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Patterns of place promotion, place marketing and/or place branding in Dutch municipalities

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Abstract This paper analyses the different degrees to which place promotion, marketing and branding policies are institutionalised, based on a relatively straightforward and generally applicable methodology in order to stimulate international comparative research in the field. A consensus has emerged over the last decades among scholars and practitioners on the growing importance of place promotion, place marketing and place branding for local authorities. However, few comparative studies have paid specific attention to the extent to which local authorities have applied these instruments. In addition, to our knowledge, no comprehensive studies exist that cover all local authorities within a specific country. We aim to fill this gap. This paper systematically compares how in Dutch municipalities place promotion, place marketing and/or place branding is organised. It also analyses the reasons behind these differences in the institutionalisation of place promotion, marketing and branding using regression and cluster analyses of some key statistical characteristics of Dutch municipalities. The results of these analyses are clearly interpretable, which is a first indication of the validity of our relatively straightforward classification system to determine the popularity and institutionalisation of place promotion, place marketing and/or place branding by local authorities. As this classification is designed to be applicable to other studies, it hopefully stimulates further comparative research within and between national contexts. Based on a simple content analysis of automatically selected online resources, a comprehensive dataset was compiled that includes all 390 Dutch municipalities as of January 1st, 2016. The municipalities have been classified based on whether or not place promotion, place marketing and/or place branding has been a recent local policy issue, whether there is an identifiable, mandated entity responsible for the application of these instruments, and, if so, whether or not such an entity is internally or externally organised (viewed from the vantage point of the municipal organisations). Finally, we have classified the extent to which these mandated entities have an integrated mandate to employ these instruments towards more than one market segment (e.g., residents, businesses/investments, tourists/visitors). This paper presents one of the first comprehensive analyses on the national level of the (spatial) patterns of the popularity and institutionalisation of place promotion, place marketing and/or place branding by local authorities. Additionally, detailed analyses and combinations with official data from Statistics Netherlands and the Netherlands Environmental Assessment Agency enabled us to determine to what extent certain spatial attributes produce these (spatial) patterns: such as population size, population development and the dependence on tourism for the local economy.

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Introduction

We do not know for sure whether place promotion, place marketing and place branding are truly gaining in world-wide popularity, but the impression that this is the case has certainly gained traction in the last decades. As a consequence, the amount of research concerned with these concepts has increased dramatically. We are, however, under the impression that the vast majority of academic studies fall into one of the following three categories: (1) explorative attempts at generalisation based upon empirical observations drawn from case studies with single or very few cases; (2) theoretical frameworks developed by transferring or (hopefully) translating concepts from the disciplines of marketing-, communication-, business-, tourism- or management-studies; or (3) methodological papers aimed at effect measurement using either quantitative or qualitative methods. In other words: there are very few studies presenting comprehensive data allowing for comparisons based on a large number of cases.

After having analysed 217 scientific studies, Lucarelli and Berg (2011, p. 14) wrote "[…] *depending on the scientific and ontological perspective chosen, it could either be argued that the empirical foundation of the domain is largely based on anecdotic evidence with few comparative studies […], or that the research domain is founded on rich auto-ethnographic data, often collected in close collaborative relationship with the city.*" Gertner (2011b, p. 96) concluded: "*Between 1990 and 2009, the 'place marketing' and 'place branding' literature was predominantly qualitative, descriptive or based on disparate and unique case studies and marketing campaigns carried out by places.*" A more recent, exhaustive review of 1,172 publications by Vuignier (2016) arrives at a similar conclusion. These findings are also backed by other literature reviews such as those published by Green et al. (2016), Acharya and Rahman (2016), Lucarelli and Brorström (2013), Gertner (2011a), and Hankinson (2010). The need for comparative research incorporating a large number of cases is also increasingly voiced during scientific conferences and in journal editorials (e.g., Zenker and Govers 2016).

It is indeed curious that a topic so inherently comparative does not seem to prompt more comparative research. Inspired by the critical conclusions from the above-referenced literature reviews, we set out to create a comprehensive dataset that would allow for further comparative analysis. In this paper, we present our method step-by-step such as to provide maximum transparency and allow other researchers to follow and possibly apply the steps themselves. We decided to build the dataset with the purpose of illuminating the popularity and institutionalisation of place promotion, place marketing and/or place branding by local authorities in the Netherlands. As

geographers, we were particularly interested in whether we would be able to observe spatial patterns in the generated data. Would we for example observe major differences between peripheral regions and core regions? Would larger cities have a different approach to institutionalisation as compared to smaller cities? Focus on the extent to which differences in spatial attributes between the municipalities generate spatial patterns can provide guidelines for further, in-depth research.

