relationships that the Go Vilnius team had with international journalism outlets due to the previous coverage they had received in the 'G-Spot' campaign proved particularly useful here in pitching and landing stories and keeping the activities in Vilnius on the international media radar.

Local media also reported extensively, generally lavishing praise on the city for the efforts it was taking to reinvigorate the local economy, and restaurateurs, small businesses, politicians and other city stakeholders were frequently featured discussing the initiatives and engaging in public debate (P3). In those early months, more than 75 per cent of coverage in the local media focused on the work of Go Vilnius and the City Municipality, and later research identified that the coverage was overwhelmingly positive: *'the constructive exchange of knowledge and collaborations were the two most significant acts that were covered and were always reported on positively'* (P1).

Finally, social media proved to be a crucial tool in both informing residents about safety measures, changing restrictions and mask mandates, but as the pandemic shifted, a vital vehicle for sharing positive stories, engaging the community and promoting local successes (P2). The tone of the message shifted throughout the pandemic, from emotional support and emergency advice to more entertaining and engaging content designed to create a sense of solidarity and connectivity throughout the population as their engagement numbers increased (P4). A variety of platforms were used including Twitter, Facebook, and the creation of two new dedicated websites that focused exclusively on pandemic-related information and promotional campaigns.

One of the more successful social media campaigns featured the artistic work by local photographer, Adas Vasiliauskas, who spent the first few months of lockdown deploying a drone throughout the city, photographing families from the windows of the dwellings in which they were bound. Named 'Portraits of Quarantine', the series quickly gained traction on social media and Go Vilnius capitalised on the trend by featuring the work on their social media channels, increasing their virality. The posts proved to be very popular both locally and internationally, garnering a 700 per cent increase in followers and a post engagement rate of nearly 20 per cent on their platforms (P4). These early social media wins helped grow and solidify the audience and primed them for deeper engagement with future content throughout the summer months, also helping to result in expanded international awareness and media coverage (P2).



Image 4. 'Portraits of quarantine' (Vasiliauskas, 2020)

Discussion: The Social Capital 'Network Constellation' as a Crucial Element in Developing Anti-Fragility

What emerges from the dominant narrative in both interviews and secondary research is that the ability to quickly leverage strong partnerships and existing working relationships resulted in timely, innovative and creative collaborations that could be activated when the crisis hit. The marketing team at Go Vilnius had already established themselves as competent and connected professionals, through a variety of high-impact and successful brand campaigns such as 'The G-Spot of Europe' as well as a multi-year brand building strategy that integrated stakeholder relations as a central feature. The prior success of that campaign had legitimised their credibility as cultural intermediaries with stores of existing social and cultural capital that afforded a degree of symbolic power over the city's narrative and reputation both at home and abroad. Their ability to draw on the existing relationships they had formed with government officials in the Vilnius City Municipality, along with key local community, cultural and artistic groups, small businesses and larger stakeholders such as the airport and the academic community meant that their creative campaign ideas in the midst of the crisis swiftly became reality.

Through partnerships and collaborations, their communicative efforts were both integrated and amplified among a captivated and willing local audience who trusted their voice and engaged with them through digital channels. Further, their existing relationships with local and international media – also garnered through years of dedicated and noticeable campaigns,

meant that their public relations pitches achieved a relatively high rate of coverage, especially during a time when the world was looking for good news pandemic stories to tell.

It is vital to note here that social capital as a core component of place branding is neither static nor fixed; relationships that had been developed prior to the pandemic would have had to have been renewed and renegotiated under new, and possibly strained terms owing to the stress of the economic and cultural shock the city was undergoing. This paper focuses not so much on the process of transformation that these relationships might have undergone in the crisis, but instead casts a finer focus on the outcomes, or possible reverberations, that were possible through the relational constellations that had been established before the pandemic and strengthened and reinforced during it.

