

# **Painting a Self Portrait of a City:**

Exploring Participatory Branding Practices and Sense of Place in  
Seoul, South Korea's 2014-2015 Branding Process

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Honors Dissertation in Geography, Spring 2020

Hofstra University

## Table of Contents

<b>Introduction .....</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Seoul, South Korea .....</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Methodology and Positionality .....</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>City Branding Overview .....</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>Sense of Place Overview .....</b>	<b>12</b>
<b>Seoul Branding History .....</b>	<b>14</b>
<b>An Overview of <i>Seoul Brand Story</i> and Seoul's Branding Process ....</b>	<b>17</b>
<b>Participatory Branding in Seoul Brand Story .....</b>	<b>22</b>
<b>Sense of Place in Seoul Brand Story .....</b>	<b>27</b>
<b>Conclusion .....</b>	<b>33</b>
<b>References .....</b>	<b>38</b>

## Introduction

Drawn to new job opportunities or fresh starts, there exists a growing trend of increased migration to cities on a global level. Between 1950 and 2018, the world's urban population saw an increase from 30% to 55% (UNDSEA, 2018). Today's economic institutions and corporations all have origins themselves in global cities, not rural villages. Thanks to a neoliberal wave in policymaking and new communication technologies over the past few decades, corporations and tourists have more flexibility when choosing their destination city. While more options may be great for corporations and tourists, it presents a challenge for cities. To set themselves apart from their competitors, global cities have started to utilize the marketing tool of city branding to be viable in the geopolitical theatre (Anttiroiko, 2014).

Much of this competition exists within the Asian continent, hosting over one-third of the world's 33 megacities, or cities with more than ten million residents. (UNDSEA, 2018). Seoul, South Korea was anticipated to be a megacity by 2030 (UNDSEA, 2018), but, as of May 2020, the city is already over this threshold with a population of 10,013,781 people (Seoul Metropolitan Government [SMG], 2020a) and an estimated growth rate of 0.13% (World Population Review, 2020). Despite being an up and coming city, there is very little written about the way Seoul, and Asian cities overall, have utilized city branding. When work can be done from anywhere, when tourists can hop on a plane and go everywhere, demands on cities change and it is important to fill the gaps in the literature dedicated to understanding how cities respond to this rapidly changing world.

As branding initiatives grew, so did concerns about the processes behind them. While cities were looking to draw the rest of the world in, how were these efforts

impacting those already there? One consequence of traditional branding strategies was that residents were gatekept from the process of branding (Eshuis & Edwards, 2013). It is concerning that those who live in the city and feel the impact of city branding's goals would have no say in the way their city is portrayed to the outside world. However, in recent years, new frameworks have emerged that encourage resident participation in brand development (Eshuis et al., 2014).

To ask for the opinions of residents is one thing, but to have residents serve as decision makers and to integrate these ideas and comments into a brand is another level of involvement. One way that the depth of resident participation might be explored is through the geographic notion of sense of place. To see how residents connect with their city, and to see how that connection is translated into a brand can serve as an important way to understand both the practical challenges of participatory frameworks and the effectiveness of their usage. Both the exploration of Asian city branding strategies and the exploration of participatory branding are two fields in the academic literature that this paper aims to expand with the question: In what ways does Seoul, South Korea's 2015 city branding strategy utilize participatory city branding and residents' sense of place to develop their latest branding effort, I • SEOUL • U?

## **Seoul, South Korea**

Seoul has historically played a large role in South Korea's overall growth as a developmental state (Joo, 2019), meaning that many local level policies are rooted in national politics. Due to South Korea's national development policies, much of Seoul's development was driven by the state rather than private entrepreneurship. Seoul's development policies followed this state-led development framework until the election

of Mayor Park Won-soon in 2011 (Joo, 2019), who will be discussed later in this paper. Seoul has also become an internationally recognized city ranked 6th in the Comprehensive Ranking on the Global Power City Index, 6th in the Global Cities Performance Index, and 7th in the 2016 Sustainable Cities Index (SMG, 2020b). As of the most recent population survey made available by the South Korean government, the population of South Korea was 51.63 million (Statistics Korea, 2018). Roughly one fifth of this is composed of Seoul's population of 10,013,781 (SMG, 2020a). Beyond the proportion of the country's population, its status as the nation's capital and its status as an internationally recognized city means that the branding efforts of Seoul can carry an impact that extends far beyond its city limits.

Tourism has also seen a sharp increase over the past decade, with the number of foreign sightseers rising from 6,366,684 in 2009 to 14,432,275 in 2019 (Seoul Statistics Service, 2020). In South Korea, as of 2016, 5.1% of all GDP comes from tourism revenue, and the tourism sector employs an estimated 1.5 million Koreans (OECD, 2018). Also given that Seoul is ranked third in international MICE<sup>1</sup> cities (SMG, 2017), it is well positioned to take advantage of city branding strategies. Seoul also represents a key piece of the growing Korean wave, or "hallyu" across the world. Originally, this wave referred to an increased interest about Korean pop culture among Chinese youth, but the term has since expanded to broadly refer to the spread of Korean culture to a global rather than national consumer base (Bae et al., 2017). Studies have shown that this wave has directly contributed to an increase in South Korean tourism (Bae et al., 2017), and Seoul makes it explicit that it hopes to be a central part of this movement. On its tourism

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<sup>1</sup> Meetings, Incentives, Conferences, and Exhibitions

website, there is a section entitled “hallyu” dedicated to the different ways tourists can experience aspects of Korean pop culture, such as a “musical tour,” cooking classes, or tours of television broadcasting studios (Seoul Tourism Organization, n.d.).

Beyond pop culture, Seoul, and South Korea, have come to occupy an interesting place in the global geopolitical theatre thanks to North Korea. Around the time Seoul’s branding process began in 2014, South Korea’s public stance towards North Korea was one of optimism, even unification (Wertz, 2017). The president at the time, Park Geun Hye, placed improved relations as a cornerstone of her campaign in 2012 (Wertz, 2017). When relations took a turn for the worse in August of 2015 due to a deadly border conflict, the city had completed the branding process up to the point of opening up online forums and the Seoul Citizen Hall for resident’s slogan submissions. It should be noted that this paper is not trying to make a definitive comment about the scope of impact that Seoul’s branding has, but it is a relevant point to mention when considering the overall context of the city.

