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Volume 2

**Multimodal Promotional Strategies
in Place and Cultural Heritage Branding
Case studies and best practices**

edited by

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INTRODUCTION TO THE VOLUME¹

NICOLETTA VASTA, PIETRO MANZELLA

1. “Small cities with big dreams”

“How can small cities make an impact in a globalizing world dominated by ‘world cities’ and urban development strategies aimed at increasing agglomeration?” This question, posed in the blurb of Greg Richards and Lian Duif’s (2019) seminal volume *Small Cities with Big Dreams. Creative Placemaking and Branding Strategies*, was a source of inspiration for the international conference “Multimodal Promotional Strategies in Place and Cultural Heritage Branding: Case studies and best practices”, held at the University of Udine (Gorizia Campus) on December 11-12, 2023. The conference – organized by the *Research Lab on Strategic Communication and New Media* at the Dept. of Languages, Literatures, Communication, Education and Social Studies (DILL) with the financial support of the Fondazione Carigo and Consorzio Universitario di Gorizia and under the patronage of the Municipality of Gorizia – was part of the GO!2025 initiatives promoting Nova Gorica and Gorizia as “the borderless European Capital of Culture” (henceforth, ECoC, see <https://www.go2025.eu/en>).

The creative concept underlying Nova Gorica and Gorizia’s candidacy as ECoC 2025 underscores its being “a transnational European city, a place where people and ideas are treasured and respected regardless of their cultural, national, linguistic or any other background” (GECT GO 2020, p. 3). In its White Paper on Intercultural Dialogue, the Council of Europe defines the latter as “an open and respectful exchange of views between individuals and groups belonging to different cultures [...that] aims to develop a deeper understanding of diverse worldviews and practices [...] while fostering integration and social cohesion” (CM[2008]30, p. 9). While intercultural dialogue is fundamental for the development of relationships between people, countries and cultures in general, it becomes all the more crucial in a border area like Gorizia. Hence, the Nova Gorica-Gorizia ECoC 2025 project is an

¹ Although the present Introduction is a collaborative effort and reflects the views of both authors, Nicoletta Vasta wrote Sections 1 and 2.1 while Pietro Manzella wrote Sections 2.2 and 3.

opportunity for intercultural inclusion, as well as a tool for strengthening the sense of belonging to a shared European identity. Intercultural dialogue sustains cohesion and inclusion and is also an instrument of mediation and reconciliation, as it prevents social fragmentation by promoting equity, human dignity, and the pursuit of the common good. The actions to be undertaken to foster civic engagement have to be aimed at enhancing social cohesion and inclusion. Moreover, the ECoC status represents a unique opportunity for *place branding* through the synergic interplay of various activities aimed at forging and enhancing Nova Gorica and Gorizia's shared identity and image, which will be promoted among, and communicated to, multiple internal and external stakeholders.

Among those activities, fostering tourism is certainly of paramount importance. Tourism is a global industry which has been massively penetrated by digital technologies and the internet and which affects even the most remote areas of the world, thus offering opportunities to study interpersonal and cross-community relations alongside international and intercultural relations and contacts (Jaworski, Pritchard 2005).² As the designation of an ECoC has shifted from big European cities to smaller ones, it seems to us that the two key strategies small cities have to enact if they wish to brand themselves as attractive *glocal*³ destinations for cultural tourism should be:

- developing institutional collaboration (and extending it to the regions surrounding the small city in question) in the co-creation, as a territorial network, of events and projects, to be consistently pursued through a single institutional website (in our case, <https://www.go2025.eu/en>); and
- ‘positioning’ the small city’s distinctive brand identity against competitors by triggering the psychological leveraging process through *storytelling* (see, e.g., Qualizza 2017; Vasta 2020) – in J. Bruner’s (1990, p. 47) definition, whereby “storytelling [...] develops as an unfinished process in which causes are identified, links are forged, predictions are risked, and the exceptional is linked with the ordinary”. This is achieved

² Although most studies investigating the relationship between technology and tourism tend to emphasize the affordances of digital connections, viz. in co-creating the city (see e.g. Marques and Borba 2017) and in underscoring the role of tourists as *prosumers* (as defined in Toffler 1980, p. 292 *et passim*), some critical discourse analysis (CDA)-inspired, ‘take-a-break-from-technology’-oriented studies (e.g. Li, Pearce and Low 2018) have questioned the idea that technology is beneficial *per se* to the tourist industry.

³ The literature on multimodal and web-mediated discourse analysis of *glocalization* strategies in promotional texts, including those aimed at cultural heritage branding, is burgeoning: to mention just a few titles, see, e.g., Campagna 2007; Fairclough 2006; Jaworski and Thurlow 2010, 2014; Maci 2007, 2012, 2017; Manca 2016; Paganoni 2015; Pawels 2012; Thurlow and Jaworski 2011; Turra 2020.

by drawing on individual related stories building up a recurrent narrative, or “Intertextual Thematic Formation” (Lemke 1988),⁴ in itself linked to master (or transhistorical) narratives, i.e. narratives embedded in a specific narrative system drawing on recognizable myths and archetypes deeply embedded in a particular culture (Vasta 2023, p. 52; see also Bhabha’s 1994, p. 145 notion of the “production of nation as narration”); these master narratives, however, are not fixed, but can be adapted creatively to changing times and, as such, resonate with different communities (see Andò, Leonzi 2014, viz. Ch. 1).

In passing, E.M. Bruner (2005, viz. pp. 19-27) distinguishes three types of narrative concerning the tourist’s experience and calling into play vital constructs for discourse analysts and ethnographers of communication, such as agency, contested narratives and the tourist gaze:

- *pretour narratives*, i.e. the imagined journey when tourists are exploring their options for travelling and are gathering information; in the current authors’ opinion, these narratives draw on the master narratives inscribed in the global tourist community of practice’s *habitus* (in Bourdieu’s sense, 1990, pp. 52-65), marketed online by the local authorities, tour operators or tour guides, and, more recently, new tourism and hospitality “curators”, like travel consultants and destination marketing organizers and bloggers, and thus reflecting the growing trend towards re-intermediation in the form of collecting, selecting, displaying and contextualizing (Richards 2024, p. 28);
- the lived, extraordinary *experience on tour*, on the grounds of which tourists reshape and personalize the pretour narratives; and
- *posttour narratives*, recounting the journey and related experiences, which “are never finished, for, with each retelling, the circumstances, the audience, and the situation of the narrator change, providing the opportunity for novel understandings and novel narratives to arise” (E.M. Bruner 2005, p. 27).

Even more importantly, the crucial step required to amplify the voice of a relatively unknown city is by creatively engaging one’s stakeholders – first and foremost one’s citizens as a community of advocates and/or brand ambassadors – in *storytelling* and *storylistening* (Scholes, Clutterbuck 1998; Qualizza 2017, pp. 69-70) concerning individual lived experiences and their interpretations; selecting, showcasing and raising awareness about the most interesting tangible and intangible features of, and master narratives about,

⁴ In Lemke’s (1988, p. 30, 32) definition, ITFs are common systems of semantic relations to speak of the same things in the same manner, i.e. “a community’s recurrent *said*s and *done*s [...] as well as its semiotic resources for saying and doing”; see also Coccetta, this volume.

the destination will meet this requirement, ultimately bringing in more tourists and business. In the case of Nova Gorica-Gorizia 2025, one such master narrative is subsumed by the adjective “borderless” in the slogan “GO borderless”, recalling the need for civilized societies to build bridges, not walls, between neighbouring communities. This master narrative tells a tale of, and (re-)establishes an emotional bond between, the two cities, its citizens and the values subsumed by their shared historical heritage, despite different political, economic and institutional systems, while reconciling tradition and innovation, past and future.