Figure 1 visually demonstrates the central and highly connected position held by the team, predominantly of marketing and public relations staff, at Go Vilnius. Sitting at the nexus among the most dominant actors within Vilnius' social, economic and political value chains, they were the epicentre of the 'Network Constellation' that was activated in the early days of the pandemic and had perhaps the greatest impact on the city's ability to both communicate clearly with residents, the business community and potential visitors, but to also work with myriad stakeholders to both stabilise the economy and provide a lasting positive impression – a confluence of both economic and social value that ultimately contributes to a strong brand reputation.

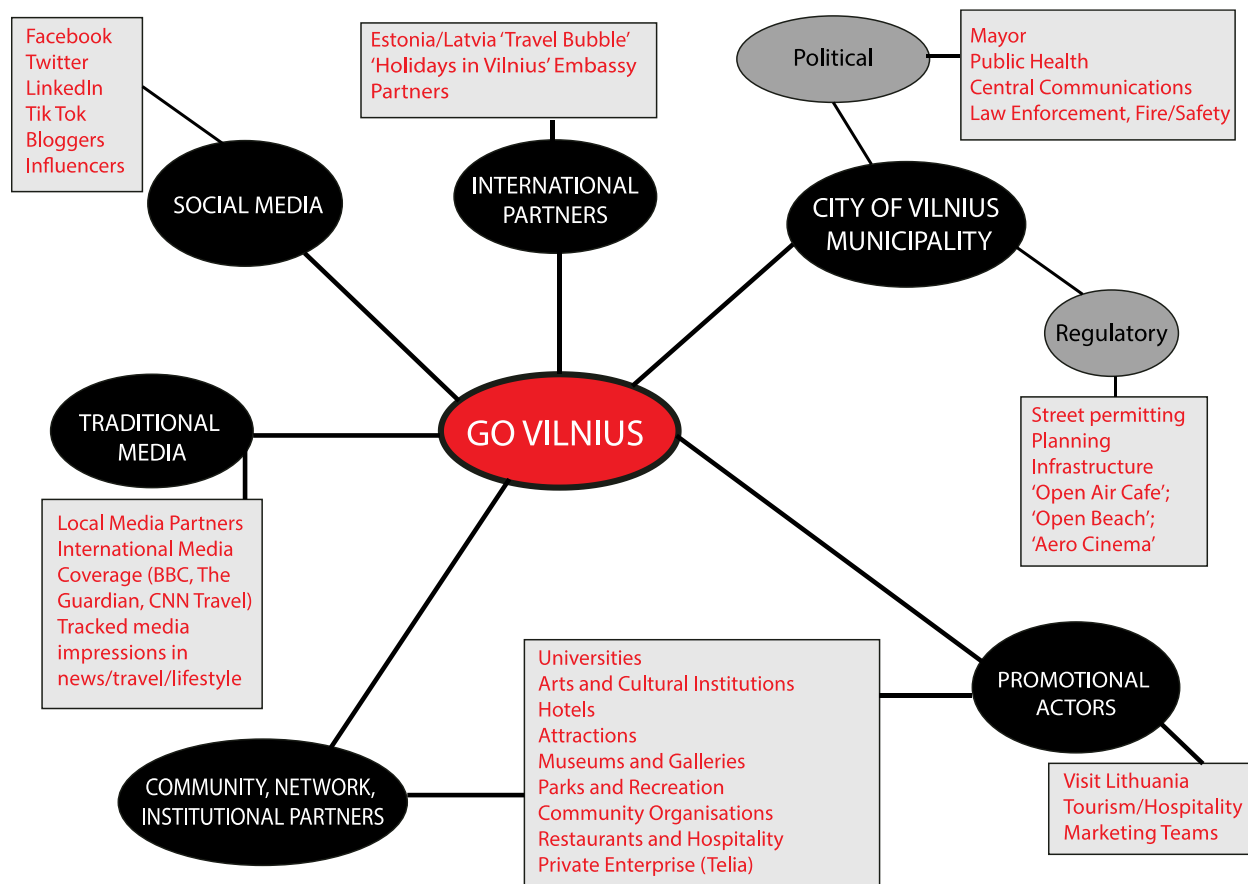


Figure 1: The Network Constellation in Vilnius, Lithuania

Whilst it might be perceived that the communicative and collaborative actions taken by Go Vilnius during the pandemic were merely a means of returning the city back to ‘business as usual’ and salvaging a measure of economic stability, it might be argued that broader goals were at work. The practitioners working at Go Vilnius possessed a heightened awareness of the relational dimensions of their work, and the symbolic capital it afforded them to instil a strong positive narrative about the city during a time when audiences were captive and engaged. The prior work they had done in building those relationships and legitimising their profile within the city’s value chain enabled them to tackle both the economic and social dimensions of the crisis through an integrated set of activities that ultimately benefited the reputation among both internal and external audiences, enhancing the brand.

Conclusions

What starts to become apparent from the data is that the marketing and communications professionals at Go Vilnius, in close cooperation with Vilnius Municipality officials, were at the heart of the innovative collaborations with locals, stakeholders, the international community and the media that allowed the city to weather the worst of the Covid-19 crisis, especially in its early days. When closely examining the role of social capital in societal power dynamics, Bourdieu

observed that ‘[T]he existence of connections is not a natural given, or even a social given ... it is the product of an endless effort at institution’ (1984: 249). The officials at Go Vilnius had worked hard to establish themselves as ‘professionals of taste and qualification’ (Smith Maguire and Matthews, 2014) and had built a degree of social capital through years of previous strategic engagement. This cultivated a position of cultural intermediation and the symbolic power it afforded to allow Go Vilnius to take a swift and comprehensible action that leveraged partnerships that were achievable at scale. This had a knock-on effect that transcended the local context and captured international attention as a framework for community collaboration, partnership and resilience that has paved routes for future growth.