## **Methodology and Positionality**

The methodology utilized in this paper is document analysis, focused on the document *Seoul Brand Story* published by the Seoul Metropolitan Government. According to Brown (2009), document analysis refers to “the analytic procedure [that] entails finding, selecting, appraising (making sense of), and synthesising data contained in documents” (p. 28). In reading through *Seoul Brand Story*, the data in question included extracting text on Seoul’s branding process and analyzing quotes from those who participated in the branding process. In preparing to write this thesis, I also reviewed literature from the fields of geography, public policy, and communications as a

framework to understand the history, recent developments, and case studies surrounding the concepts of “sense of place” and city branding. With this background from academic sources, I further applied these concepts to the *Seoul Brand Story* publication to analyze participatory branding efforts and the incorporation of sense of place into Seoul’s brand development. This publication was released in January 2017, a little over a year after the final Seoul city brand was selected. The publication is 227 pages, and gives a detailed account of the philosophy behind the branding process, who the decision makers were, and how the branding process was carried out. The document also includes quotes and testimonials from those involved in the project and was published in both Korean and English. It is interesting to note that this document is framed as being a “story.” While offering an account of the branding process, there are sections that distinguish it from a technical report as it includes occasional anecdotes or biased language. For example, when discussing a festival that was part of the branding process *Seoul Brand Story* states “The participating citizens could not hide the excitement on their faces. They were even more satisfied with the fact that it was the citizens’ festival where the Seoul Brand would be created and determined by themselves” (SMG, 2017, p. 133). Such comments that generalize or speculate on public emotions have little data behind them and so do not offer meaningful analysis. Because of this, it is important to note that *Seoul Brand Story* is not trying to be a technical report. However, it is still a source worthy of analysis due to the high level of information it provides about the branding process. Aside from a few recent articles, there is a large gap, especially in English language literature when it comes to analyzing Seoul’s branding. It would be useful if there were more accessible resources to analyze or use to contextualize the report, but due to these gaps there are not. Therefore, in this

paper what will be analyzed is primarily the frameworks of the different participatory branding projects with quotes from participants included only where they are relevant. Ideally, there would be a more straightforward analytical report available to me on the framework and proceedings, but *Seoul Brand Story* still offers much insight into the overall branding process.

In my own positionality as an American with no Korean heritage, I have an outsider's perspective when analyzing this document and am very limited as to the language of my sources. In my thesis, I center around the notion of sense of place being important to understand a city, and yet I do not have the same sense of place in regards to Seoul as someone who is a resident of the city. My personal reason for being particularly interested in Seoul is due to my own time there as a tourist a year ago and enjoying my experience there. My own trip occurred about three and a half years after the new brand was implemented, and I have clear memories of seeing the brand imagery around the city. I want to stress that I am in no way trying to pass judgement about the *authenticity* of the brand or make a comment about the different perspectives on Seoul that arose during the branding process. That is an analysis that needs to be made by someone with a different background than my own. However, with my academic knowledge and dedicated research to these topics, I am prepared to make and defend statements on Seoul's participatory framework and the sense of place the city's branding process engendered.

Before moving further into this paper, it is worth taking a moment to acknowledge the limitations of this thesis. The first, and key, limitation being language. As someone who is not able to speak or read Korean, this barrier limited my ability to seek out additional primary sources and secondary analysis of Seoul's branding process.



There is also the possibility that certain sources were not accessible to me due to regional firewalls. As someone working out of America, certain Asian publications or analyses may not appear in my search for sources. Another limitation is the lack of data provided by Seoul Brand Story, and the inability to find data on resident participation from any third party sources (in English). Being able to break down a specific branding part of the branding process, such as the public vote on the final three slogan options for the city, by age, city district, or gender would be a useful indicator as to which segments of the city's population were engaged in the branding process. In terms of directly seeking out such data, the chaos of COVID-19 made it difficult to reach out to think tanks going into lockdown.

### **City Branding Overview**

City branding is relatively new as a tool for cities and as an academic subject. City branding can be seen as an evolution within the practice of city marketing (Kavaratzis, 2004). On the surface, the two practices may seem to be nearly identical. However, city marketing is a way for a city to try and “check off” externally focused goals it has set for itself, such as seeing an increase in foreign investment or an increase in global tourists, and, while branding does incorporate these goals, it contains an aspect of community development and depicting a *holistic* view of a city (Kavaratzis, 2004). An example of this in the corporate world can be seen with Apple and its products: the latest iPhone, as a hypothetical, may have a camera with a higher resolution and three times more storage than the previous model. Of course, while this is a selling point, Apple also advertises its products on the notion that they come with a certain carefree millennial lifestyle: you're buying more than the phone, you're purchasing the bright, happy,

carefree world that comes with it. By *branding* its product in such a way, it becomes easier to *market* it to the masses.

There are multiple interpretations of city branding, such as: “the network of association in the consumers’ mind based on the visual, verbal, and behavioral expression of a place, which is embodied through the aims, communications, values, and the general culture of the place’s stakeholders” (Zenker & Braun, 2010, p.3), or the basis “for developing policy to pursue economic development and... a conduit for city residents to identify with their city” (Kavaratzis, 2004, p. 58). For the sake of this paper, a more fleshed out definition from Kavaratzis (2008) will be in use:

City branding centres on people’s perceptions and images and puts them in the heart of orchestrated activities, designed to shape the city and its future.

Managing the city’s brand becomes the attempt to influence and treat those mental maps in a way favourable to the city’s circumstances and further needs for economic and social development. (p. 10)

When considering the practice of creating and managing a brand for a city, it is important to understand the involvement of different stakeholders, or those who have a vested interest in the brand or who will be affected by the brand (Maheshwari et al, 2014). While specific stakeholders can vary from city to city, some examples of stakeholders include local governments who manage the brand, potential investors who may be drawn in by the brand, tourists who may visit the city, current economic ventures already functioning in the city, and residents of the city. Even if someone were to be unfamiliar with the academic definition of city branding, they would probably be familiar with some of its outcomes, or the imagery, or at least the slogans adopted by cities, such as “I, Amsterdam,” “Shanghai, Let’s Meet!” or “Be Berlin.”

In the past, the process of developing a brand was one rooted in government development and implementation, with residents' role as stakeholders being largely underrepresented in the process of brand creation (Eshuis & Edwards, 2013). Concerns surrounding the lack of input from those who are so deeply rooted in the city and who will be largely impacted by changes or developments in the city led to another evolution in branding: participatory branding. Rather than a top down approach to brand development, in participatory branding, residents are consulted about both the formation of the brand and the values behind it through an interactive process that allows for resident input (Eshuis et al., 2014). Another reason for this shift is the question of legitimacy that can arise from a non-participatory framework; government officials are crafting an image of a city without consulting those who live there: their constituents (Eshuis & Edwards, 2013). When citizens have a larger role in shaping the projected brand for their city, it carries a stronger degree of legitimacy for stakeholders, encouraging potential investors to consider bringing their resources and business to a city (Eshuis and Edwards, 2013).