Hence, the research question for this study: *To what extent can we identify (spatial) patterns in the institutionalisation of place promotion, place marketing and/or place branding amongst Dutch municipalities?*

The Netherlands: a tight competitive field

The Netherlands is a densely populated country, with a profound tradition for a competitive approach to local and regional governance. The country is administratively organised in 12 provinces and 390 municipalities (January 1st, 2016)—excluding its overseas territories. Figure 1 shows the four largest cities (G4), 38 mid-sized cities (G32), the built-up areas, and the territorial-administrative borders of both the regional (provinces) and the local (municipalities) authorities. The geographical proximity of these 42 cities emphasises the impression of a state of pronounced inter-urban competition. The Netherlands, therefore, constitutes what we term a tight competitive field. This provides the ideal conditions for a growing popularity of translating instruments such as promotion, marketing and branding to the territorial-administrative arena. In addition, this also creates ideal conditions for policy transfer from one municipality to the other. We believe that this is part of the explanation for why local authorities in the Netherlands have developed such a profound interest in place promotion, place marketing and place branding.

From the early 1980′s onwards, the popularity of these instruments slowly but steadily gained ground. Dutch-based scholars such as Borchert and Buursink (1987), Ashworth and Voogd (1990), Van den Berg et al. (1990) and Buursink (1991) fortunately took a profound interest in the topic early on. Later, scholars like Kavaratzis (2004), Braun (2008), Govers and Go (2009), Hospers (2009, 2011), Ashworth and Kavaratzis (2010), Boisen et al. (2011), Oliveira (2016) and many others have contributed to the body of scientific knowledge from a Dutch-based institution.

In 2009, *Netwerk Citymarketing* was established and *Nederlandse Vereniging voor Citymarketing* in 2011. They both aim to further the professionalisation of the discipline amongst Dutch practitioners. Annual, nation-wide conferences for practitioners—such as *Nationaal Congres voor Citymarketing en Evenementen* (since 2008) and *Dag van*
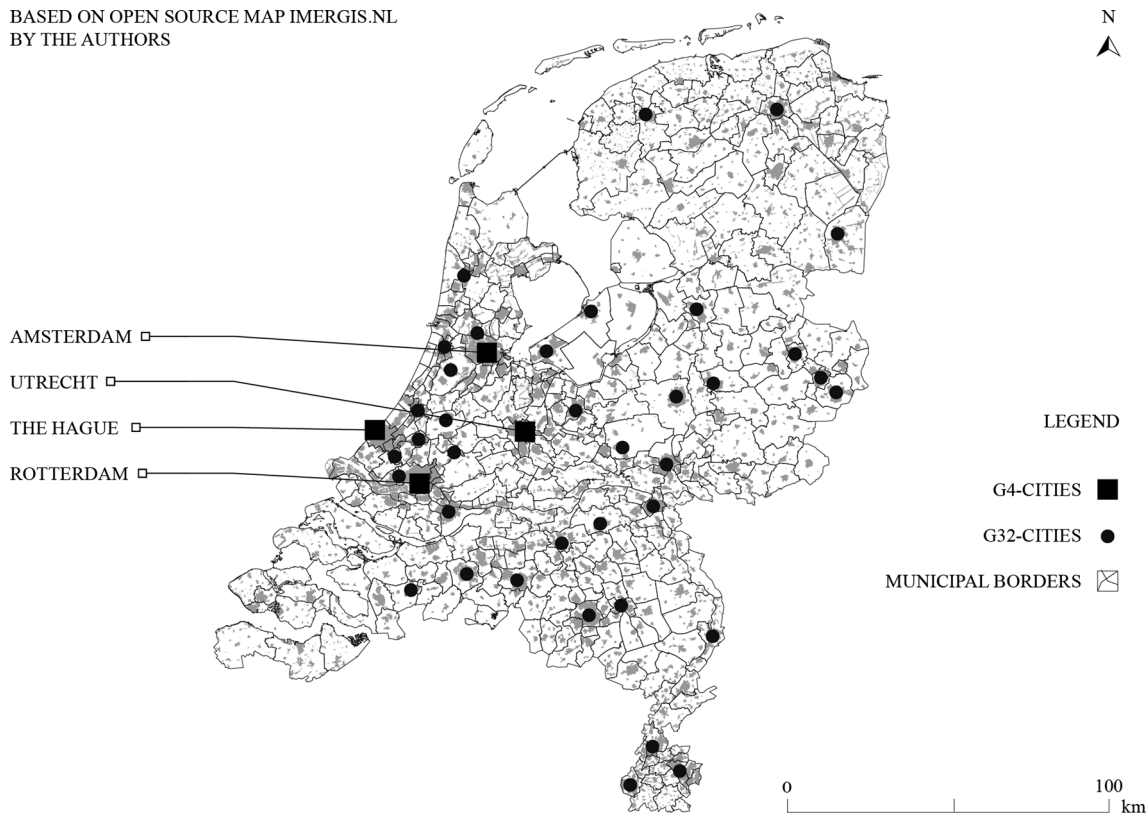
Fig. 1 The Netherlands: a tight competitive field

de Citymarketing (since 2010) further helped secure the recognition of place promotion, place marketing and/or place branding as a more established discipline in the Netherlands. Over the years since, various Dutch consultancies (e.g., *DNA/Respons*, *Berenschot*, *City Result, Bureau Buhrs*) and various interest groups have launched questionnaire-based surveys to gain more insight into the application of these instruments in the Netherlands. From the scientific community, Rotterdam-based researchers regularly carry out a survey amongst around 600 Dutch professionals (Eshuis et al. 2013) to identify which obstacles they are confronted with in their day-to-day practice.