A more critical outlook on this work might posit that these professionals were merely performing their function as marketers; that their sole focus was to get the city ‘back to business’ and return a measure of economic stability as the tourism sector became decimated. Many of the activities, such as activating the town centre, promoting staycations and catalysing local spending are expected and conventional initiatives that any DMO would do in any crisis situation. This argument focuses solely on the economic development function of place marketing and ignores the broader social potential that cultural intermediaries bring to the table in the largely communicative, discursive and meaning-making aspect of their work in place branding (Warren and Dinnie, 2018). The resultant prevailing narrative that embeds itself into the hearts and minds of the local population might begin to contribute to a stronger sense of resilience, and ultimately anti-fragility, over time. While a direct causal case may not be made about the communicative aspects of the work directly affecting brand outcomes, this paper sheds some light on the relational dimensions of place branding and points to the merit in taking a more sociological approach to the facets of social capital that might make it more effective, especially in a crisis.

This case study demonstrates that a ‘Network Constellation’ approach centralised around key stakeholder relationships held by marketing, tourism and promotional professionals is a crucial component in urban post-pandemic and emergency planning. This doesn’t inherently happen; all too often city marketing is seen as an add-on, a cost component of economic development, the visitor economy and brand promotion when times are good. This approach misses an opportunity to build on the relational and communicative value that cultural intermediaries possess through the ongoing nature of their work long before any crisis becomes imminent. Theoretically, this paper advances the cultural intermediary framework as a crucial component in building more resilient, anti-fragile cities. It reinforces the theoretical notion of social capital occurring at communitarian, network and institutional levels within a societal context ((Woolcock and Narayan, 2000). From an urban management perspective, by placing marketing professionals at the heart of crisis planning, cities can capitalise on the inherent social capital that is their key occupational resource, and leverage their relationships with residents, the business community, international collaborators, and the media for swift and maximum impact. Place marketers thus deserve a seat at the policy planning table – a strategic force fundamental to a city’s future quest for anti-fragility that must not be overlooked.