A positive consequence of increased levels of participation in brand making is an increased sense of ownership felt amongst residents towards a brand (Campelo et al., 2013). An example of this is outlined in a 2014 study on participatory branding conducted by researchers Jasper Eshuis, Eruk Hans Klijn, and Erik Braun entitled "Place marketing and citizen participation: branding as strategy to address the emotional dimension in policy making?" (2014). In their study, the authors cite Katendrecht, a village in the Netherlands as an example of participatory branding, as residents were able to directly speak with brand developers to explain the values they

wanted to see in a new brand for their village. Overall, the branding campaign was a success, and the authors make the point that part of this success was because

The citizens' association and entrepreneurs of Katendrecht support the brand and the branding campaign, and they use elements of it on their websites or in other communications. Thus they reproduce and strengthen the brand. The wide endorsement of the brand makes it easier for the local officials and politicians to include the ideas behind the brand..." (Eshuis et al., 2014, pp. 165-166)

This "wide endorsement" by residents offers a positive side effect of participatory branding for implementation of the brand: Fewer resources need to be spent on integrating a brand into a town if citizens are excited and already utilize the brand on their own initiative, creating a net positive from a public policy perspective. It can also strengthen the brand by demonstrating a united vision amongst residents and the local government. If there were a discrepancy between what residents experienced and what tourists and investors saw if they were to come to a city, there may be further questions about the authenticity of the brand and the city. Another strength of participatory branding is that overall residential satisfaction with a brand can also strengthen the power of a brand (Insch & Florek, 2008). A 2008 study by Inch and Florek on residents' satisfaction with their city's brand concluded that "an unhappy, dissatisfied resident can harm the brand image of the city held by visitors and potentially other residents through negative word-of-mouth" (p. 146). Of course, resident *satisfaction* holds many components not related to city branding. However, this study further strengthens the notion that a disconnect between what is promised to residents, who are also stakeholders, and what is delivered to stakeholders can have a role in the success of a brand.

## **Sense of Place Overview**

A key component of understanding how residents perceive their city is understanding sense of place, and to further see the role it naturally plays in participatory city branding. Similar to city branding, there are a variety of definitions that can be used when discussing sense of place. One such definition comes from Schumaker and Taylor who describe a “person–place bond that evolves from specifiable conditions of place and characteristics of people.” (Schumaker & Taylor, 1983 p. 223). Stedman (2003, p.671) writes that sense of place is the coming together of “physical environment, human behavior, and social and psychological processes.” In this paper, the definition that will be adopted comes from Yi-fu Tuan: “In experience, the meaning of space often merges with that of place. “Space” is more abstract than “place.” What begins as undifferentiated space becomes place as we get to know it better and endow it with value.” (Tuan, 1977, p. 6). It should also be noted that these experiences that inform how one constructs a sense of place happens more than just in passing, and meaning and sense of place in human-place relationships are constructed over a period of time (Tuan, 1975).

This definition from Tuan automatically carries meaning for participatory frameworks in city branding. Considering residents’ sense of place for branding can be more than just an obligation for legitimacy; if a city were following Kavaratzis’ 2008 definition of branding as centering “on people’s perceptions and images,” (p. 10) focusing on residents’ sense of place could create a stronger brand. Of course, another group, such as tourists, may also construct a sense of place with a city they visit. However, in line with Tuan’s (1975) thinking, sense of place is constructed over a period of time, and, while tourists and other visitors can certainly develop a sense of place

towards a location, there is an inherent *depth* that comes with living in a place— a resident’s sense of place will be stronger and more complex. Therefore, when considering the high levels of residential input required to undertake participatory branding, it is only natural that a sense of place is integrated into the practice; they are the ones who create the experiences that transform spaces into places.

Campelo, Aitken, Thyne, and Gnoth (2013) note that

“destination branding should begin by understanding sense of place as experienced by local residents, and the importance of positioning their voices at the heart of the branding strategy... those who are represented by the brand and for whom its success is critical.” (Campelo et al., 2013, p. 162).

Referencing the literature on branding, this notion of “critical success” is another vital reason to center the lived experiences of residents in brand creation. While place branding is more holistic than place marketing, it is still the goal of cities to create this picture of themselves for *outside* consumption and to encourage development. As a result, residents and the local economy should naturally be the main benefactors of this. Creating strong brands through residents’ sense of place is more than morality or representation— it builds a stronger brand and, hopefully, economic growth that is felt by all.

Campelo et al (2013) also argue that the construction of sense of place is “primarily determined by the meanings given to it by those whose place it is... While this presents a challenge of representation and inclusivity for branding, its greater authenticity is more likely to lead to a stronger sense of brand ownership.” (Campelo et al., 2013, p. 154). Incorporating participatory frameworks into city branding can become a logistical nightmare, but academics argue that the benefits outweigh the costs

(Campelo et al., 2013). A 2017 case study on sense of place and branding in cities along the coast of France further demonstrated that “through the sense of place concept, residents who were not associated with the place brand development approach became more involved. First, their testimonies helped to build the sense of place... Second, the feedback of sense of place to the residents is an opportunity for interaction and a means of spreading greater awareness [of the brand]” (Francois-Lecompte et al., 2017, pp. 413-414). This ties back to Eshuis, Kljirn, and Braun (2014) and the idea that awareness and acceptance of a brand encourages residents to use it on their own without as much implementation from the government, demonstrating the stronger sense of ownership Campelo et al. see as the positive benefit of participatory branding.

### **Seoul Branding History: Setting the Stage**

Beyond the world of academia, Seoul’s participatory framework was also a new approach for the city itself. Seoul first endeavored to establish its brand in 2002, under Mayor Lee Myung-bak. This is when the first slogan “Hi, Seoul” was selected for the city. City branding was still a relatively new practice on a global scale, but what pushed Seoul to formulate its brand was the need to prepare for the 2002 soccer World Cup (Joo & Seo, 2017). Born out of the desire to present Seoul in the best light from an outsider’s perspective, branding efforts were framed with the goal of advertising Seoul in the most strategic way possible to the rest of the world rather than to be a reflection of the city itself (Lee, 2014). There were, however, some limited ways in which residents of the city could get involved in the branding process. Similar to how the process would later go in 2015, the city held a submission contest for the new slogan, with 8,064 responses, but submissions of slogan ideas were the extent of the public participation, and both the

development and implementation of the brand were mainly conducted by the Seoul Metropolitan Government or contracted private experts (SMG, 2017, p. 116).