As Jaworski and Thurlow (2010, p. 256) effectively point out, “tourism is a past master at recontextualization, lifting the everyday into the realm of the fantastical, transforming the banal into the exotic, and converting use-value into exchange-value”. A brand, including a town or city, cannot be restricted to offering goods and services, but must result from the strategic harmonization of a number of factors – including those pertaining to its economic, political and media systems – and must be enriched by emotional values represented symbolically, both verbally and visually, so as to project a multi-faceted, yet distinctive and consistent image:

The ultimate goods purchased by tourists during their travels are images, lifestyles, memories, and their narrative enactments. Material goods such as souvenirs and other artefacts, not unlike snippets of language formulae brought back from foreign trips, are themselves (re-)packaged and promoted as useful props in the enactment of these performances, and they serve as an extension of the tourist gaze. (Jaworski, Thurlow 2010, p. 257)

In this process of recontextualization and re-enactment of the tourist performance (Jaworski, Thurlow 2014), it is vital to recall, however cursorily, the fundamental distinction between *space*, a physical entity combining mobility and trajectories, and *place*, a philosophical entity ‘constructed’ through living, telling and inhabiting (Tuan 1979; Qualizza 2017, p. 69):

As location, place is one unit among other units to which it is linked by a circulation net; the analysis of location is subsumed under the geographer’s concept and analysis of space. Place, however, has more substance than the word location suggests: it is a unique entity, a ‘special ensemble’ (Lukermann, 1964, p. 70); it has a history and meaning. Place incarnates the experiences and aspirations of a people. Place is not only a fact to be explained in the broader frame of space, but it is also a reality to be clarified and understood from the perspectives of the people who have given it meaning. (Tuan 1979, p. 387)

Thus, *place branding* is to be construed in contingent and dynamic terms – i.e., in a constant, productive dialogue with the historical and sociocultural context a place is associated with and not simply in terms of its perceived

image –, as well as in strategic terms – i.e., in its potential to construct competitive identity (Anholt 2007) and to act as a countermeasure to massive globalization processes (see also Vasta 2020, pp. 7-8) by mediating between the global and the local (E.M. Bruner 2005, p. 12). Borrowing Richards' words (2024, p. 27, *emphasis added*),

Cities use curation to highlight particular “urban scenes” and develop “experiencescapes”, adding new meanings to places. [...] Following the principles of stylistic innovation, [...] curators do not produce experiences, but frame and disseminate them through *creative sensing, stylistic orchestration and synchronization of producers and consumers*.

It is precisely the “multimodal orchestration” (Kress 2010; Bezemer, Kress 2016; see Footnote 5) of unique stories and extraordinary experiences that constitutes the main focus of this volume, as the following Sections illustrate.

2. The return of ‘places’

2.1 Multimodal/multisensorial practices and transmedia storytelling

According to Thurlow and Jaworski (2011, p. 286),

Language scholars and academics working in the interdisciplinary field of critical tourism studies have often had to justify their scholarly interests to those unable to see beyond their own personal experience of tourism as a frivolous and recreational activity.

The same authors (Jaworski, Thurlow 2010, p. 255) advocate for “a sociolinguistics or discourse analysis that is better able to account for the hybrid, the trans-local, the spectacular, the idiosyncratic, the creative, and the multimodal”: against this backdrop, the contributions collected in this volume, inspired by the above-mentioned international conference on multimodal promotional strategies in place and cultural heritage branding, bring together cultural tourism studies, multimodal analyses of individual case studies and corpus-driven studies, critical analyses and educational applications of integrated semiotic modes, also embracing extended reality, virtual reality and augmented reality technologies. The object of investigation is a range of promotional digital genres (such as thematic videos, institutional websites, virtual maps and tours, and the like) constructing, construing and constituting the dialectic relationship between culture, place and text (Fairclough 1995, 2006).

This is all the more relevant in a material world where “every human action is a process of selection among many semiotic systems which are

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always in a kind of dialectal dialogicality with each other” (Scollon, Scollon 2003, p. xii) and where new communication technologies have an ever-increasing impact on social interactions and discourses themselves (Scollon, Le Vine 2004): not only is all discourse multimodal (e.g. Kress, van Leeuwen [1996] 2021; Kress 2010), but multimodal meaning-making (and, more specifically, “multimodal orchestration”⁵) is particularly important for the critical discourse analysis of multisensorial experiences (van Leeuwen 2004, pp. 15-17). The latter include those related to tourism-oriented experiential marketing (Schmitt 1999, 2010, 2011), where experience is divided into 5 dimensions: sensory experience, emotional experience, action experience, thinking experience and associative experience. In Schmitt’s view (2010, p. 71), “ordinary experiences occur as part of everyday life; they are routine and result, to a degree, from passive stimulation. Extraordinary experiences are more active, intense, and stylized” and “experience providers”, such as visual identity, communication, product presence, web sites, and service, are used to create different types of customer experiences.⁶

In these respects, it is also useful to recall Bitner’s (1992) notion of *servicescape* – or “how the built environment (i.e., the manmade, physical surroundings as opposed to the natural or social environment) [...] affects both consumers and employees in service organizations” (Bitner 1992, p. 58) and is used as a tangible organizational resource. In describing the dimensions of the servicescape, Bitner notes that

A complex mix of environmental features constitute the servicescape and influence internal responses and behaviors. Specifically, the dimensions of the physical surroundings include all of the objective physical factors that can be controlled [...] to enhance (or constrain) employee and customer actions. Those factors include an endless list of possibilities, such as lighting, color, signage, textures, quality of materials, style of furnishings, layout, wall decor, temperature, and so on (Bitner 1992, p. 65)

– all elements which multimodal and multisensorial communicative practices and analyses take into due account and which, in the context of providing intangible services like that of a journey or cultural trip, concur with

⁵ By “multimodal orchestration”, Kress (2010, p. 162) defines “the process of *assembling/organizing/designing* a plurality of signs into a particular configuration to form a coherent arrangement”, with an emphasis on the ‘semiotic harmony’ of the resultant *ensemble*, and their ‘aptness’ to “meet the rhetor’s [or text organizer’s] interests. [...] *Orchestrations* and the resultant *ensembles* can be organized in *space* and they can be organized in *time*, in *sequence*, in *process*, in *motion*”. See also Bezemer and Kress (2016, p. 28 *et passim*, *emphasis original*).

⁶ For a review of the literature on experiential marketing, see Tian (2022). For its applications to tourism-related marketing, see, e.g., Rather (2020).

storytelling to form *experiencescapes* (Mei *et al.* 2020), which favour consumer engagement.

The potential for storytelling through the convergence of different media and multisensorial practices requires some reflection on the elusive notion of *transmedia storytelling* (see Jenkins 2003, 2006)⁷ in relation to those of *transmedia traversals* and *transmedia identities* (Lemke 2002, 2003, 2005a, 2005b, 2013, 2014, 2023): first of all, in Gambarato's view, transmedia storytelling refers to

integrated media experiences that occur amongst a variety of platforms. A transmedia narrative tells altogether *one big pervasive story*, attracting audience engagement. It is not about offering the same content in different media platforms, but it is the *worldbuilding experience*, unfolding content and generating the possibilities for the story to *evolve with new and pertinent content*. (Gambarato 2013, p. 82, *emphasis added*)

In this perspective, the reader will find more than one chapter in this volume viewing *place branding* in terms of mythical and/or “remediated” (Bolter, Grusin 1999; Iedema 2003) narratives and multimodal/multisensorial meaning-making practices that re-cast, re-invent and re-actualize stories relating reality to the world of imagination and vice-versa, enacting in discourse Lemke's crucial notion of *traversal*:

The defining characteristic of a traversal is that it makes meaning across boundaries: between media, genres, sites, institutions, contexts. It may and usually does extend across multiple timescales as well: minutes, hours, days, years. (Lemke 2013, p. 16)

– which entails that

The media are shaping us, and we are determining what shapes the media must take to do so. Agency here is distributed over vast networks of producers, marketers, consumer/interpreters, and media themselves. As in any such complex dynamical system, new qualitative phenomena are emergent, whether they are new social identities, new cultural imaginative-worlds, or new marketing strategies such as transmedia franchises. (Lemke 2013, p. 24)

Against such a complex kaleidoscope, the interdisciplinary perspective adopted in this volume is a springboard for further research that takes up

⁷ See also: Andò and Leonzi 2014; Ciancia (2015, p. 131) on “the rising importance of multi-channel structures that completely change the role of the audience, allowing the development of widespread creativity through the collaborative creation and the collective consumption of narrative worlds”; Gambarato (2013) for interesting insights into the differences between *transmedia storytelling*, *cross-media* and *multimedia*.