REFERENCES

- airBaltic und Hamburg Airport feiern Erstflug nach Vilnius - Hamburg Airport [WWW Document], 2022. URL <https://www.hamburg-airport.de/de/unternehmen/presse/airbaltic-und-hamburg-airport-feiern-erstflug-nach-vilnius-51104> (accessed 11.4.22).
- Aldrich, D.P., 2012. *Building Resilience: Social Capital in Post-Disaster Recovery*. University of Chicago Press.
- Aleffi, C., Cavicchi, A., 2020. The Role of Food and Culinary Heritage for Postdisaster Recovery: The Case of Earthquake in the Marche Region (Italy). *Journal of Gastronomy and Tourism* 4, 113–128. <https://doi.org/10.3727/216929720X15846938924012>
- Anholt, S., 2007. *Competitive Identity: The New Brand Management for Nations, Cities and Regions*. Palgrave Macmillan, Basingstoke England; New York.
- Anholt, S., 2003. *Brand New Justice*, 2nd ed. Routledge, London.
- Avraham, E., 2021. From 9/11 through Katrina to Covid-19: crisis recovery campaigns for American destinations. *Current Issues in Tourism* 24, 2875–2889. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13683500.2020.1849052>
- Avraham, E., Ketter, E., 2008. *Media strategies for marketing places in crisis: improving the image of cities, countries, and tourist destinations*. Butterworth Heinemann, Amsterdam.
- Becken, S., 2013. Developing a Framework for Assessing Resilience of Tourism Sub-Systems to Climatic Factors. *Annals of Tourism Research* 43, 506–528. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.annals.2013.06.002>
- Best countries to work remotely | NordLayer [WWW Document], 2022. URL https://nordlayer.com/global-remote-work-index/?utm_source=socialmedia&utm_medium=post&utm_campaign=GRWI&utm_id=Research&utm_content=1 (accessed 11.4.22).
- Bloom Consulting, 2021. *The Antifragile City*. Bloom Consulting. URL <https://www.bloom-consulting.com/journal/the-antifragile-city/> (accessed 10.8.21).
- Boisen, M., Terlouw, K., Groote, P., Couwenberg, O., 2018. Reframing place promotion, place marketing, and place branding - moving beyond conceptual confusion. *Cities* 80, 4–11. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cities.2017.08.021>
- Bourdieu, P., 1984. *Distinction: a Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*. Routledge, London.
- Buultjens, J., Ratnayake, I., Gnanapala, A., 2017. Sri Lankan tourism development and implications for resilience., in: Butler, R. (Ed.), *Tourism and Resilience*. CABI, Wallingford:, pp. 83–95.
- Chowdhury, M., Prayag, G., Orchiston, C., Spector, S., 2019. Postdisaster Social Capital, Adaptive Resilience and Business Performance of Tourism Organizations in Christchurch, New Zealand. *Journal of Travel Research* 58, 1209–1226. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0047287518794319>
- City Administration, V., 2020. Vilniaus miesto savivaldybė - Vilnius will welcome vacationers this summer: the capital will turn into many different countries. Vilniaus miesto savivaldybė.
- Clere, A., 2022. *Fintech Frontiers: Vilnius and the fintech boom in Lithuania* [WWW Document]. URL <https://fintechmagazine.com/articles/fintech-frontiers-vilnius-and-the-fintech-boom-in->