Branding in Seoul further evolved in 2006 with the election of Mayor Oh-Sehoon. Under him, the city moved towards branding Seoul as “The Design City.” The original tagline of “Hi, Seoul” was kept as the slogan, but this new brand effort was focused on changing the perceived identity of Seoul to being “The Design City,” transforming the city into the “design” capital of the world (Lee, 2014). Traditionally, when writing a paper such as this one, the next step would be to further flesh out or clarify the term “design;” however, one of the main failures of this strategy is that on both the development and implementation scale, a definition of “design city” was never established by the Seoul Metropolitan Government (Lee, 2014). The overall process was rooted in top down thinking and the brand was developed behind closed doors (Joo & Seo, 2017). As a result, the “Design City” strategy lacked clear leadership and communication— a shortcoming that trickled down the implementation pipeline. The poor execution of these ideas has led many academics and policymakers to look back on this period of branding as a failure (Lee, 2014). An example of how this weak branding manifested itself is the 2008 Seoul Design Olympiad. When reflecting on the planning for this event, it became clear that no one managing the event had a clear idea of what “design” meant. With so much room for personal interpretation in a project that aimed to promote a single message, the event was not able to come to fruition the way organizers thought it would, and was poorly organized while also suffering from poor marketing (Lee, 2014). This lukewarm reception to the “design city” went beyond the Design Olympiad. In reflecting on this period of branding, it was concluded that “initiatives born of the ‘design city’ era” were “rejected by locals and ignored by visitors”



(Lee, 2014, p.14). It becomes clear that a lack of unity and understanding behind the branding went beyond government officials, it also impacted the way the brand was perceived by residents and tourists.

The public reaction to the branding strategies of two previous administrations of Lee Myung-bak and Oh Se-hoon was neatly summed as: “For ordinary citizens in Seoul, both mayors’ branding projects appeared similar to the “growth-first” strategies that had previously shaped Seoul’s development” (Joo & Seo, 2017, p. 7). Joo & Seo (2017) imply that these economic “growth first” put people and quality of life second behind potential economic gains. It is clear that neither of these eras of branding held the role of citizens as stakeholders in much regard.

In 2011 with the election of current mayor, Park Won-soon, the rhetoric around Seoul’s governance, and subsequently its branding, changed again. When running for the position of mayor, Park’s campaign slogan was “citizens are the mayor,” which embodied his platform to break from the past and “promote a ‘human-centered city,’” (p. 7). This rhetoric of being a mayor of the people set the stage for the Seoul City Brand development process that began in August of 2014 and explains the reason for the shift toward highly interactive participatory branding strategies when none had existed like this before. The brand that will define his era of governance is I • SEOUL • U, as seen in Image 1.



*Image 1: I · SEOUL · U official brand image (SMG, 2017, title page)*

## **An Overview of *Seoul Brand Story* and Seoul's Branding Process**

In August of 2014, the city government of Seoul announced that it was time to create a new brand for the city. Its rationale for changing the brand from former mayor's Oh Se-hoon's "design city" branding and the 2002 "Hi Seoul" logo was that "existing brands and slogans [of Seoul] selected from public participation involved two issues. One was a restriction in methodology limiting civil participation and the other was the difficulty in expressing Seoul's past, present, and future adequately" (SMG, 2017, p. 19).

As previously mentioned, there are multiple definitions of city branding, and the Seoul Metropolitan Government had their own that served as the backbone of its branding formation:

[a city brand] expresses how a city thinks about itself, and how it wants to present itself to its citizens and the world. Our goal has been to show that Seoul is a city that cares about the people living in it, and to communicate how it wants visitors to experience its many attractions and sights. (p. 5).

Deviating slightly from the Kavaratzis (2008) definition, the process's guiding document established that this new brand would also take into account citizen perceptions of the city, setting up the branding process to naturally lend itself to inclusive practices.

In the construction of the brand, several key players held decision making power. The first group was the Seoul Brand Promotion Committee (SBPC). This committee was formed by the government and consisted of twenty-five experts in fields relevant to branding, i.e. communications, product and city branding, Korean culture, etc. (p. 72). The second group was the Seoul Brand Citizen Ambassadors (SBCA). This group of

residents was sought out via an open application process, and the 245 members served as the in-meeting decision-making representatives for Seoul's residents. Specifically, they were involved in the talkbacks "Our Seoul Story," the 1st - 3rd Citizen Town Hall Meeting, keyword and slogan filtering, and the "1,000 Person Meeting". The age of this group ranged from teenagers to those above the age of 65 (p. 73), which is especially noteworthy as about a tenth of Seoul's population is over 65 (Seoul Statistics Service, 2019). There is little information available in *Seoul Brand Story* as to how members were selected. The third group was Everyone's Seoul, another group of experts, but this group of 96 members was volunteer based. They focused on the implementation of public projects and campaigns and tried to increase public awareness of the branding process (SMG, 2017, pp. 75-76). The fourth and fifth groups were third-party researchers from *The Seoul Institute*, who handled data collection; *Metabranding*, who handled data analysis; and *Coordinating Dreams & Reality* (CDR), who handled design and presentation (p. 79). The Seoul Metropolitan Government selected members of the Seoul Brand Promotion Committee, which had a presence in promoting keyword research and online questions, selecting keywords, attending select town hall meetings, and organizing the final reveal festival for the winning brand (SMG, 2016, p. 9, p.; SMG, 2017, p. 15). The general public was consulted on their thoughts of Seoul, shaping keyword creation and discussion, providing slogan submissions, and voting on the final brand selection. Finally, there were the members of the "1,000 person meeting," representing the general public at the final round of voting in person at the final brand selection festival that was held on October 28th. While not made clear, it seems like these 1,000 members of the public could sign up to attend the meeting and vote on the behalf of the rest of Seoul after hearing the final presentations of the brand choices.

Members of the public were enticed to apply for a spot at this festival through performances by popular k-pop artists before the final presentations began (SMG, 2017 pp. 131-132).