Jaworski and Thurlow's above-mentioned call for a paradigmatic shift in discourse analysis.

2.2 Sustainability-related issues

The integration of multimodal promotional strategies in cultural heritage branding aligns closely with the principles of sustainability – a contested concept (Manzella 2023, p. 101) that must be framed positively through a balanced approach to economic growth, environmental preservation, and social equity. In this context, numerous informative and educational resources – often multimodal in nature – target non-expert citizens, particularly younger generations, and have been employed to sensitize them to global challenges such as environmental sustainability (Zollo 2024, p. 185). By utilizing diverse communication platforms, including digital media, interactive technologies, and traditional outreach methods, these strategies enhance the visibility and accessibility of cultural and historical destinations. Hypertexts and interactive websites, for example, rely on a broad spectrum of multimodal resources to offer potential tourists an immersive experience of a country and its culture (Turra 2020, p. 256).

Moreover, a strong emphasis on the authentic representation of local traditions in branding fosters feelings of belonging and community involvement. The dissemination and celebration of local traditions are linked to social sustainability, as they can enhance local pride and attachment to place (Irimiás *et al.* 2024, p. 2). Arguably, sustainable tourism ensures the development of local communities and natural environments, while promoting human welfare and public participation in decision-making (Adamus-Matuszyńska *et al.* 2021, p. 2). This participatory approach fosters a sense of ownership among local populations, strengthening social cohesion and empowering communities to act as stewards of their cultural heritage. Sustainable branding practices also encourage visitors to respect local customs and reduce activities that may degrade the physical or cultural environment of heritage sites.

Crucially, multimodal promotional strategies can embed sustainable development goals into the broader master narrative of cultural heritage conservation, which must also address the need to re-scale urban narratives in response to the rise of unprecedented global economies and the increasing competition between cities to attract residents, investments, and tourists (Paganoni 2015, p. 102). Highlighting the importance of conservation, responsible tourism, and intergenerational equity resonates with contemporary audiences, who are increasingly conscious of their environmental impact. By aligning cultural promotion with these global values, these strategies help to foster a tourism model that prioritizes long-

term conservation over short-term exploitation. Thus, the intersection of multimodal promotional strategies and cultural heritage branding offers a powerful framework for achieving sustainability by harmonizing cultural heritage conservation, community empowerment, and ecological responsibility.

3. Multimodal Narratives: Exploring Place, Space, and Identity in the Digital Age

In an era characterised by rapid globalization and escalating competition among urban centres, the need to preserve cultural diversity while fostering innovation has never been more pressing. Cities, both large and small, are confronted with complex challenges: maintaining a unique, recognizable identity, attracting investment, and promoting community engagement within a landscape increasingly shaped by global trends. This collection of studies examines the transformative potential of creativity, multimodal technologies, and inclusive practices in addressing these challenges, offering a rich tapestry of insights into the evolving interplay of place, space, and identity.

Central to this exploration is the redefinition of ‘place’ and ‘space’ in the digital age, which encompasses both physical and virtual environments as dynamic portals connecting the past and present. These spaces, whether represented by a city square, an artefact, or an immersive digital experience, act as systems of information and memory, enabling individuals and communities to navigate their histories while shaping their futures. Alongside this is an unwavering commitment to intercultural dialogue and inclusive practices, which celebrate the value of diversity – individual and collective memories, local traditions, and cultural narratives – ensuring their preservation against the homogenizing pressures of globalization.

Greg Richards sets the tone for this volume with his comprehensive examination of the role of creativity in the urban development of smaller cities. He introduces the “Middleground” framework – a conceptual space where local resources, creative industries, and institutional networks intersect – highlighting how events and cultural initiatives act as vital catalysts for community engagement and economic renewal. Richards positions these initiatives as portals to urban identity, enabling smaller cities to “borrow size” and amplify their presence within global networks. Through insightful case studies from the Netherlands and Luxembourg, he illustrates how cross-border collaborations create synergies that preserve diversity while positioning smaller cities as dynamic contributors to broader urban development. His analysis underscores the importance of collaborative

leadership in fostering shared visions that harness the power of creativity and local heritage.

Francesca Coccetta extends this discussion through her analysis of the European Capital of Culture (ECoC) initiative, focusing on its impact on urban identity and cultural narratives. Her multimodal discourse analysis of 60 promotional videos reveals how these media serve as virtual spaces – doorways to a city’s past and aspirations. These transmedia representations function not only as marketing tools but also as vehicles for cultural expression, preserving local identity while situating it within a broader European context. Coccetta’s findings emphasize the value of storytelling in resisting the homogenizing effects of globalization, offering powerful lessons for urban revitalization and cultural tourism.

Deirdre Kantz and Anthony Baldry explore the intersection of tourism, technology, and marketing through a detailed investigation of wine glossaries and augmented reality (AR) wine labels. These tools, once merely informative, have evolved into immersive storytelling devices that connect consumers to the rich traditions and histories behind wine culture. An AR wine label becomes a portal, enabling individuals to engage with the craftsmanship and cultural narratives embedded within the product. Kantz and Baldry highlight the role of these innovations in fostering deeper consumer engagement and promoting intercultural dialogue, illustrating the broader educational spin-offs of digital marketing practices.

In a complementary exploration, Anthony Baldry and Davide Taibi focus on the transformative effects of augmented reality (AR) and artificial intelligence (AI) in tourism and education. Their work centres on the development of structured pathways in serious games, which enable users to virtually explore cultural and historical sites. These pathways, accessed through digital interfaces such as icons on buildings or AR markers, create immersive experiences that bridge the past and present, enriching the understanding of heritage. Their approach emphasizes collaboration, encouraging educators, students, and tourists to engage with cultural narratives in ways that sustain shared memory and community ownership.

Cristina Arizzi’s analysis offers illuminating insights into the case study of the Museum of the Sea (MUMA) in Milazzo, Sicily, where storytelling and digital technologies converge to address pressing ecological challenges. Triggered by the tragic story of Siso, a sperm whale whose death due to marine pollution became a symbol of environmental degradation, MUMA transforms the traditional museum model into an ecomuseum. Through virtual and augmented reality experiences, MUMA engages visitors, particularly children, in interactive journeys that promote ecological consciousness and marine conservation. Arizzi positions the museum as a portal connecting visitors to both local traditions and global environmental

concerns, demonstrating how grassroots initiatives can foster sustainability and redefine cultural tourism.

Antonina Dattolo and Elena Rocco expand the discussion of inclusivity through their innovative *Talking Maps* project, which reimagines cultural heritage as a participatory and accessible experience. These multimodal maps serve as virtual spaces that bring cultural narratives to life for diverse audiences, including individuals with cognitive or linguistic impairments. By engaging communities in the storytelling process, the project ensures that local traditions are preserved and celebrated, promoting intercultural dialogue and shared ownership of heritage. Dattolo and Rocco's work exemplifies the transformative power of inclusive design in preserving diversity while making cultural heritage accessible to all.