- lithuania?fbclid=IwAR3otQ6SyyQB6smoBCGWESoCal6YuA2am_PgmXLCTq-RaSiBtiDSHmOE2Uo (accessed 10.15.22).
- Coleman, J., 1990. *Foundations of Social Theory*. Harvard University Press, Cambridge, MA.
- Coronavirus: Baltic states open a pandemic “travel bubble” [WWW Document], 2020. . BBC News. URL <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-52673373> (accessed 4.10.21).
- Cronin, A.M., 2004. Regimes of Mediation: Advertising Practitioners as Cultural Intermediaries? *Consumption Markets & Culture* 7, 349–369. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1025386042000316315>
- Dahles, H., Susilowati, T.P., 2015. Business resilience in times of growth and crisis. *Annals of Tourism Research* 51, 34–50. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.annals.2015.01.002>
- Dinnie, K., 2016. *Nation branding: Concepts, Issues, Practice*, 2nd ed. Routledge, Oxford.
- Edwards, L., 2005. Rethinking power in public relations. *Public Relations Review* 32, 229–231. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pubrev.2006.05.013>
- ELTA, 2020. Karantino metu Vilniuje pradeda veikti karštoji linija 1664 - DELFI [WWW Document]. URL <https://www.delfi.lt/news/daily/lithuania/karantino-metu-vilniuje-pradeda-veikti-karstoji-linija-1664.d?id=83817753> (accessed 3.15.21).
- Eshuis, J., Klijn, E.H., 2012. *Branding in Governance and Public Management*, 1st ed. Routledge, New York.
- Esteves, C., 2018. *Cidade Anti Frágil*. Realejo Livros, Sao Paolo, Brazil.
- Fenomenas visame pasaulyje AEROKINAS [WWW Document], 2020. URL <https://kinopavasaris.lt/lt/aerokinas> (accessed 3.31.21).
- Gilboa, S., Jaffe, E., 2021. Can one brand fit all? Segmenting city residents for place branding. *Cities* 116, 103287. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cities.2021.103287>
- Gössling, S., Scott, D., Hall, C.M., 2021. Pandemics, tourism and global change: a rapid assessment of COVID-19. *Journal of Sustainable Tourism* 29, 1–20. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09669582.2020.1758708>
- Govers, R., Go, F., 2009. *Place branding: glocal, virtual and physical identities, constructed, imagined and experienced*. Palgrave Macmillan, Hampshire.
- Gursoy, D., Chi, C.G., 2020. Effects of COVID-19 pandemic on hospitality industry: review of the current situations and a research agenda. *Journal of Hospitality Marketing & Management* 29, 527–529. <https://doi.org/10.1080/19368623.2020.1788231>
- Hadley, S., 2021. Artists as cultural intermediaries? Remediating practices of production and consumption. *Arts and the Market* ahead-of-print. <https://doi.org/10.1108/AAM-01-2021-0001>
- Hall, C.M., Prayag, G., Amore, A., 2017. *Tourism and Resilience: Individual, Organisational and Destination Perspectives (Tourism Essentials): 5, Illustrated*. ed. Channel View Publications, Bristol, UK ; Blue Ridge Summit, PA, USA.
- Hankinson, G., 2007. The management of destination brands: Five guiding principles based on recent developments in corporate branding theory. *Journal of Brand Management* 14, 240–254. <https://doi.org/10.1057/palgrave.bm.2550065>
- Hanna, S., Rowley, J., 2011. Towards a strategic place brand-management model. *Journal of Marketing Management* 27, 458–476. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02672571003683797>
- Hodges, C., 2006. “PRP culture”: A framework for exploring public relations practitioners as cultural intermediaries. *Journal of Communication Management* 10, 80–93. <https://doi.org/10.1108/13632540610646391>