The process of brand development had five key steps. The first step consisted of projects that were about public outreach and gathering data on keywords that would serve as the guiding values behind constructing the final brand. Such projects included the talkback series “Our Seoul Story,” public survey events, and online comment games. “Our Seoul Story” took place every Friday from February 27th, 2015 to May 8th, 2015 and consisted of a series of short lectures from experts, professors, and industry figures, on eleven different Seoul-centric topics<sup>2</sup>, with the SBICA in attendance as the audience. (p. 86). After the lectures, there was a presentation by a citizen brand ambassador on their personal relationship with that meeting’s topic, and an open, unstructured conversation with the rest of the audience on the subject (p. 80). Also in attendance were members of Metadata, who noted recurring words and points of conversation for later analysis and formation into the initial batch of keywords. The public survey events consisted of canvas boards in public areas with questions about Seoul for passersby to answer (p. 87) and online SNS<sup>3</sup> comment games consisting of social media prompts posted by the Seoul Metropolitan Government to get members of the public to answer questions about Seoul (p. 90).

The second step of the branding process consisted of expert analysis. Here, Metadata was presented with the data provided by the Seoul Institute from “Our Seoul

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<sup>2</sup> Themes: “Seoul’s mountains and rivers, capital city Seoul, squares of Seoul, markets of Seoul, songs for Seoul, flavors of Seoul, culture of Seoul, streets of Seoul, Seoul in the world, world in Seoul and future city, Seoul for our children” (SMG, 2017, pg. 86).

<sup>3</sup> Social Networking System

Story,” the public events, and online comment games. After analyzing the data provided, CDR created a list of potential keywords to be presented at a series of meetings where citizens narrowed down the choices presented to them (p. 93), or the third step. These keyword filtering meetings were attended by SBCA, government representatives, and the SBPC. It took two meetings, with more expert refining between the two, to settle on the three keywords: coexistence, passion, relaxation (p. 46).

The fourth phase of brand development was to choose a slogan and brand image based on the keywords. This aspect of the development was turned over to *all* citizens in an online contest rather than just the SBCA. In total, 16,147 slogan submissions were amassed (p. 46). These ideas could be either submitted online or in person (p. 105). Efforts were made to reach out directly to underrepresented areas of Seoul through a program entitled “Contest Delivered to Your Door.” Here, representatives of the volunteer group “Everyone’s Seoul” visited three nursing homes, six organizations for the disabled residents of Seoul, six schools, a youth center, the National Club of Geography Teachers, and a center for multicultural families to get ideas for the slogan directly from these members of the public (p. 110). There is no specific figure given to reflect the number of responses gathered from this program. From all of the submitted ideas, similar to the keyword process, submissions were passed back and forth between experts and SBCA, SBPC, and government representatives, until the three remaining slogans were: I • SEOUL • U, SEOULMATES, and SEOULING (pp. 122-127).

In the final stage, these three ideas were taken to the public (p. 130). In the first stage of the voting, the public had access to an online vote that lasted from October 8th until October 26th of 2015. In this selection period, any member of the public could select their favorite slogan. The goal established for this period was to receive 100,000

online votes, or 1% of the population, which was exceeded by 34,747 more responses than anticipated, gathering responses from 1.4% of the population. This portion of the vote weighed in at 50% (p. 130). On October 28th, the next round of selection commenced. Here, the city sponsored a public presentation where branding experts from CDR created presentations for the top three slogans to be given to the audience (p. 79).

This audience, also referred to as the “1,000 person meeting”, were members of the public invited specifically to represent the larger demographics of Seoul; other members of the public were allowed to attend but not vote (p. 133). Also in attendance were nine industry experts. Voting would commence after presentations were delivered for each option. The final breakdown of the vote can be seen in Figure 2. It should be noted that while throughout the document the “1,000 person meeting” is referenced several times, as is the presence of 1000 live voters, the live vote totals are shown to be 1,140. In the *Seoul Brand Story*, there is no explanation given for this numerical discrepancy.

Classification (Reflection rate)	Preliminary civil voting (50%)	1,000–Person Meeting		Total
		Civil panel group (25%)	Expert examiners (25%)	
<b>I. SEOUL.U</b> 나와 너의 서울	36.5 (49,189 people)	59.8 (682 people)	100 (9 people)	58.21%
서울은 진행형 <b>seouling</b>	23.7 (31,933 people)	19.8 (226 people)	0	16.81%
<b>SEOULMATE</b> 나의 친구 서울	39.8 (53,625 people)	20.4 (232 people)	0	24.99%
Number of voters	134,747 people	1,140 people	9 people	100%

Figure 2: Total Vote Share and Results (SMG, 2017, p. 131)

## **Participatory Branding in *Seoul Brand Story***

From the outset of its branding endeavor, Seoul's government outlined its decision to limit its role in the branding process. This was done, in the words of the *Seoul Brand Story*, because

“if the project were to be affected by the opinions of the current mayor, there would be a risk of the Seoul brand changing with the change of the mayor. To establish a Seoul brand for a century ahead, this project needed to be independent of the Seoul Metropolitan Government.” (p. 15).

As outlined in the overview of the branding process above, the SMG still held certain roles in the process, but most of the power was held by the Seoul Brand Citizen Ambassadors and the Seoul Brand Promotion Committee. Now, it is worth noting again that the SMG was responsible for forming the SBPC (p. 14), and it is unrealistic to assume this was a completely neutral and apolitical process of appointment. Giving up responsibility on paper does not exempt the government from having influence in practice. However, there are still many examples of citizen input and leadership throughout this central branding document.

In *Seoul Brand Story*, it is established that the framework the branding process aimed to follow was the “governance build,” where citizens, government officials, and experts debate and make decisions on a problem in *agreement* (p. 20). Within this framework, it is also discussed that Seoul wants to make a clear departure from branding strategies of the past, not just on a local level but also on a global level: “Previously, cities promoting new policies professed to have civil participation; as of yet, however, citizens have participated in such initiatives as assistants, not leaders.” (p. 16). This is a bold claim to make, but there are some relevant examples of other brands that

come to mind, such as The Netherlands' "I, Amsterdam" campaign. Ideas for this new brand were gathered via resident's online submission, but the submissions were analyzed and vetted solely by a team of experts, and the public had no further input into the campaign (Eshuis et al., 2014). While it may be difficult to say that there was absolutely no other city that had involved citizens as branding leaders in such a way before, Seoul certainly represents a major step for global cities embarking on citizen-led branding projects. The Seoul Metropolitan government may be waxing poetic speaking on the important role of citizens, or that citizens are *leaders*, not assistants, but beyond theory and framework, where did citizens have input into the 2015 branding process?