Elisa Perego and Piergiorgio Trevisan highlight the role of audio description (AD) as both a tool for accessibility and a resource for education. By transforming paintings, films, and other visual media into richly descriptive narratives, AD opens a portal for visually impaired individuals to experience cultural artefacts in meaningful ways. The authors demonstrate how AD can also serve as an innovative pedagogical tool in English as a Second Language (ESL) classrooms, equipping students with linguistic and critical thinking skills while raising awareness on the accessibility issue. This dual focus on inclusivity and education underscores the broader societal impact of AD in creating more equitable cultural spaces.

Finally, Pietro Manzella investigates the role of extended reality (XR) technologies in promoting sustainable tourism, focusing on the *GO GREEN* project in Italy's Gorizia province. Through immersive digital experiences, such as narrative itineraries facilitated by XR headsets and goggles, the project connects audiences to the Collio region's cultural, historical, and natural heritage. Manzella's analysis highlights the significance of multimodal communication in fostering sustainability narratives and engaging younger audiences. By positioning youth as innovators and active participants, the project demonstrates how virtual spaces can drive environmental education and intercultural dialogue, creating new pathways for sustainable tourism.

Together, the contributions in this volume illuminate how creativity, technology, and inclusivity can redefine the ways people engage with urban spaces, cultural heritage, and educational practices. These works underscore the importance of bridging the past and present, preserving diversity, and fostering collaboration to navigate the challenges of globalization. By presenting cutting-edge research and real-world applications, this collection is intended as a resource for scholars, policymakers, and practitioners striving to create a more inclusive, sustainable, and culturally vibrant future.

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ANALYSING THEMATIC CONTINUITIES AND DISCONTINUITIES IN EUROPEAN CAPITAL OF CULTURE VIDEOS

FRANCESCA COCETTA

Abstract – The title European Capital of Culture (ECoC) represents an opportunity for cities to enhance their brand image in the eyes of their own inhabitants and the whole of Europe alike; in addition, from a socio-economic standpoint, the title is a catalyst for the city's cultural development and urban revitalization as well as a boost for tourism. For this reason, it is important for cities aspiring to the ECoC title to make sure that their place identity is well-formulated in all their ECoC-related materials and in line with the expectations of ECoC calls. This article will thus explore place identity and the related concept of place branding in relation to 60 videos marketing and communicating 35 ECoCs in the 2007-2025 time period. In particular, by combining genre analysis and corpus-based Critical Multimodal Discourse Analysis it looks at the thematics enacted in the videos and the forms and strategies of place branding they use. The analysis shows that, while some thematics are common to many videos (e.g. the city, local cultural heritage and performing arts), others are rarer or related to the ECoC leitmotiv (e.g. borders and crossing borders in the case of the videos promoting Nova Gorica and Gorizia). The results seem to suggest that the ECoC event represents an opportunity for the designated cities to showcase themselves as well as their cultural heritage.

Keywords: place branding; European Capital of Culture initiative; Intertextual Thematic Formations; corpus-based Critical Multimodal Discourse Analysis.

1. Introduction

Drawing on Paasi (2002, 2003), in this article the term *place identity* refers to:

features of nature, culture and people that are *used* in the discourses and classifications of science, politics, cultural activism, regional marketing, governance and political or religious regionalization to distinguish one region from others. (Paasi 2003, p. 478) (italics in the original)

This concept has attracted considerable interest in various disciplines including geography, urban planning, sociology, environmental studies, and tourism, to

mention just a few. In their review of bibliographical records retrieved from the core data set of Web of Science, Peng, Strijker and Wu (2020) found that there was a rise in 2006 in academic articles with “place identity”, “regional identity” or “regional identities” in their title and this rise was observed in various disciplines; after 2010, articles on place identity gradually came to be concentrated in humanities and social sciences, the disciplines with a more recent shift towards place marketing.

Indeed, related to the concept of place identity is that of *place branding* defined by Kavaratzis and Ashworth (2006, p. 186) as “the application of product branding to places”. Place branding captures a place’s unique meaning and differentiates a place from the others so that place consumers recognize it as existing, perceive it as possessing qualities superior to those of competitors and “consume[d] [it] in a manner commensurate with the objectives of the place” (Kavaratzis, Ashworth 2006, p. 189).

One of the three main strategies for city branding identified by Kavaratzis and Ashworth (2006) is events branding, which is exemplified, *inter alia*, by the European Capital of Culture (ECoC), a EU-financed initiative aiming to highlight the cultural diversity and richness of different European cities every year. The initiative is a prestigious platform for cities to showcase their cultural and artistic offerings in the eyes of their inhabitants and the whole of Europe alike. From a socio-economic standpoint, an ECoC title is a catalyst for a city’s cultural development and urban revitalization as well as a boost for tourism (e.g. Liu 2012; Richards, Duif 2019). For this reason, it is important for cities aspiring to the ECoC title to make sure that their place brand is properly constructed in all their ECoC-related materials, including their bid-book and promotional materials. A case in point is Liverpool which, when bidding for the ECoC title, was branded as *The World in One City* in reference to its multiethnic identity.¹ In line with this, the promotional material produced for the ECoC events entextualized a narrative of diversity and Otherness depicting images of people of African, Indian or Arabic origins and using slogans such as *wondrously diverse* and *melting pot* (Krüger 2013). Moreover, a city’s brand should also be in line with the expectations of ECoC calls. In this respect, Lähdesmäki (2009) analyses the application books of Istanbul, Pécs, Tallinn and Turku and observes that their language makes constant use of expressions such as *local culture*, *local identity*, *regionality*, *European culture*, *European heritage*, and *common European*; these expressions clearly hint at the concepts of locality, regionality and Europeanness which are the cornerstones of the EU’s cultural policy as well as of the ECoC initiative.

With a specific focus on the ECoC initiative, this article focuses on the concepts of place identity and place branding from a sociosemiotic perspective

¹ Liverpool is indeed a multicultural city where many communities coexist, including the Indian, African, Chinese and Arab communities who settled in the city at the height of British imperialism.

(e.g. Aiello, Thurlow 2006; Koller 2008; Paganoni 2015, 2019; Thurlow 2024). Specifically, it explores place branding in relation to a small corpus of 60 videos marketing and presenting 35 ECoCs in the 2007-2025 time period (henceforth: ECoC corpus) by looking at the thematics entextualized in the videos. The article aims to understand whether and how the videos capture ECoCs' cultural uniqueness and promote cultural diversity, but also combine them with European (and international) perspectives, thus increasing European citizens' sense of belonging to a common cultural area. Relevant to this article is Aiello and Thurlow's (2006) study examining the visual themes entextualized in official promotional texts of 30 cities which either competed for the ECoC title or were nominated ECoC in the 2005-2011 time period. Their analysis found that the most recurrent visual themes are: cityscapes, fireworks, children, and maps. They concluded that the repetition and uniformity of these themes:

contribute to the creation and consolidation of a visual repertoire of 'Europeanness', which in turn is likely to be used as currency for the exchange of intercultural meanings and thus also for a mutual (not necessarily equal) understanding of what European culture is and what it means to represent it through the European Capital of Culture in any given year. (Aiello, Thurlow 2006, p. 159)

The present article approaches thematics using Lemke's semantically-based theory of intertextuality (1995a, 1995b) and suggests that this theory can help identify recurrent thematics as well as rare thematics that can potentially highlight the uniqueness of the designated ECoC. The article is organized as follows: Section 2 is an overview of the ECoC initiative; Section 3 describes the theoretical framework adopted to analyse the videos; Section 4 presents the materials analysed in this study and the methodology adopted; Section 5 presents and discusses the results of the study; finally; Section 6 draws some conclusions.