- Holling, C.S., 1973. Resilience and Stability of Ecological Systems. *Annual Review of Ecology and Systematics* 4, 1–23. <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.es.04.110173.000245>
- Inovacijų agentūra: 5 Adaptable Innovative Solution Lithuania Used To Overcome First Wave Covid-19 [WWW Document], 2020. URL <https://kc.inovacijuagentura.lt/?lang=en> (accessed 3.15.21).
- Intelligence fDI, 2022. Baltic city of the future: Vilnius, Lithuania [WWW Document]. URL <https://www.fdiintelligence.com/content/news/baltic-city-of-the-future-vilnius-lithuania-24810> (accessed 11.4.22).
- Jiang, Y., Ritchie, B.W., Verreynne, M.-L., 2019. Building tourism organizational resilience to crises and disasters: A dynamic capabilities view. *International Journal of Tourism Research* 21, 882–900. <https://doi.org/10.1002/jtr.2312>
- Johnson, J., 2017. Vilnius - Case Study in Place Branding. The Public Diplomacy Council. URL <https://www.publicdiplomacycouncil.org/2017/10/25/vilnius-case-study-place-branding/> (accessed 7.31.21).
- Kavaratzis, M., 2004. From city marketing to city branding: Towards a theoretical framework for developing city brands. *Place Branding* 1, 58–73.
- Kavaratzis, M., Ashworth, G.J., 2005. City Branding: An Effective Assertion of Identity or a Transitory Marketing Trick? *Tijdschrift voor economische en sociale geografie* 96, 506–514. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9663.2005.00482.x>
- Kavaratzis, M., Hatch, M., 2013. The dynamics of place brands: An identity-based approach to place branding theory. *Marketing Theory* 13, 69–86. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1470593112467268>
- Khazai, B., Mahdavian, F., Platt, S., 2018. Tourism Recovery Scorecard (TOURS) – Benchmarking and monitoring progress on disaster recovery in tourism destinations. *International Journal of Disaster Risk Reduction* 27, 75–84. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijdrr.2017.09.039>
- Klijn, E.-H., Eshuis, J., Braun, E., 2012. The Influence of Stakeholder Involvement on The Effectiveness of Place Branding. *Public Management Review* 14, 499–519. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14719037.2011.649972>
- Kowalczyk-Anioł, J., Grochowicz, M., Pawłusiński, R., 2021. How a Tourism City Responds to COVID-19: A CEE Perspective (Kraków Case Study). *Sustainability* 13, 7914. <https://doi.org/10.3390/su13147914>
- Landry, C., 2008. *The Creative City: A Toolkit for Urban Innovators*. Routledge, New Stroud, UK: London; Sterling, VA.
- Le Feuvre, M., Medway, D., Warnaby, G., Ward, K., Goatman, A., 2016. Understanding stakeholder interactions in urban partnerships. *Cities* 52, 55–65. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cities.2015.10.017>
- Lengnick-Hall, C.A., Beck, T.E., Lengnick-Hall, M.L., 2011. Developing a capacity for organizational resilience through strategic human resource management. *Human Resource Management Review* 21, 243–255. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.hrmr.2010.07.001>
- Lucarelli, A., 2015. *The Political Dimension of Place Branding (PhD Dissertation)*. Stockholm Business School, Stockholm University, Stockholm, Sweden.
- Matthews, J., Smith Maguire, J., 2014. Introduction: Thinking with Cultural Intermediaries, in: *The Cultural Intermediaries Reader*. SAGE, London.