To our knowledge—however—there has never before been a comprehensive study of the popularity and institutionalisation of these instruments encompassing all Dutch municipalities. In addition, we have not identified any such comprehensive study dealing with another country.

Method: five steps measuring institutionalisation

Our aim was to construct a comprehensive dataset including all Dutch municipalities classifying them using the same method of classification. In addition, we wanted the method we used to be replicable both within and outside of the Netherlands, such as to further international comparative

research in the field. To achieve this, we compiled a dataset through a content analysis of all the websites and other online resources produced by the Dutch municipalities. The foremost advantages of this approach are that (1) it increases the comparability of the resulting data, and (2) that manual dataset compilation guaranteed that all 390 Dutch municipalities are included in the dataset.

The primary data in the dataset was compiled by examining a large number of online resources. To identify and select these resources, we made use of Google's Advanced Search function to build two search queries that were run separately from each other: (1) '[name of municipality] AND "[term for place promotion]" OR "[term for place marketing]" OR "[term for place branding]"' and (2) '[name of largest city in the municipality] AND "[term for place promotion]" OR "[term for place marketing]" OR "[term for place branding]".' Next to the websites and online documents that these search queries selected, the official websites of the municipalities and their organizations were given specific attention, using targeted search via Google ('site:') and domain-based search tools offered by the websites themselves.

We are convinced that this method was sufficient to identify whether a municipality actively engages in place promotion, place marketing and/or place branding—especially since the implementation of these instruments

inherently aims to generate a certain level of exposure and attention.

The search queries described in the above were run municipality-by-municipality, province-by-province between April 18th and September 24th, 2016—thereby covering all 390 Dutch municipalities (January 1st, 2016). The data we generated by this manual step-by-step classification was geo-referenced using the standard for spatial data in the Netherlands (GM-codes). This allowed us to join other geo-referenced data from *Statistics Netherlands* and *the Netherlands Environmental Assessment Agency* in our search for patterns emerging from our own data.

We measured the institutionalisation of place promotion, place marketing and place branding in five steps: First of all, we determined the relevant keywords used in the Dutch context. These keywords were used to identify and search through the municipal websites and other online resources for relevant information. Based on the information thus gathered, we were able to determine the institutionalisation of these policies and practices in municipalities in four further analytic steps. The second step of our content analysis was to determine whether place promotion, place marketing and/or place branding has been a recent topic in policy debates. In the third step, we determined if it had a distinct mandated entity. The fourth step determined whether the position of the identified entity was internal or external. The fifth and final step analysed to what extent the place promotion, place marketing and/or place branding integrated different market segments.

These five steps are discussed in more detail below. This enables other researchers to replicate this study, and—perhaps more interestingly—to apply our classification method in other national contexts, which will enable international comparisons.

First step: identifying the terminology of practitioners

The first step was to assess which terminology civil servants, politicians, advisors and scholars commonly use when referring to place promotion, place marketing and place branding in the Netherlands. Identifying the terms that are used within a specific national context is essential, because omitting one or the other will potentially limit the results. Only municipalities with larger cities are likely to employ international terminology, because they oftentimes operate on a more international platform and have international target groups. Insight in the specific national context, a basic knowledge of the discourse and basic language proficiency are therefore essential prerequisites for a study that aims to be comprehensive and include all municipalities in a given country.

In the Netherlands, the term '*citymarketing*' is most commonly used. This is also reflected by the fact that the two most prominent interest groups dealing with this topic in the Netherlands are respectively named '*Netwerk Citymarketing Nederland*' and '*Nederlandse Vereniging voor Citymarketing*'. The term '*stadspromotie*' is a close second, and lately the term '*city branding*' has gained in popularity. In addition, terms referring to other scalar levels are frequently used—e.g., referring to a certain 'region' ('*regiomarketing*', '*regiobranding*'), 'area' ('*gebiedsmarketing*', '*streekmarketing*') and even individual 'villages' ('*dorpspromotie*', '*dorpsmarketing*') and 'islands', ('*eilandmarketing*').

At this step, it is important to note that practitioners often use these terms interchangeably. This results in an interesting research problem because the used terminology neither indicates which instruments are employed nor how they are organised (Boisen et al. 2017). This is also the reason why we did not attempt to distinguish between place promotion, place marketing and place branding in this classification exercise. It would be an interesting topic for further research to analyse the extent to which the conceptual definitions and theoretical frameworks from the scientific literature are applicable to what we observe in practice.