### The General Public

One way the general public was integrated into the branding process was through preliminary "on-site" events. These events consisted of a series of six blank canvases set up across six different locations in Seoul over a single weekend. At these events, participants were encouraged to write down examples of their attachments to Seoul. Also, public participation was encouraged by the city via online "comment games," where the Seoul Metropolitan Government would use SNS social media to encourage the public to answer questions about what Seoul means to them (SMG, 2017, p. 90). These physical and online events are an example of how the Seoul Institute collected data on keywords that could represent the city and guide the logo and brand image contest directly from Seoul's residents' input.

Aside from collecting responses, onsite events had another benefit for citizens and the branding process: generating awareness. Seoul may go to great lengths in order to boost public participation in its branding process; however, none of this matters if people do not know about their role and power as stakeholders in the city's new brand.



The open canvases in total gathered 3,438 responses (p. 89), or representing about 0.03% of the population, but the number of people who stopped to read the text on the canvases or just observe the event were naturally higher than the number of recorded responses. With the public voting taking place a few months later, events such as this began to make the public aware of the changes the city was undertaking.

Hosting part of the public input online offered some other great advantages when it came to engaging with a wide variety of citizens. Weekend long on-site events can only engage a certain number of people. Also, such events can only be inclusive of people who have the means to be in these areas. It would have been useful to have access to an explanation as to why specific locations were chosen to host the onsite events. These locations, Seoul City Hall, Gwanghwamun Square, Dongdaemun Design Plaza, Hongdae Square, Ewha Women's University and the Myeongdong Arts Theater (p. 89) are all busy spots that got a mix of resident and tourist respondents, but this neglected the areas of Seoul that are less tourist friendly but still hold a high number of residents. The document *does* state that the goal of this event was to go to busy, tourist rich areas, and they did this well with a high number of responses. However, Seoul clearly missed an opportunity by not expanding this program to other parts of the city in order to ensure there was a diversity of residents engaging with these canvases. For example, you would not try to understand New York by only canvassing the Upper East Side and Williamsburg, Brooklyn. Nevertheless, by taking part of its outreach online, certain barriers of physical accessibility were equalized to those with internet access.

Another major area of general public participation was the submission of brand ideas. In line with the notion that ideas *must* be generated by citizens (p. 15), choosing a new brand was based on a submission contest and a public vote. As a guide for brand

creation, the contest outlined that the inspiration for the new brand should be led by the SBCA selected keywords of coexistence, relaxation, and passion. Submissions for the slogan could be presented onsite at Seoul Citizen Hall or online (p. 105). Similar to the online and offline initiatives, such as the open canvases and comment games, this was another good choice to maximize the avenues of participation open to residents of Seoul.

One of the most unique ways that Seoul integrated a participatory framework into its branding process was the “Contest Delivered to Your Door” program. According to the branding document, this in-person survey event was created to “visit those less advantaged, those with limited internet access and places where there were local and international tourists to collect fresh ideas” (p. 105) for the brand. By sending “Everyone’s Seoul” representatives into the spaces where citizens might have a hard time accessing branding initiatives, such as nursing homes or centers for the disabled, the city took several key steps to make sure the widest range of voices were considered in the course of the branding process.

This program is emblematic of strong participatory practices for a few reasons. Outreach to the general public was dependent on either accessibility to specific physical locations or accessibility to the internet. The Seoul Brand Citizen Ambassadors were chosen based on applications and had a serious time commitment associated with the role— it takes a certain type of dedication and free time to be a part of such a volunteer force. By nature, such a task force leaves out people who could not afford to take time off for meetings or who did not have the means to reach the meetings themselves. While it is a good thing to have excited and knowledgeable citizens speaking up in such forums, it is important to take into account the voices that may not be heard simply because they did not know anyone was encouraging them to speak up.

The general public's final role in voting for the top three brand options raises some questions about the implementation of the city's goal of "assistants, not leaders" (p. 15). The breakdown of the vote, as previously mentioned, gave 50% of the vote to the general public, who had eighteen days to cast a vote before the public event on the 28th. There are valid questions to be raised about the decision to give these detailed presentations *after* the general public cast their vote. Before these presentations, I • SEOUL • U was in second place, with 36.5% of the vote, yet they were the clear favorite amongst the public voters and experts on the 28th (p. 146). While it may be because of the sample chosen from the applicants to attend the 1,000 person meeting, there is the probability that these presentations had an impact on the voting choice of those present that day. Even if the general public had hypothetically selected I • SEOUL • U as its first choice without access to expert presentations, it does not make sense to hold back key information on the brand and its meaning from the stakeholders this process claims to be so focused on.

#### Seoul Brand Citizen Ambassadors

The selection of the 245 Seoul Brand Citizen Ambassadors is another reflection of the efforts to make Seoul's branding participatory. As mentioned above, this group is what gave residents an established "place at the table" by granting them decision making power at many steps of the branding process. At the "Our Seoul Story" talkbacks, brand ambassadors were able to follow up on presentations made by experts with their own experiences on a subject (p. 85). This maintains the integrity of the city as a place primarily made up of *people* rather than just an economic wheelhouse. By allowing residents to have an equal share of the floor to speak about their experiences

on a given topic before the group discussion, it further demonstrates a centering of resident input on a topic. They were not there to just reflect on lessons given from someone else, but also on the personal experience of themselves and their neighbors.

These sentiments carried over into the keyword filtering meetings, where SBA, SBPC, and members of the city government came together to select the final keywords. After the final meeting, a participant is quoted as saying

“They say, 'People are born in a city. And the city is created by people.' I didn't understand it better before all presentations [from residents on which keywords to keep] ended. The town hall meeting itself was evidence that we were working out the purpose of this initiative, as we talked to achieve a consensus although we all had different thoughts. In that sense, the meeting was full of meaning to the participants and planners alike” (p. 97).

The citizens involved felt that they were playing an integral process in the creation of the brand. There was a demonstrated sense of ownership within this example of a participatory branding practice, as discussed by Eshuis et al. (2014), as attendees of the meeting seem to have reached a consensus and talked through these topics together.

### **Sense of Place in *Seoul Brand Story***

How exactly then, given the high levels of participatory practices, can a sense of place, as defined by Tuan in 1977, be found in Seoul's branding document? Going in chronological order of the branding process, the ideas generated in the talkbacks “Our Seoul Story ” are responsible for bringing out a discussion of sense of place with the SBCA. In describing the content of the resident presentations the document says that citizens’ “Our Seoul Story” presentations talked about the mountains in their villages,

the legends and personal memories of the mountains” (SMG, 2017, p. 85). Creating a space for these “personal memories” to be shared elevates the sense of place brought to these events. Also, the inclusion of an open discussion after the presentations allowed people’s varying relationships with Seoul to come to light. These open forums also offered the opportunity for brand ambassadors to discuss their relationships with the “Our Seoul Story” topics person to person and construct commonalities between their experiences. In a way, this takes some of the third person analysis out of the question and leaves it to the brand ambassadors to find their own commonalities and identify which of those commonalities between their lived experiences in Seoul are important enough to be included in the creation of the new brand.