- McManus, S., Seville, E., Vargo, J., Brunson, D., 2008. Facilitated Process for Improving Organizational Resilience. *Natural Hazards Review* 9, 81–90.
[https://doi.org/10.1061/\(ASCE\)1527-6988\(2008\)9:2\(81\)](https://doi.org/10.1061/(ASCE)1527-6988(2008)9:2(81))
- Nahapiet, J., Ghoshal, S., 1998. Social Capital, Intellectual Capital, and the Organizational Advantage. *The Academy of Management Review* 23, 242.
<https://doi.org/10.2307/259373>
- @NatGeoUK, 2022. Best of the world: 35 destinations for 2023 and beyond [WWW Document]. National Geographic. URL <https://www.nationalgeographic.co.uk/travel/2022/10/best-of-the-world-35-destinations-for-2023-and-beyond> (accessed 11.4.22).
- Ntounis, N., Parker, C., Skinner, H., Steadman, C., Warnaby, G., 2021. Tourism and Hospitality industry resilience during the Covid-19 pandemic: Evidence from England. *Current Issues in Tourism* 0, 1–14. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13683500.2021.1883556>
- Onwuegbuzie, A., Collins, K., 2007. A Typology of Mixed Methods Sampling Designs in Social Science Research. *The Qualitative Report* 12, 281–316.
- Orchiston, C., 2013. Tourism business preparedness, resilience and disaster planning in a region of high seismic risk: the case of the Southern Alps, New Zealand. *Journal of Tourism Research* 16, 477–494.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/13683500.2012.741115>
- Orchiston, C., Prayag, G., Brown, C., 2016. Organizational resilience in the tourism sector. *Annals of Tourism Research* 56, 145–148.
- Reynolds, L., 2021. Reconsidering place branding: ‘connecting the dots’ between placemaking, policy making and sustainable development. *Welsh Economic Review* 28, 14–22.
<https://doi.org/10.18573/wer.260>
- Reynolds, L., Koenig-Lewis, N., Doering, H., Peattie, K., 2022. Competing for legitimacy in the place branding process: (re)negotiating the stakes. *Tourism Management* 91, 104532.
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tourman.2022.104532>
- Rinaldi, C., Giovanardi, M., Lucarelli, A., 2021. Keeping a foot in both camps: Sustainability, city branding and boundary spanners. *Cities* 115, 103236.
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cities.2021.103236>
- Ryanair builds in the Baltics with new Vilnius base [WWW Document], 2021. . Routes. URL <https://www.routesonline.com/news/29/breaking-news/253828/ryanair-builds-in-the-baltics-with-new-vilnius-base/> (accessed 11.4.22).
- Seshadri, U., Kumar, P., Vij, A., Ndlovu, T., 2023. Marketing strategies for the tourism industry in the United Arab Emirates after the COVID-19 era. *Worldwide Hospitality and Tourism Themes* 15, 169–177. <https://doi.org/10.1108/WHATT-10-2022-0120>
- Skorwid, G., 2020. The city that became an open-air café [WWW Document]. URL <https://www.bbc.com/worklife/article/20200805-how-vilnius-became-an-open-air-cafe> (accessed 7.31.21).
- Smith Maguire, J., Matthews, J. (Eds.), 2014. *The Cultural Intermediaries Reader*. SAGE, London.
- Statistics Lithuania, 2022. Eurostat Metadata - Lithuania [WWW Document]. URL https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/cache/metadata/EN/urb_esms_lt.htm (accessed 10.24.22).
- Statistics Lithuania - Oficialiosios statistikos portalas [WWW Document], 2022. URL <https://www.stat.gov.lt/en/> (accessed 7.4.22).
- Sydnor-Bouso, S., Stafford, K., Tews, M., Adler, H., 2011. Toward a Resilience Model for the Hospitality & Tourism Industry. *Journal of Hospitality & Tourism Research* 10, 195–217.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/15332845.2011.536942>