Second step: a policy issue for the local authorities

The second step was to identify whether or not place promotion, place marketing and/or place branding had been a recent topic of policy debate in each of the 390 municipalities. We have chosen to define 'recent' as the period from just before the last municipal elections (March 19th, 2014) until present. Based on the output of the earlier described search queries, the selected websites and documents were investigated for occurrences of the earlier mentioned Dutch terms, and, based on the found texts, we asserted whether these instruments had been a topic of policy debate or not. Although this does not say anything about the extent to which these instruments are institutionalised, it does provide an indication of the popularity of the topic amongst Dutch municipalities.

Third step: the existence of a mandated entity on the municipal level

The third step was to assess whether or not we could identify an entity (a person, a unit, a department or an organisation) that held a formal mandate for the promotion, marketing and/or branding of the municipality in question. We classified an entity as being 'mandated', when the entity in question had indisputably been given the task and responsibility of place promotion, place marketing and/or

place branding by the municipal authorities—or will be given that mandate as of January 1st, 2017 at the latest. In addition, if an entity was identified which only held the mandate for a part of the municipality (for example a certain village), or held a mandate for the regional level—we did not see this as a 'mandated entity on the municipal level'. Likewise, if a municipality had granted its mandate to an entity chiefly operating for another municipality—for example, a neighbouring municipality with a larger city—we did not classify this entity for the municipality in question.

Fourth step: the organisational position of the mandated entity

The fourth step consisted of an assessment of the organisational position of the identified entity in relation to the municipal organisation. We used a simple distinction between 'internal' and 'external' position, where 'internal' refers to entities that are parts of the organisation of the municipal authorities, and 'external' refers to those that are not. In the Dutch context, such internally mandated entities can be organised in many different ways, but as long as they have an internal position they remain under the direct responsibility of elected politicians, whereas externally positioned entities often are a shared responsibility between the municipal organisation and participating third-parties (local/regional and public/private stakeholders). In theory, this means that external entities are more independent of the whims of local government—although, in practice, such entities are still heavily dependent on government subsidies.

Fifth step: integration of multiple market segments

Following Braun's (2008) considerations on the importance of an integrated approach, we chose to include a fifth and final step in our classification: the extent to which the mandate of the identified entity included responsibilities for both residents, business/investments and tourists/visitors. If the mandate explicitly mentioned at least two of these three market segments, we classified the municipality in question as having an integrated approach.

We should point out that we were not capable of asserting to which extent these mandated entities truly addressed more than one market segment in the practice: as a consequence, this classification is solely based on the stipulated mandates and not on de-facto activities.

Results: emerging patterns of place promotion, place marketing and/or place branding

Looking at the thematic map we created based on the dataset (Fig. 2), it becomes evident that place promotion, place marketing and/or place branding has been a recent policy issue in the vast majority of Dutch municipalities (310 of 390; 79.5%). Searching for possible patterns, we observe that no differences between the centre (the provinces of Utrecht, North- and South-Holland) and the periphery (towards the borders of Germany in the East and Belgium in the South) of the country. With regards to the 80 municipalities in which this has not been a recent policy issue, we observe that most of these are covered by activities by one or more entities operating on the regional scale. We have not yet examined this multi-level aspect in further detail.

Based on the data, we can safely conclude that place promotion, place marketing and/or place branding are very popular instruments for local authorities in the Netherlands. Anno 2016, it seems to be more of a rule than an exception that Dutch municipalities occupy themselves with place promotion, place marketing and/or place branding.

The number of municipalities for which we identified a mandated entity is impressive (125 of 390; 32.1%). Contrary to Fig. 2, we observe a clearer spatial pattern emerging in Fig. 3: almost all municipalities with middle-sized or larger cities have established a mandated entity tasked with place promotion, place marketing and/or place branding. In fact, amongst the 50 municipalities with more than 70,000 inhabitants—only five (Hilversum, Heerlen, Leidschendam, Purmerend and Súdwest Fryslân) do not have a mandated entity (10%). To our knowledge, at least Hilversum and Heerlen are in the process of establishing such an entity, although a final decision has not been made at the time of writing. For municipalities with cities of a certain size (> 70,000 inhabitants), having a mandated entity responsible for place promotion, place marketing and/or place branding appears to a certainty, but even amongst the 340 smaller municipalities (< 70,000 inhabitants), 80 have established such an entity.