2. European Capitals of Culture

Initiated by the European Commission in 1985 with the aim of bringing EU citizens close together, European Capitals of Culture is “[a]n initiative putting culture at the heart of European cities.”²

The ECoC selection competition starts six years before the *title year* and is organized at a national level with two EU Member States publishing a *call for bid* specifying the selection criteria and procedure. In a pre-selection stage,

² <https://culture.ec.europa.eu/policies/culture-in-cities-and-regions/european-capitals-of-culture> (29.05.2024).

the cities interested in participating in the competition submit a *bid-book* setting out the city's objectives, programme, financial plans and management structure. The bid is reviewed by a Panel of experts in the field of culture against the following six categories of criteria (European Commission 2017):

- contribution to the long-term cultural strategy;
- cultural and artistic content;
- European dimension;
- outreach;
- management;
- capacity to deliver.

For example, in the case of the European dimension, which is “at the heart of an ECoC's programme” (European Commission 2017, p. 18), the Panel considers the extent to which the cultural programme promotes European cultural diversity, highlights the commonalities between various European cultures, and involves artists from different parts of Europe. The Panel selects a short list of cities authorized to proceed to the final selection stage and provides them with a report with some recommendations; in the final selection stage, these cities submit a more detailed application further assessed against the criteria used in the pre-selection stage. The Panel recommends one city per host country for the title which is then ratified by the Member State four years before the title year is celebrated.

The designated ECoC then plans and prepares the event. This includes involving stakeholders, engaging with citizens, establishing the necessary European connections, and building and/or modernizing infrastructure. During this four-year period, the ECoC is monitored by the Panel which then recommends the city for the Melina Mercouri Prize funded by the EU Creative Europe Programme and currently amounting to €1.5m.

Finally, after the ECoC year, the city is evaluated by the European Commission. The evaluation, carried out by an organization unrelated to the designated city and its ECoC management, is both qualitative and quantitative in nature and is made public so that other ECoCs can benefit from it.

3. Lemke's theory of intertextuality

To investigate recurrent and rare thematics in the ECoC corpus this article draws on Lemke's (1995a, 1995b) theory of intertextuality. According to Lemke, intertextuality is a social phenomenon which depends on a given community's culture; in his view, the meaning-making practices of a community produce texts

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that are similar in their meanings. This focus on the community's meaning-making practices contrasts with previous definitions of intertextuality, such as Kristeva's (1980) and De Beaugrande and Dressler's (1981). For example, for Kristeva (1980, p. 37) "any text is constructed as a mosaic of quotations; any text is the absorption and transformation of another", meaning that a literary text is a product of a single author, but also borrows words and concepts from other texts of the past. Similarly, De Beaugrande and Dressler point out the existence of similarities between texts, but add that the recognition of these similarities depends on a reader's knowledge of other texts.

By drawing on Halliday's grammar (Halliday, Matthiessen 2013), specifically its three metafunctions (i.e. ideational, interpersonal, and textual), Lemke states that texts:

may be alike in the content of what they say about topics and subjects. They may be alike in their values, attitudes and stances toward their subjects and audiences. They may be alike in the sequence, structure and form of organization of what they say. These texts will always also be different as well, each will be in some ways unique. (Lemke 1995b, p. 6)

In other words, he postulates the existence of three types of intertextual relationship, namely, thematic ties, orientational ties, and generic ties. Thematic ties are those between texts sharing the same experiential meaning (i.e. topic); orientational ties are those between texts sharing a particular attitude or standpoint towards some topic; generic ties are those between texts belonging to the same genre.

When it comes to thematic ties, Lemke states that these can be identified by looking at the Intertextual Thematic Formations (ITFs) present in a text, defined as "[t]he shared and repeated patterns of semantic relationships, mainly ideational ones, usually characteristic of a register's Field. [...] They consist of context-specific thematic items [...] and semantic relations among these items" (Lemke 2005, p. 34); he (1995b, p. 35) adds that "[t]he same patterns recur from text to text in slightly different wordings, but recognizably the same, and each wording can be mapped onto a generic semantic pattern that is the same for all". Lemke investigated how thematic ties are made through linguistic resources by extending Hasan's (1984) notion of cohesive ties in texts, particularly of synonymy, antonymy, hyponymy, and metonymy.

This article posits that Lemke's ITF is a viable tool for identifying the recurrent and rare thematics in the ECoC corpus. However, considering the multimodal nature of the texts under analysis, it extends Lemke's theory and investigates how thematic ties are made through linguistic resources as well as visual ones.

4. Materials and methods

The present study aims to propose a methodology to identify recurrent thematics in videos in a structured way. To do so, corpus-assisted multimodal discourse analysis (Bednarek 2015; Baldry, Kantz 2022) was adopted to analyse the ECoC corpus, a small corpus consisting of 60 videos marketing and presenting 35 ECoCs³ in the 2007-2025 time period. The videos were retrieved from the YouTube and Vimeo video sharing platforms using the following search phrases: *European Capital of Culture*, *European Capital of Culture [year]*, *European Capital of Culture [name of the city]*, and *European Capital of Culture [year] [name of the city]*. The videos making up the corpus exemplify various types of videos, including adverts, image films, and legacy videos. The text types making up the corpus are shown in the line chart in Figure 1.

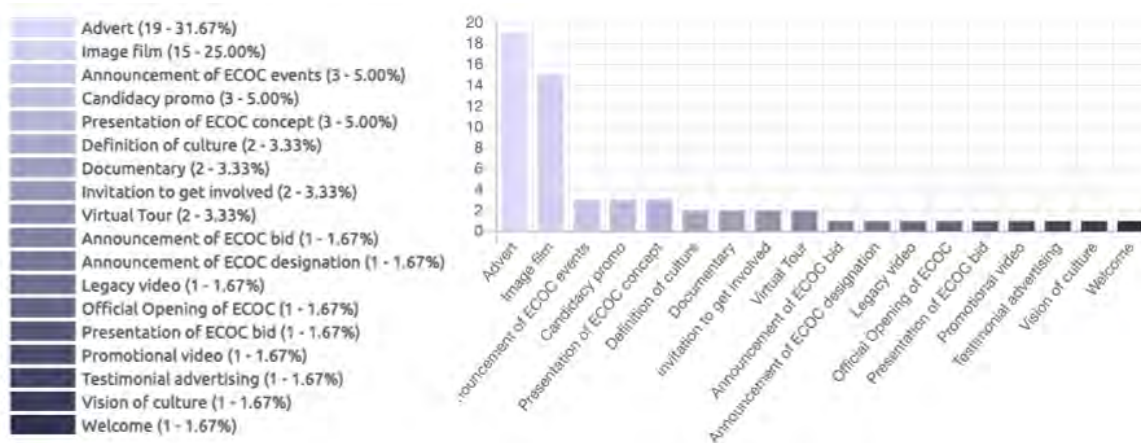


Figure 1
Corpus composition: text types.

As can be seen, adverts are the most frequent video type (31.67% of the total), followed by image films (25% of the total), that is, a film “used to present, sharpen and strengthen the image and identity of a company, brand or organization” (The mmmake agency 2023); in the case of the videos under analysis, the image films convey the core values, messages and culture of the respective ECoC. Among the least frequent video types are videos describing

³ The ECoCs whose promotional videos are included in the corpus are (in alphabetical order): Aarhus (2017), Bodø (2024), Donostia-San Sebastian (2016), Elefsina (2023), Esch-sur-Alzette (2022), Galway (2020), Guimarães (2012), Istanbul (2010), Kauna (2022), Košice (2013), Leeuwarden-Fryslân (2018), Linz (2009), Liverpool (2008), Marseille-Provence (2013), Matera (2019), Mons (2015), Nova Gorica and Gorizia (2025), Novi Sad (2022), Paphos (2017), Pilsen (2015), Plovdiv (2019), Riga (2014), Rijeka (2020), Salzkammergut (2024), Sibiu (2007), Stavanger (2008), Tallinn (2011), Tartu (2024), Timișoara (2023), Turku (2011), Umeå (2014), Valletta (2018), Veszprém (2023), Vilnius (2009) and Wrocław (2016).

how the ECoC conceives culture, videos announcing the ECoC bid, and legacy videos. Legacy videos describe the legacy of the ECoC mega-event in terms of how this has enhanced the city which has hosted it; legacy videos can cover the aims envisaged by the ECoC initiative such as improvement of the city image, urban regeneration and investment attraction.