The two big public outreach pushes at the beginning of the branding process, the open canvas questions and online comment games, also had lots of space for Seoul’s sense of place to present itself. These outreach initiatives could have easily been structured as a quick five-minute survey, or an online questionnaire. However, the header for the open canvas was simply “You know Seoul well, you are a Seoul expert!” (p. 87) and passersby were asked to write what came to their minds when thinking of Seoul. These types of open-ended questions are pivotal to having a window into what people actually think about their city; the open-ended language removes some bias and incidental barriers that could lead to inaccurate findings. Lived experiences and human interpretations of a city are too complex to put into a neat ten-question, multiple choice survey. Given that people who have lived in a place over a long period of time have a deeper sense of place (Tuan, 1975), it would be incredibly reductive to give any sort of leading questions when trying to identify the guiding images that exist for Seoul. These projects also align with the aforementioned idea that brand development should start

with “understanding sense of place as experienced by local residents” (Campelo et al., 2013, p. 162).

The language of framing the viewer as a Seoul “expert” may also create more unique and sense of place driven responses; it calls upon the viewer to consider things about Seoul that they feel a deep connection to or have a deep knowledge of. As Tuan (1977) notes, this comes down to how residents have endowed Seoul with value in their own, personal way. What have the people of Seoul been experiencing so deeply that they feel they are now an “expert” on the topic? By collecting these deep connections between resident and city, sense of place is again made a component of compiling the list of keywords that will guide the brand generation. The online comment games also asked a similar variety of questions: “We also asked more specific questions about the words that come to your mind when you hear the name, Seoul, such as the sound, color, shape and flavor of Seoul” (SMG, 2017, p. 92). Similar to the notion of a “Seoul expert,” these questions are probing questions to uncover people’s sense of place toward the city. The question is not “What is the sound that overall best represents Seoul?” The question is “What is the sound of Seoul *to you*?”

An example of these uncovered personal meanings integrating themselves into branding can be found through keyword negotiation meetings. Back in one of the “Our Seoul Story” talks, during the post-presentation discussion,

“the audience was asked a question about what area or landscape they would include if they were to write a song for Seoul. One person in the audience answered, “Jeongdong Lookout” located in the Seosomun Seoul City Hall building. It was said the lookout was a place where you can admire the

*coexistence* of tradition and modernity, from the harmony of places and modern skyscrapers” (p. 84).

Later on, one of the final keywords selected was coexistence, and the “official” justification for including the word “coexistence” reads as follows:

“Open to all, no discrimination, real coexistence. It also means that Seoul has different elements in harmony and balance such as palaces and skyscrapers, mountains and rivers and Koreans and people from all over the world... Preserving the heritage and combining it with modern sentiments and sustainable value for the next generation” (p. 99).

While the final explanation for the three selected key words includes other factors, such as diversity, into its justification as a word choice, lines can still be drawn between comments and the memories of others to the final guiding keywords that shaped that brand. Rather than just having “talks” for the appearance of public participation, this demonstrates how SBCA stories were factored into keyword filtering discussions. When it comes to such participatory practices, the question is about *agreeing* on the story to tell, not necessarily telling every story. This further supports the idea, keeping in the example of coexistence, that residents showed favor towards selecting ideas that came from their own experiences: they saw their own experiences mirrored in “coexistence,” and then further thought it could be a word to describe Seoul to the world. When examining participant testimonials from the final keyword meetings, the notion that sense of place was a factor in guiding the Seoul Brand Citizen Ambassadors is further strengthened: “We talked about Seoul with various stories and expressions from our diverse personal experience, but soon realized our stories are essentially one. The new possibility created by Seoul, a city of diversity well represented the present progress of

Seoul.” (p. 97). There are interesting parallels here to other case studies of participatory branding, such as the aforementioned branding study on cities in coastal France. There, researchers noted the importance of testimonials when building sense of place into place branding (Francois-Lecompte et al., 2017). Here, sense of place is present in resident testimonials and therefore is a factor in decision making rationale.

While not necessarily part of the branding creation framework, it is worth taking a minute to observe how the winning brand, I·SEOUL·U furthers the notion that sense of place is compatible with branding efforts. In the literature on sense of place and place branding, Campelo et. al (2013) acknowledge that participatory place branding, while having several challenges, leads to stronger brand ownership. With its new brand, Seoul took the notion of public brand ownership quite literally and decided to structure the new brand as being open-source:

“First, it is to open the guidelines and rights to use so as to improve the application of the developed Seoul brand. Second, it is to share it so that the citizens can come up with ideas for its use. Third, it is to spread the brand and gain awareness so that good applications are officially valued. The key to open source strategy is to let ‘the citizens improve the application of the brand that they have created on their own” (SMG, 2017, p. 192).

In this description of the newly open source brand, it is referenced that this is because I·SEOUL·U was a brand they created on their own. In another government publication, the *Seoul Brand Book*, citizens, companies, and nonprofits are encouraged to use the branding image to combine their own slogans and logos with official brand imagery (SMG, 2016). The document discusses brand communication and brand usage for the



public and organizations. Figures 3, 4, and 5 are all examples from *Seoul Brand Book* of how the brand image for I·SEOUL·U translates to non-governmental use.



*Figure 3: Example of Company Logo + Brand (p. 41)*



*Figure 4: Example of Sports Logo + Brand ( p. 35)*



*Figure 5: Example of Non Profit Logo + Brand (p. 43)*

Acquiring the rights to the brand is an online process that anyone can access, and it allows the brand to be easily integrated into already existing businesses and organizations: much of the literature on participatory branding supports the rationale behind encouraging the public use and marketing of the brand, (Edwards & Ehuis, 2013; Francois-Lecompte et. al, 2013, Campelo et al., 2013; Eshuis et al., 2014). The open source application of the brand also highlights the sense of place that was built into

I·SEOUL·U. In her slogan application, the citizen who proposed the brand wrote “I wanted my idea to represent the Seoul that each of us thought of, although it was just a name. That's how I thought of 'I·SEOUL·U' 'SEOUL' can be replaced by many other words, like love, enjoy or miss,” (SMG, 2017, p. 123). Each person being able to adapt the slogan to the version of Seoul that is true for them is emblematic of the idea that an individual creates a sense of place through their own interactions and experiences. Even if a resident of Seoul was not a brand ambassador, a voting member of the general public, or selected for the 1,000 person meeting, they still have the opportunity to have some autonomy over brand usage and what it can mean for them. In capturing the perceptions of what makes Seoul *Seoul*, the branding process heavily relied on residents’ sense of place to guide each step of the way, and ironically enough it engendered a brand that in its use even further puts citizens first.