Looking at the organisational position of the mandated entities, the pattern ceases to be as clear (Fig. 3). Of the G4-municipalities, in the four largest cities in the Netherlands, (Amsterdam, Rotterdam, The Hague and Utrecht), only The Hague has chosen to organise the responsibility internally. In The Hague, several external organisations are responsible for place marketing towards different market segments, whereas the responsibility of the place branding that all of these external organisations should adhere to, rests within the municipal organisation. The other three G4-cities have chosen to organise the responsibility
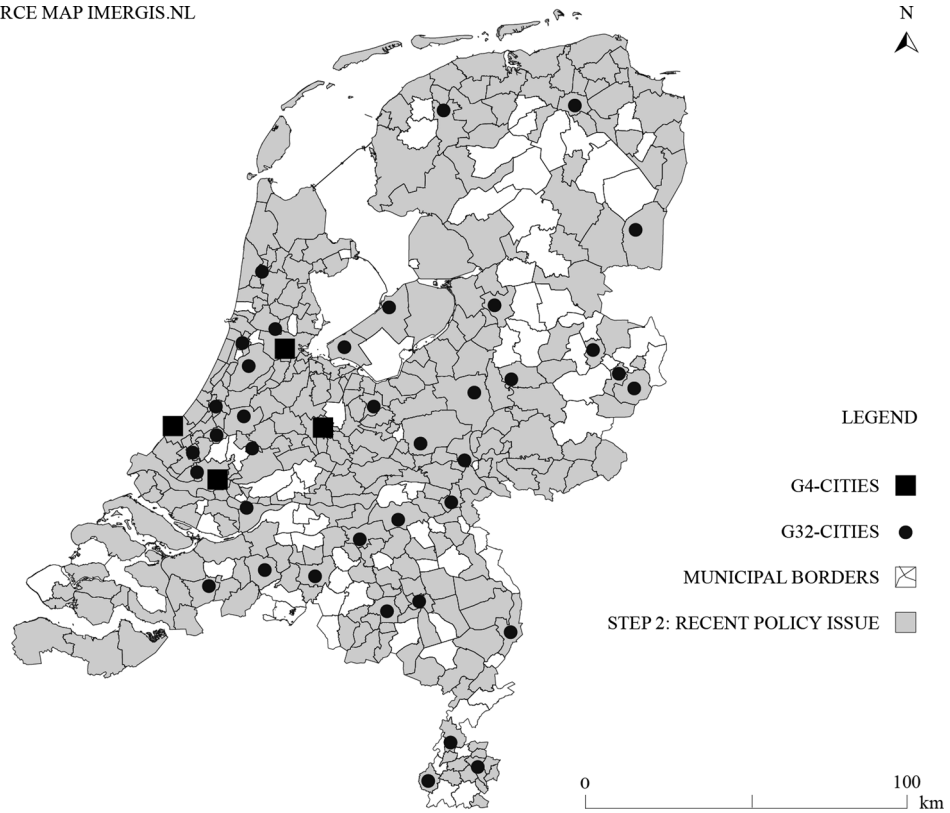
Fig. 2 Place promotion, place marketing and/or place branding as a recent policy issue
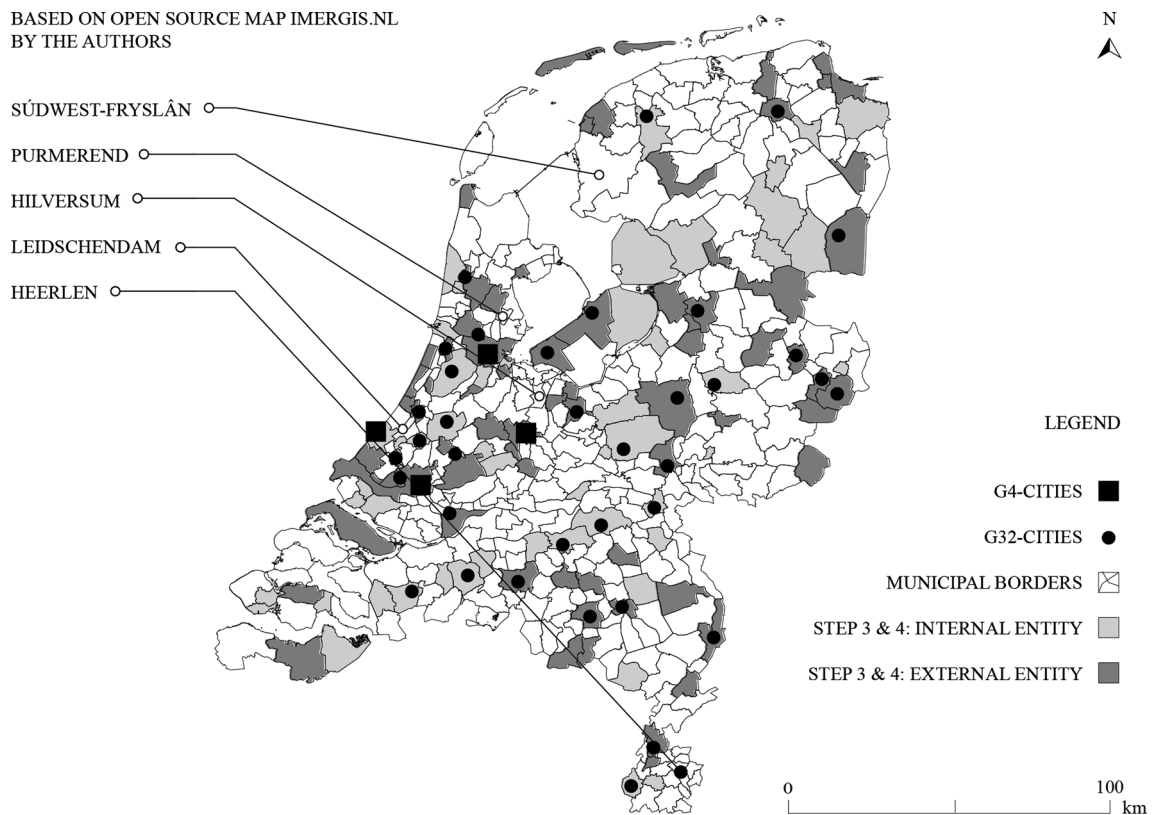

Fig. 3 The mandated entities and their organisational position

externally. Amongst the 125 municipalities that have established a mandated entity, 50 (40%) have organised the responsibility for place promotion, place marketing and/or place branding internally and 75 (60%) externally.