53 videos were produced before and five after the designation (Figure 2). While for some videos this information was available in the description box below the video on the YouTube or Vimeo webpage, in other cases the distinction was made on the basis of the details provided by the video itself. When it was not possible to retrieve this information, the label UNDECIDED was used.

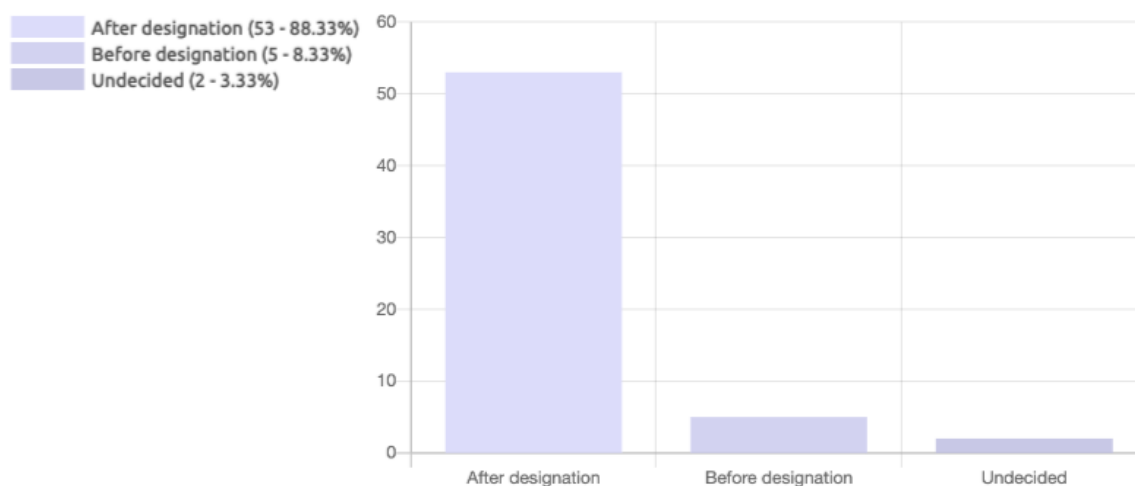


Figure 2
Corpus composition: time of production.

Information on the text type and on whether the video was produced before or after designation was deemed to be particularly relevant to understanding the relationship between the video genre and the specific thematics (see Discussion below).

The videos were uploaded to the OpenMWS platform⁴ (Taibi 2023) to facilitate their annotation for ITFs and subsequent retrieval. In this respect, OpenMWS allows corpora of videos available on media sharing sites (e.g. YouTube and Vimeo) to be compiled and sequences in the corpus to be annotated using a tagging system created by individual researchers on the basis of their research objectives; sequences can then be searched using the OpenMWS search engine and, once retrieved, can be viewed so that a systematic multimodal analysis can be performed for specific sequences. For example, in the case of the present study, an ITF can be retrieved with a view to establishing the specific

⁴ <http://openmws-dslcc.pa.itd.cnr.it/pages/login.jsf> (7.10.2024).

semiotic resources used in its construction and to assessing whether they are entextualized in the soundtrack, the videotrack or both simultaneously.

Once uploaded to the OpenMWS platform, the videos under analysis were divided into sequences; in this study, the term *sequence* is used to indicate a part of a video where a given thematic is entextualized. The sequences were then annotated in the platform's Annotation and Transcription Panel. An example of sequence annotation is given in Figure 3 with respect to a sequence of a video announcing the designation of Nova Goriza and Gorizia (WnitO6GlkxU)⁵ as 2025 ECoCs.


Item: V9_ECOC_057	Duration: 00:32	Video: WnitO6GlkxU
		Oral discourse: NONE
		Sounds: MUSIC
		Written discourse: ITALY SLOVENIA
ITFs: BORDERS		Visual images: Aerial view of the natural border between Italy and Slovenia

Figure 3

Example of sequence annotation in the Annotation and Transcription Panel.

The Annotation and Transcription Panel includes the video sequence that can be played to facilitate its analysis and some boxes where the researcher/annotator can add information about *ITF type*, *Oral discourse*, *Sounds*, *Written discourse* and *Visual image*. In the case of the sequence shown in Figure 3, this entextualizes the BORDERS ITF; as indicated by the annotation NONE, there is no oral discourse, but music (see Music box); the visual image shows an aerial view of the natural border between Italy and Slovenia which is indicated with written discourse in the form of the labels ITALY and SLOVENIA shown on the video. This annotation allows the corpus to be searched for ITFs using the platform's Search Panel (Figure 4): an ITF can be selected from a drop-down menu containing all the ITF types

⁵ The videos quoted can be viewed in YouTube using the code given.

identified in the corpus (Figure 4-A) and this returns a list of sequences where the ITF is entextualized (Figure 4-B) which can be played by clicking on them.

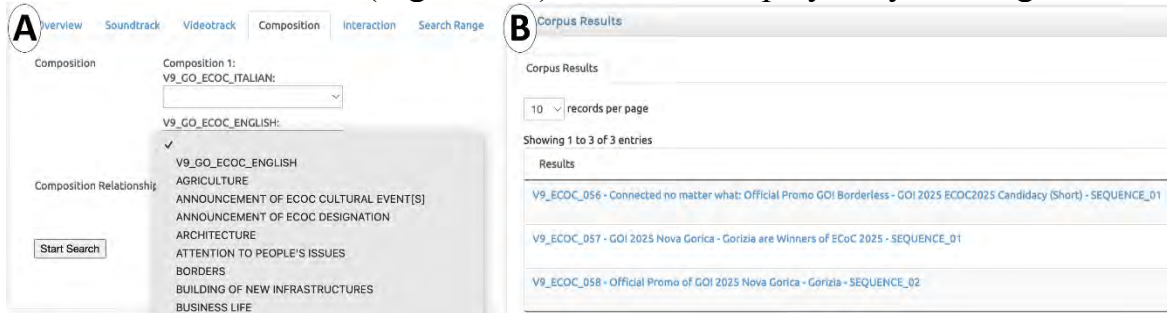


Figure 4
OpenMWS Search Panel.

Before presenting and discussing the results of the present study, a note on ITF annotation is in order. The present study has an exploratory nature, that is, establishing whether in the corpus under analysis recurrent thematics exist as well as rare thematics that can potentially highlight the uniqueness of the designated ECoC. For this reason, it was decided to annotate each ITF type only once in each video when an ITF occurred more than once in the same video.

5. Results and discussion

5.1. More frequent and rarer ITF types

In the corpus 97 ITF types were identified. Table 1 shows the top five most frequent ITFs.

	ITFs	OCCURRENCES
1st	THE CITY	42/60
2nd	LOCAL CULTURAL HERITAGE	34/60
3rd	PERFORMING ARTS	30/60
4th	FREE-TIME ACTIVITIES OFFERED BY THE CITY	14/60
5th	LOCAL CULTURAL EVENT[S]	13/60
	TOURISM	

Table 1
Top 5 most frequent ITFs.