- Systas, A., 2020. Coronavirus: Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia create ‘travel bubble’ to ease restrictions [WWW Document]. World Economic Forum. URL <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2020/05/baltic-states-to-create-travel-bubble-as-pandemic-curbs-eased/> (accessed 4.10.21).
- The secret to Lithuania’s domestic tourism success [WWW Document], 2020. . City Nation Place. URL <https://www.citynationplace.com/the-secret-to-lithuanias-domestic-tourism-success> (accessed 7.31.21).
- The strategy for presenting Lithuania abroad [WWW Document], 2021. . City Nation Place. URL <https://www.citynationplace.com/the-strategy-for-presenting-lithuania-abroad> (accessed 7.31.21).
- The Vilnius Model: How to keep people smiling [WWW Document], 2021. . City Nation Place. URL <https://www.citynationplace.com/the-vilnius-model-inga-romanovskiene> (accessed 7.31.21).
- Tøttenborg, A., Ooi, C.-S., Hardy, A., 2021. Place branding through public management lenses: supplementing the participatory agenda. *Place Brand Public Dipl.* <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41254-021-00252-0>
- Vargo, J., Seville, E., 2011. Crisis strategic planning for SMEs: finding the silver lining. *Journal of Business Venturing* 49, 5619–5635. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00207543.2011.563902>
- Vilniuje – kaukių mados savaitė: kūrybiškumo neuždengsi [WWW Document], 2020. . Žmonės.lt. URL <https://www.zmones.lt/naujiena/vilniuje-kaukiu-mados-savaite-kurybiskumo-neuzdengsi-pL5Alp66VYZ> (accessed 3.14.21).
- Vilnius: Amazing Wherever You Think It Is [WWW Document], 2021. . City Nation Place. URL <https://www.citynationplace.com/vilnius-amazing-whenever-you-think-it-is>
- Vilnius office market demand hits new high amid record quarterly take-up, 2021. . Newsec. URL <https://newsec.lt/en/vilnius-office-market-demand-hits-new-high-amid-record-quarterly-take-up/> (accessed 11.10.21).
- Vilnius secures 20 new conferences in pandemic recovery - CMW [WWW Document], 2021. URL <https://www.c-mw.net/vilnius-secures-20-new-conferences-in-pandemic-recovery/> (accessed 11.10.21).
- Volgger, M., Pechlaner, H., 2014. Requirements for destination management organizations in destination governance: Understanding DMO success. *Tourism Management* 41, 64–75. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tourman.2013.09.001>
- Warren, G., Dilmeri, A., Dinnie, K., 2021. Power struggles and playing politics: An application of Bourdieu’s cultural intermediation theory to place marketing. *Annals of Tourism Research* 91, 103276. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.annals.2021.103276>
- Warren, G., Dinnie, K., 2018. Cultural intermediaries in place branding: Who are they and how do they construct legitimacy for their work and for themselves? *Tourism Management* 66, 302–314. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tourman.2017.12.012>
- Woolcock, M., Narayan, D., 2000. Social Capital: Implications for Development Theory, Research, and Policy. *The World Bank Research Observer* 15, 225–249. <https://doi.org/10.1093/wbro/15.2.225>
- World Bank, 2020. Rebuilding Tourism Competitiveness: Tourism Response, Recovery and Resilience to the COVID-19 Crisis (Policy Note). World Bank, Washington, DC. <https://doi.org/10.1596/34348>

- World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) (Ed.), 2021. The Economic Contribution of Tourism and the Impact of COVID-19. World Tourism Organization (UNWTO).
<https://doi.org/10.18111/9789284423200>
- Yeh, S.-S., 2021. Tourism recovery strategy against COVID-19 pandemic. *Tourism Recreation Research* 46, 188–194. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02508281.2020.1805933>
- Yin, R.K., 2003. *Case Study Research: Design and Methods*. SAGE Publications, Inc, Los Angeles.
- Zavattaro, S.M., 2018. What's in a Symbol?: Big Questions for Place Branding in Public Administration. *Public Administration Quarterly* 42, 90–119.
- Zavattaro, S.M., Adams, F.G., 2016. Bridging the gap: An exploration of how DMO managers use education to overcome challenges. *Urban Studies* 53, 669–688.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/0042098014568069>
- Zenker, S., Braun, E., Petersen, S., 2017. Branding the destination versus the place: The effects of brand complexity and identification for residents and visitors. *Tourism Management* 58, 15–27. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tourman.2016.10.008>
- Zenker, S., Erfgen, C., 2014. Let them do the work: a participatory place branding approach. *Journal of Place Management and Development* 7, 225–234.
<https://doi.org/10.1108/JPMD-06-2013-0016>
- Zenker, S., Kock, F., 2020. The coronavirus pandemic – A critical discussion of a tourism research agenda. *Tourism Management* 81, 104164.
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tourman.2020.104164>