From a scientific viewpoint, it makes sense that local authorities choose different organisational set-ups. We would expect them to do so based upon differences in incentives, ambitions and challenges. However, at this stage, we have not yet attempted to analyse whether the different choices made with respect to the organisation were actually triggered by such differences. In-depth research of each municipality would be necessary to determine such causation. Alternatively, the different organisational choices might simply be explained by dominating inclinations in the period that the respective entities were established.

The fifth and last step in the classification was concerned with the level of market segment integration. We identified that 40 of the 125 mandated entities (32%), held a mandate for more than one market segment (citizens, businesses/investments, tourists/visitors). In Fig. 4, we observe that 26 of the 41 largest (G32 and G4) municipalities (63.4%) have stipulated an integrated mandate. This also holds for 52% of the larger municipalities (> 70,000 inhabitants; the same

26 out of 50). Although we did not systematically classify which of the market segments the mandates specified, we noted that all entities were mandated with the tourists/visitors-segment and that the business/investment-segment appeared to be the least common. A reason for this might be that business attraction and foreign direct investment frequently is addressed on and from the regional or even the national level, leaving less elbowroom for local authorities.

This part of the classification produced the most problematic results, because it only examined the mandate, thereby not taking the actual activities of these entities into account. Doing so would require an in-depth analysis of the mandate and the activities in each municipality. For example, the municipality of Kampen does stipulate a mandate to incorporate all three market segments, but the goal that has been formulated for the mandated entity is currently limited to the tourism/visitor segment. Hence, a mandate for integrated place promotion, place marketing and/or place branding does not necessarily result in a de-facto integration of the three market segments. This is an important distinction to keep in mind.
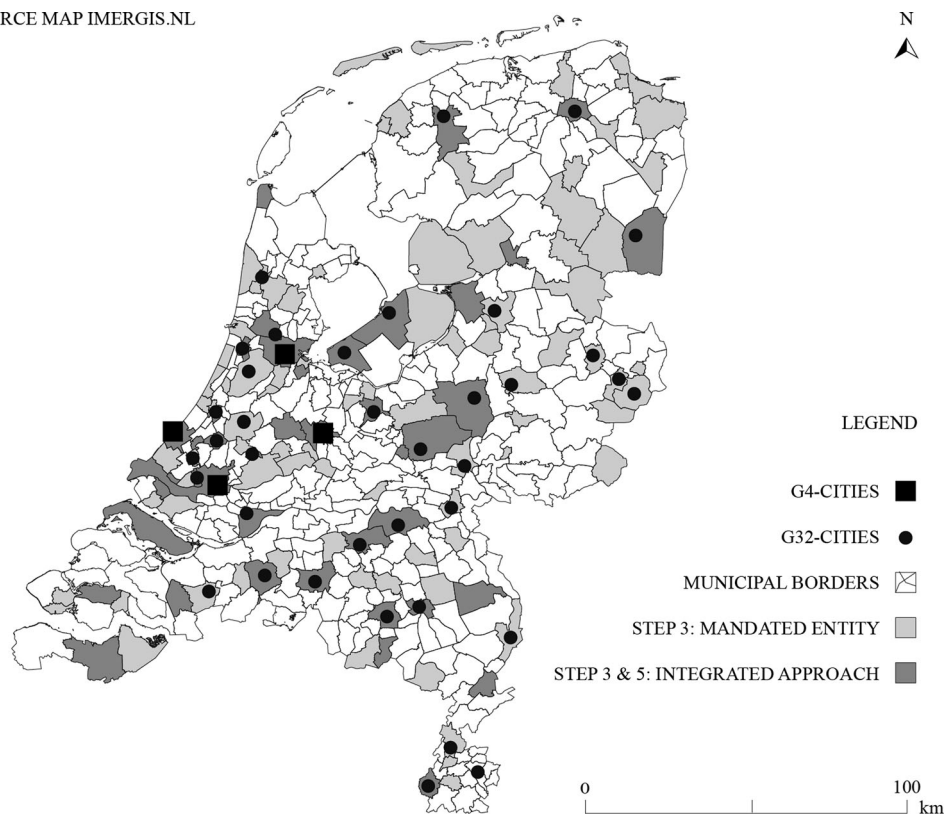

Fig. 4 Integrated approach to place promotion, place marketing and/or place branding

Results: a quantitative analysis of whether the municipalities have a mandated entity