53 of the 97 ITF types (i.e. 54.6% of the total) occur just once. Among these are CITY'S VALUES, DIVERSITY OF CULTURE, RESPECT FOR OTHER RELIGIONS, SENSE OF COMMUNITY and COMMON CULTURAL HERITAGE. The last ITF is worth mentioning. It is present in a video promoting Sibiu (HMKhVcc1WXw); here tattoos of symbols of the Italian

Renaissance (i.e. the Mona Lisa and the Vitruvian Man by Leonardo da Vinci and the Birth of Venus by Sandro Botticelli) and of the Hellenistic period (i.e. the typical painting of Greek vases) hint at the European cultural roots. This reference to the past is interesting considering that Sibius was ECoC in 2007, the year when Romania joined the EU. In addition, this ITF is related to the idea of European dimension fostered by the ECoCs programme (see Section 2), namely commonalities between various European cultures.

The following subsections present and discuss further results; the discussion is supported by the information provided in the reports published on the EU website⁶ dedicated to the ECoC initiative: the reports are particularly useful to understand whether the thematics entextualized in the videos are in line with the ones put forward by the ECoC for the initiative.

5.2. THE CITY ITF

It comes as no surprise that the most frequent ITF is THE CITY presenting the ECoC (42 occurrences in 60 videos, 70% of the total). This seems to be in line with Aiello and Thurlow's (2006) study which found that cityscape was one of the more recurrent visual themes in the official promotional texts they analysed. What is surprising is that this ITF does not occur in all the videos considering that these are videos marketing and presenting the ECoCs. This can be related to the text type. A case in point is the video entitled *Culture to live together. San Sebastian 2016, European Capital of Culture* (-AeCHUMkTXM) which describes what culture means for the city of San Sebastian. Another example is a video for Pilsen as the 2015 ECoC (PRunTMLYAs4) focusing on the events taking place in the ECoC year as well as Pilsen's well-known symbol, beer.

When occurring, THE CITY ITF is entextualized mainly in the visual image where, to use Kress and van Leeuwen's ([1996] 2021) terminology⁷, views of the city are 'offered' to the viewers: i.e. the city is the object of the viewers' gaze. This ITF thus represents an opportunity for the designated ECoC to build the image it wants to convey to viewers. For example, in the case of Elefsina, the visual images (see Figure 5) present the city as a heavily industrialized entity, an image the city itself aimed to change with the revenues from the ECoC title as highlighted by the Panel of experts in their report:

[t]he city sees their bid as a major contributor to the progress the city has been making from its heavy industrial and polluted past, "a grey industrial city" to its

⁶ <https://culture.ec.europa.eu/policies/culture-in-cities-and-regions/designated-capitals-of-culture> (5.10.2024)

⁷ Kress and van Leeuwen ([1996] 2021) distinguish between 'demand' image and 'offer' image; in the former, the represented participants look directly at the viewer as if demanding to enter into some kind of relation with them; in the latter, the represented participants do not look directly at the viewer but are "the object of the viewer's dispassionate scrutiny" (Kress, van Leeuwen 2021, p. 118) and the viewer plays the role of an invisible onlooker.

new sustainable urban economy in the wider metropolitan area of Athens. (European Commission 2016, p. 7).

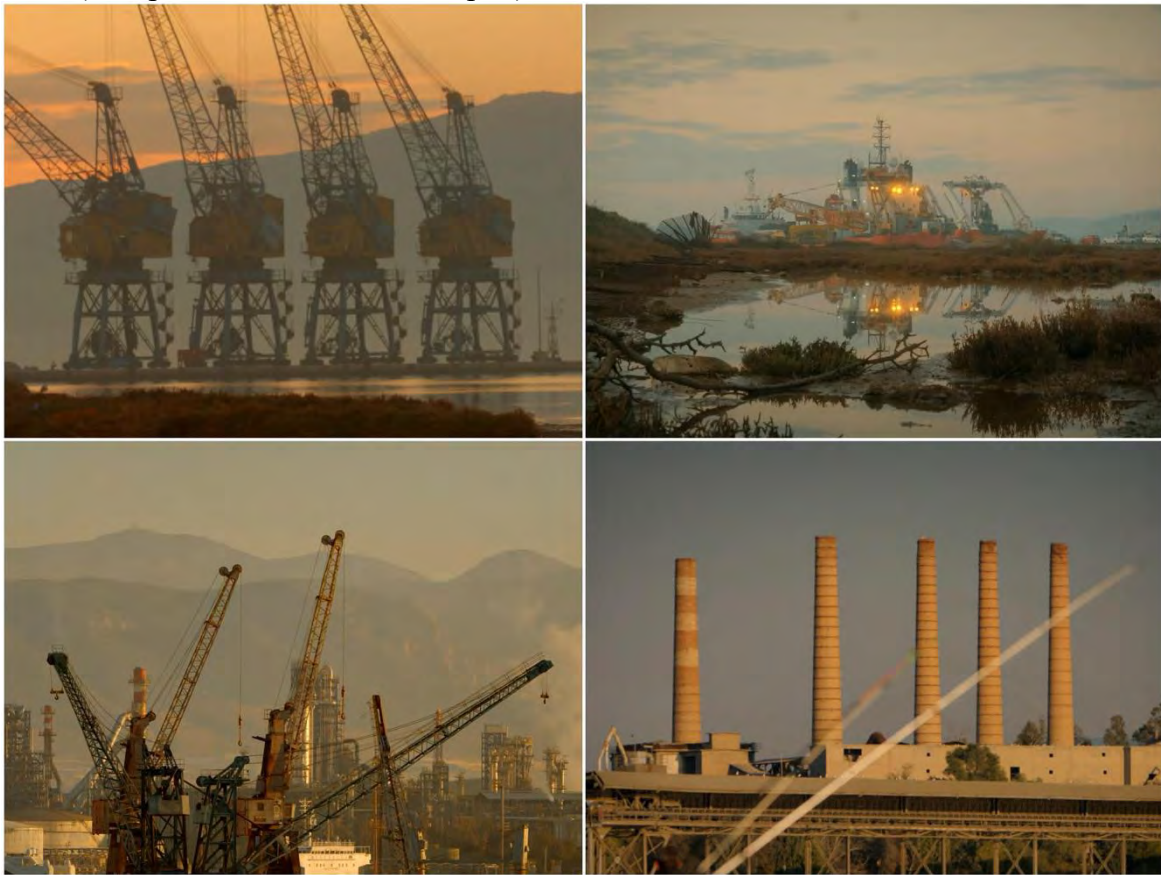


Figure 5
Representation of Elefsina as “a grey industrial city”
(European Commission 2016, p. 7) in an ECoC video (0Hwx9lWM4g4).

Besides images, some videos make use of written discourse to present the ECoC. A case in point is Liverpool (44K9bfXmQOw) which describes itself as: *dynamic, fresh, creative, real, inspirational, ironic and classical*.

While the majority of the THE CITY ITFs are entextualized mainly in the videotrack with images and in few cases with written discourse, there are some occurrences using entextualization in the soundtrack. One such example is Vilnius’ (nJLvEM0aOSk) use of a very abstract videotrack (a kind of animation) which requires the support of an extensive description:

Streets breathing nature, kind citizens and floating spirit of creativeness. It all lives here till these days. It is only with the heart that one can see rightly. What is essential is invisible to the eye.

The characteristics of the city are further highlighted in the videotrack with the keywords *nature, kindness* and *creativity*. It is hard to say whether these are elements that Vilnius intended to marketise during the ECoC year: in the two

reports available on the EU website dedicated to the ECoC initiative this does not seem to emerge; one of the elements emerging from McCoshan *et al.*'s report (n/a, 80) is, on the other hand, the “strong emphasis [put forward by the city] on [the city’s] long European history and cultural heritage”: this is present in the video with the EUROPEAN DIMENSION ITF entextualized in the soundtrack as “[t]he most talented artists from all over Europe came to create grace and cherish this peaceful town.” What seems to emerge from the sample analyses presented so far is the connection between an ECoC’s programme and the way in which the ECoC is presented in THE CITY ITFs. This is a connection further discussed below with respect to other ITFs.