## **Conclusion**

Seoul, South Korea’s 2014-2015 branding creation was a process that took meaningful steps to integrate participatory frameworks that included residents and harnessed their sense of place to establish a new city brand. The ways in which the process harnessed the residents’ ideas of “sense of place” was commendable. However, despite the multi-stage process that took place over several months, only 1.4% of Seoul’s population voted in the final online voting, which is quite low in terms of levels of total citizen participation.

Sense of place has proven integral to creating a strong brand (Campelo et al., 2013, Francois-Lecompte et al., 2017), and Seoul’s branding process successfully sought out the sense of place that its residents have with their city. The open canvas events,

online comment games, and “Our Seoul Story” events all took place with the intention of extracting what residents felt was important about their city. Allowing the SBCA to be so heavily involved in debating and filtering the *Metabranding* generated keywords also allowed for residents to use their sense of place to evaluate and make decisions at different stages of the branding process.

While the integration of sense of place into the process was a success, participation levels of the resident population were certainly not. Only 1.4% of the population voted on the final slogan. In any future branding efforts the city undertakes, or in any future efforts made by other cities using Seoul’s model, the aim should be for a much higher percentage of public participation throughout the entirety of the branding process. Before the final vote, promotion was done using popular music figures for promotional videos and the parodying of popular television shows (SMG, 2017, p. 132), but clearly this still had a limited reach when considering the total population of the city. In the future, Seoul and any cities following its example should invest resources into investigating what it takes to make more residents excited about the branding process. A perfect participatory framework does not matter if there are only relatively few people participating to begin with. This is where it would have been particularly helpful to have more specific data on *who* voted on Seoul’s final slogan. By understanding who was not engaged in the branding process, new strategies can better target public participation.

Another discrepancy that appears in Seoul’s execution of a participatory branding process is evident when considering that “SEOULMATE” won the vote of the general public, but lost the final tally after the presentations were given by the experts (SMG, 2017 p. 130). It is concerning to see how Seoul took so many strong actions to incorporate residents into its brand creation while holding back these presentations for

a limited number of voters. Unlike some of the inherent difficulties that come with city branding, it seems like this was a significant oversight that could have been addressed with a simple solution. Branding literature concludes that when there are a high number of stakeholders in brand development, keeping all stakeholders educated on the processes and the brand is very important (Francois-Lecompte et al., 2017), something the city failed to do here. This does not negate the other positive projects Seoul took on in the rest of the process, but it is important to call out shortcomings where they exist. In the future, it may be more relevant to host such a festival before the general public votes to raise awareness of the voting process and simultaneously have presentations that online voters can go back and reference when selecting their slogan.

Also, there could have been greater transparency in how the different committees in the branding process were selected. For example, with the Seoul Brand Citizen Ambassadors, the general Seoul population did not get to choose the 245 members of the group; that responsibility fell on the government and SBPC (SMG, 2017, p. 25). Citizens have no say in the selection of those chosen to make decisions on their behalf. The Seoul Brand Promotion Committee was another major decision-making body that was formed by the government. Without understanding how these committees were formed, the idea of “citizen leaders” (p. 15) that Seoul promotes in *Seoul Brand Story* comes into question. In such a large city, there realistically must be concessions between putting everything to a public vote and utilizing expert knowledge. It would not have been effective to put all 245 brand ambassadors and twenty-five SBPC members to a public vote. However, increased transparency on how these different groups were formed would allow the public to be aware of who was voting on their behalf and why, providing some accountability to the SMG in this process.

While this paper examined the process of Seoul's brand development rather than the actual outcome and implementation, it is interesting to note that I • SEOUL • U received very mixed reviews from the public and the media (p. 148). It engendered a lot of criticism and parodies, with people being critical of the use of English in the slogan and the formatting of the slogan (p. 148). If the point of participatory branding is to create a stronger sense of ownership and citizen involvement in a brand, does this mean that the process was a failure since so many disapproved? Not necessarily; it should rather be framed as a lesson. The construction of a sense of place for one's hometown is deeply personal; therefore, when residents' individual connections and experiences are used to create a brand, there will always be ideas and perspectives that get left behind. As has been previously stated, the goal is to agree on the story that is told, not necessarily telling every story. There is also precedence for the initial public skepticism of a new brand. It should be noted that many now internationally recognizable brands, such as "I ♥ New York" or "I, Amsterdam" also received frosty greetings from residents of their respective cities (p. 162). Change is always an adjustment. A critical reception does not negate the importance of citizen-led branding, especially since this was the first time the city had endeavored on such a project.

In the fall out of adjusting to the brand, one potentially positive outcome of this negative reception is increased public participation in the future if such an event were to occur again. It would be easy for the Seoul Metropolitan Government to frame future branding exercises as: you don't like Seoul's old slogan? Next time, get in on the ground floor and have your voice heard! Engage with online question games, submit a slogan you think is better than I • SEOUL • U, vote!

This paper has set out to evaluate the different participatory projects implemented by the various committees involved in Seoul's brand, and how the geographic concept "sense of place" fits into these projects and the overall branding process. However, something for consideration is that true civic participation may not have been the central goal of the SMG. Policies on paper sometimes look very different when implemented, and with the lack of transparency there are questions to be asked about what the real goals of Seoul's branding might have been beyond what is written in *Seoul Brand Story*. If the SMG had a heavy hand in constructing the SBPC and SBCA, it would not be difficult for there to be a correlation between the brand and other goals held by the city. However, given the time and materials available that was not something that could be considered in this paper.

Large scale participatory frameworks can be hard to integrate into a traditionally closed-off process, but just because something is hard does not mean that it is not worth doing. Understanding residents' sense of place is a natural consequence of involving residents in the promotion of their hometown. Seoul's branding process was not perfect; there could have been more transparency in the selection of the SBPC, publicly established criteria for the ambassadors beyond "age," and the voting process could have been made more equitable for the general public. However, through programs such as "Our Seoul Story," open canvases and online comment games, citizen-led keyword generation and filtering, public branding submissions, and, a final vote where public opinion was weighed 75%, Seoul offers a solid model for other cities to integrate participatory frameworks into their future city brands.

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