To investigate the emerging patterns in a bit more detail, we decided that we needed a transparent and more objective starting point than what a mere interpretative inspection of the data provided. Consequently, we did a regression analysis (using IBM SPSS 24) with the variable 'does the municipality have a mandated entity?' as the dependent variable. As this is a binary variable (yes/no) we employed a logistic regression. As explanatory variables, we used population size (in thousands, 2016-data from Statistics Netherlands 2016), population development (in percentages over 2011–2016, data from the Netherlands Environmental Assessment Agency 2016), and the share of jobs in the tourism sector (in percentages, 2013-data from Statistics Netherlands 2014). These three explanatory variables were chosen because they fit three characteristics that are often used in the decision to engage in place promotion, place marketing and/or place branding. The population size reflects the position of the municipality in the national hierarchy of municipalities, population development addresses urgency related to either population growth or population decline, and the share of jobs in the tourism sector is used as an indicator of the importance of tourism and recreation for the local economy of said municipalities. Each municipality was a case in the estimation. As the data on tourism jobs refer to 2013, we had to average the data for some municipalities that were merged into a new municipality between 2013 and 2016. To keep transparency, we used unweighted averages and did not correct for municipalities that were split over more than one new municipality.

Table 1 provides the results of the regression estimation. The included variables explain about 27% of the variance. Both population size and share of tourism jobs are statistically significant. Population development (growth/decline) is not. In order to interpret the coefficients of a logistic regression analysis, these have to be raised to the power of e (the base of the natural logarithm). The last column of Table 1 shows this. The values indicate the increase in the chance that a municipality does have a mandated entity over the chance that it does not, with a one-step increase in the explanatory variable. Table 1 shows that both an increase in population size with 1000 inhabitants, and an increase of the share of tourism jobs with 1% would lead to an increase of about 5% in the probability that a municipality has a mandated entity.

What is often more illuminating than the estimated coefficients is an analysis of the residuals. In other words: a closer look at the municipalities that do not behave according to the model, and in what way. Table 2 shows the number of municipalities that act according to the model's prediction and which do not.

The model's predicted probability is in line with our classification for 306 of the 390 municipalities. Looking closer at the 84 cases in which this was not the case allows us to observe the following: We have a small group of 12 municipalities that do not have a mandated entity, whereas the model predicted that they were very likely to have one. We found strong indications that five of these are currently working on establishing such an entity, but they had not yet made a final decision to do so at the time of writing.

A much larger group of 72 municipalities do in fact have a mandated entity, whereas the model predicted that they were not very likely to have one. This miss-match is intriguing. We did a cluster analysis (IBM SPSS 24; two-step cluster; same variables as in the regression analysis) on these 72 municipalities in order to check whether they fall into different categories. This resulted in the three clusters presented in Table 3: The smallest cluster consists of six strongly tourist-oriented but small municipalities. A second cluster consisted of 25 relatively large municipalities. The remaining 41 municipalities were all relatively small. These results might be interpreted as either policy-transfer (municipalities might be more likely to copy policies when the topic is seen as universally relevant) or organisational evolution (an existing entity mandated with promotion, marketing and/or branding of a destination might advance to more far-reaching place promotion, place marketing and/or place branding). Such interpretations would need to be investigated in further detail.

At this stage, it is important to underline that we did not engage in these quantitative exercises with the purpose of finding explanations for the application of place promotion, place marketing and/or place branding. We did so simply to illustrate how a comprehensive dataset, like the one presented here, next to providing a descriptive, comprehensive overview of the (spatial) patterns of the

Table 1 Results of the regression estimation

	Coefficient	p value	$e^{coefficient}$
Population 2016 in thousands	.049	.000	1.050
Tourism (% of all jobs, 2013)	.040	.028	1.041
Population development (2011–2016)	−.023	.712	.977
Constant	−2.936	.000	.053

Table 2 Residual analysis

	Predicted		
	Mandated entity		
	No	Yes	Percentage correct
Mandated entity Yes/No			
No	253	12	95.5
Yes	72	53	42.4

Table 3 Cluster analysis

Cluster	Number of municipalities	Population development (2011–2016)		Tourism (% jobs, 2013)		Population 2016 (in thousands)	
		Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
1	25	1.04	1.22	6.5	2.1	46	7
2	41	0.23	2.50	6.8	2.8	23	8
3	6	0.42	2.79	38.4	9.6	16	11
Total	72	0.53	2.17	9.3	9.5	31	14

institutionalisation of place promotion, place marketing and/or place branding in a country, can also be used as the basis for objectively selecting cases for further in-depth research. A less arbitrary, or anecdotal, selection of case-studies for in-depth research is also likely to contribute to an increasing quality of empirical investigations in line with the conclusions of the literature reviews referenced in the introduction (Acharya and Rahman, 2016; Gertner 2011a, b; Green et al. 2016; Hankinson 2010; Lucarelli and Berg 2011; Lucarelli and Brörström 2013; Vuignier 2016).