One final example of the THE CITY ITF worth mentioning is taken from a video relating to Umeå (GE0vsw1K8j4). What is highlighted here are the many affordances for people and this is conveyed by images of the city and a happy woman who says:

I’ve lived in bigger cities all my life, and now we’ve moved here where there’s lots of space, and we find that this gives us a lot of chance to be creative and inspired by the nature around. It’s different, but it’s opening up our minds in different ways.

5.3. The LOCAL CULTURAL HERITAGE ITF

The second most frequent ITF type is LOCAL CULTURAL HERITAGE (34 occurrences out of 60 videos, 56.7% of the total). This focus on local cultural heritage seems to be in line with one of the objectives of the ECoC initiative, namely “highlighting the richness and diversity of cultures in Europe”.⁸

According to UNESCO (2003, p. 3), the term *cultural heritage* refers to monuments and collections of objects as well as:

traditions or living expressions inherited from our ancestors and passed on to our descendants, such as oral traditions, performing arts, social practices, rituals, festive events, knowledge and practices concerning nature and the universe or the knowledge and skills to produce traditional crafts. (UNESCO 2003, p. 3)

UNESCO distinguishes between tangible cultural heritage, that is, monuments, buildings and historic places, and intangible cultural heritage, that is language, folklore, customs and traditions. As shown in Table 2, various aspects of cultural heritage are presented in the videos.

⁸ <https://culture.ec.europa.eu/policies/culture-in-cities-and-regions/european-capitals-of-culture> (29.05.2024).

	ITFs FOR LOCAL CULTURAL HERITAGE	OCCURRENCES
1st	HISTORY	11/34
2nd	FOOD AND DRINK	8/34
3rd	RELIGION	5/34
4th	DANCE	4/34
5th	CLOTHES	2/34
	LITERATURE	
6th	MUSIC	1/34
	PAINTING	

Table 2
Aspects of cultural heritage presented in the videos.

HISTORY is the most frequent LOCAL CULTURAL HERITAGE ITF (11 out of 34 occurrences, 32.3% of the total CULTURAL HERITAGE ITFs). What is represented in the videos highlights the long history of Europe characterized by old civilizations whose remains are still visible (e.g. Matera, dsWC576w1JU; Galway, 44QnS6aqgA0; Elefsina, 0Hwx9IWM4g4), or important historical figures who are remembered and celebrated in the city's statues as is the case of Jean de Valette⁹ whose statue stands in a square in Valletta (izWmqkEiYJ0). However, in many cases it can be hard for viewers to understand the historical references especially when they have no or little knowledge about the history of the city promoted. Illustrative of this is the video on Valletta, a mini-documentary showing snapshots of the city against background music. No written or spoken discourse is used nor are labels or captions which could have guided viewers during viewings.

5.4. *ECoC leitmotif-related ITFs: The case of Nova Gorica and Gorizia*

What emerges from the analysis is that some of the ITFs are connected with the ECoC leitmotif. A case in point are the ITFs CROSSING BORDERS and BORDERS present in all the videos for Nova Gorica and Gorizia which clearly refer to the two cities' special topography.¹⁰ In this respect, the selection report of the 2025 ECoC in Slovenia points out that "Nova Gorica wants to grow together with its Italian bordering city Gorizia as if they were one" (European Commission 2021, p. 10). Figure 6 shows two occurrences of the BORDER ITF: the one on the left shows the Italian-Slovenian border line in Transalpina/Europe Square, while the one on the right shows the Isonzo River which is considered the natural boundary between the two countries.

⁹ Jean de Valette was a French nobleman and a Grand Master of the Order of Malta. In 1565, he commanded the resistance against the Ottomans who had attempted to conquer Malta and in 1566 laid the foundation stone of La Vallette.

¹⁰ After WWII, the Treaty of Paris between Italy and the Allied Powers (1947) annexed part of the municipality of Gorizia to Yugoslavia thus drawing a national border just off the town centre.



Figure 6

Two examples of the BORDER ITF.

Figure 7 shows two CROSSING BORDERS ITFs. The one on the left shows the mayors of Gorizia and Nova Goriza separated by a fence having what appears to be a friendly chat, thus giving the idea that despite the borders they can and do collaborate. The one on the right shows Tine Kancler, a Slovenian canoe athlete, canoeing on the Isonzo River and then saying: “Sono orgoglioso di essere entrato in acqua in Slovenia pochi minuti fa, e ora sono libero di uscire in Italia.”¹¹

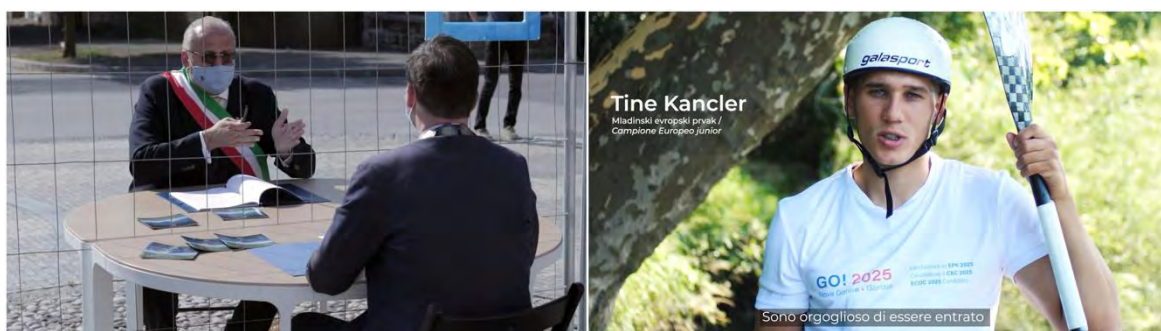


Figure 7

Two examples of the CROSSING BORDER ITF.

Conclusions

This article has given a sociosemiotic perspective to the analysis of place branding and place identity *vis-à-vis* the ECoC initiative. More precisely, using a small corpus of 60 promotional videos of 35 ECoCs it has looked for recurrent thematics as well as rare thematics that can potentially capture the uniqueness of the designated ECoC. To do so, it has put forward a model

¹¹ I am proud of the fact that a few minutes ago I got onto the river in Slovenia and am now free to get out of it in Italy (author’s translation).

drawing on Lemke's (1995a, 1995b, 2005) theory of ITFs. The article has also shown that the investigation is not limited to ITF types but also embraces the way in which they are enacted in the corpus. The results presented are preliminary and based on a small corpus; however, there is good reason to believe that the application of the model will allow researchers to quantify ITFs and provide a clearer picture of how place branding and place identity are enacted in videos.

In some ways even more significant perhaps is the article's demonstration of the importance of involving sociosemioticians in the place branding process which seems to pivot around a branding consultants-stakeholders co-operation. According to Eurocities (2011), indeed, an important consideration for successful place branding is the involvement of a wide range of stakeholders. In the case of city branding, these should include the city's government, the private sector, tourism and civil society, but also external stakeholders. In a similar vein, place branding consultant Natasha Grand states that "[o]n the operational level, political leadership and support is an essential condition for the success of place-branding and identity work" (Kaefer 2021, p. 234). Stakeholders should, *inter alia*, work together to ensure brand creativity and share a vision for the future of the place overcoming their differences. This article puts forward the need for joint work between place branding consultants, stakeholders and sociosemioticians in an effort to find best practices for place branding and place identity. These strategies can be used by sectors of public policy and urban governance to marketise their place branding in various media channels and digital genres with the ultimate goal of attracting tourism and investments.

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