Conclusions

The research question that this research was designed to address was: *To what extent can we identify (spatial) patterns in the institutionalisation of place promotion, place marketing and/or place branding amongst Dutch municipalities?*

First, we conclude that this has been a recent policy issue in a vast majority of Dutch municipalities (79.5%; between 2014 and 2016). Our findings are so overwhelming that it is safe to conclude that place promotion, place marketing and/or place branding have almost become a universal issue for local authorities in the Netherlands.

Second, we conclude that 32.1% of the Dutch municipalities have established identifiable entities mandated to apply these instruments. This includes almost all municipalities with mid-sized or large cities—and the few

exceptions to this pattern are currently in the progress of preparing such entities. Not having a mandated entity for a municipality with a mid-sized or large city appear to be an exception to the general rule and pattern. The general trend identified by our multiple logistic regression analysis as indicated by the coefficients correctly predicted the observed outcomes for 306 of the 390 municipalities (using population size (sig.), % population development (nss.) and % jobs in the tourism sector (sig.)). Our analysis of the 84 residuals showed that for the 12 cases where the model predicted that the municipalities should have had a mandated entity, but did not—at least five of the 12 are currently in the process of establishing one. For the 72 cases where the model predicted that the municipalities should not have had a mandated entity, but they did—three clusters could be identified that seemed to suggest that either policy transfer or what we termed organisational evolution could form possible explanations for these results.

Third, we conclude that the organisational position of the mandated entity is predominantly internal (60%), but that amongst the mid-sized and larger cities, an external position is much more common (90%). Apart from the difference between larger and smaller municipalities, we did not uncover any other significant spatial pattern.

Fourth, we conclude that one third (32%) of the 125 municipalities with an identifiable entity stipulated a mandate for the integration of at least two of the three market segments we looked for (residents, businesses/investments, tourists/visitors). For the larger municipalities (> 70,000 inhabitants) this was a bit more than half (52%), whereas amongst the G32- and G4-cities, the figure was closer to two thirds (63.4%). Again, apart from the difference between larger and smaller municipalities, we did not uncover any other significant spatial pattern.

Implications for practitioners

Our method to measure the institutionalisation of place promotion, place marketing and/or place branding on the municipal level generated data which showed distinct patterns to be explored further. These patterns are not only relevant for academics, but also for different types of practitioners working within this discipline. First of all, our robust and straightforward method is a relatively quick way in which to generate a comprehensive overview. This is highly relevant to practitioners:

(1) Civil servants and politicians can employ this method to compare their current organisational setup in their city to their peers and the general trend in the country. A sound basis for comparison can help in making better decisions, and provide this policy

issue with the possibility of benchmarking on institutional issues.

(2) For advisors and consultants, this method can be used to quickly fathom the market potentials in a specific country. It allows for market segmentation based on both statistical indicators and actual institutionalisation choices made by specific municipalities. This can help to fine-tune the services an advisor or consultant may offer. It is a common notion amongst advisors and consultants that there is not a 'one-size fits all' solution to the institutionalisation of this policy issue. However, an objective analysis of the emerging institutionalisations might help categorise which solutions appear to work under which circumstances, thereby allowing for a more sophisticated selection of 'best-practices'.

Implications for future research

In the process of creating the dataset and describing and analysing the results, we have also come across a number of interesting research questions for future endeavours. We believe that particularly six of these deserve meticulous attention in future research:

(1) "Which terminology is being used in different countries around the world (practice) and how do these terms relate to the international terminology reflected in the scientific literature (theory)?"

(2) "To what extent do the existing theoretical frameworks reflect the institutionalisation of place promotion, place marketing and/or place branding (practice)?"

(3) "To what extent can we identify differences in the institutionalisation of place promotion, place marketing and/or place branding based upon the dominating ideas when the entity in question was formed?"

(4) "To what extent is there a difference between the mandate entities hold (policy) and the tasks and goals they operate with (practice)?"

(5) "To what extent is there a logical relationship between incentives and ambitions of local authorities and the mandate, tasks, goals and organisational set-up of their place promotion, place marketing and/or place branding?"

(6) "To what extent does the engagement in place promotion, place marketing and/or place branding reflect the current multi-level governance that most places are part of?"

In addition to providing the first comprehensive overview of the popularity and institutionalisation of place promotion, place marketing and/or place branding in the Netherlands, the dataset that we have created helps researchers to objectively identify multiple cases and formulate promising research question for further comparative studies within the Netherlands. Such objective selections or further comparative studies can be achieved by joining our dataset to other geo-referenced data, which also enables quantitative and/or spatial analysis to be carried out. The dataset can also be used as a reference point for further in-depth research by joining it to other datasets that relate to the Netherlands (e.g., the research into common obstacles experienced by Dutch practitioners conducted by Eshuis et al. 2013).

Finally, if our method were to be replicated, refined and applied to similar classifications of local authorities in other countries—it would allow for comparative research between countries. We believe that this could provide major contributions to both the broadening and the deepening of the theoretical foundations of this emerging research domain.

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