



END-USER VALUES IN PLACE BRANDING

People's perception of the reconstruction of the
village center of Balkbrug

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Abstract

In the ongoing globalization, small urban areas can have trouble keeping their originality. Improvements in auto mobility and the online world has made the world increasingly connected with each other. At the same time, the growth of auto mobility had led to places being stripped of things that would be considered as key cultural elements for the area. Because of this, villages on the countryside could lose its identity and turn into extensions of nearby cities. By using the Dutch village of Balkbrug as a case study, an attempt for place branding will researched. Participants of this study were asked about their views of the village center and the project that would overhaul the intersection into a tunnel. The implementation of this tunnel would make for the return of a bridge that can be considered a key cultural element for the local identity. Attempts at branding would have higher chances in succeeding if the end-users can feel a certain, often cultural, connection to it. The locals should feel connected towards the attempted brand. This research builds on the idea of end-user connection towards place branding attempts. . By surveying the end-users, which are in this case the inhabitants of the village, a better perspective can be made what their values regarding the plan and the old situation are. It resulted in the understanding that the villagers were mostly concerned about the traffic safety of said village. Most thought that this would improve because the traffic would have to stop less. At the same time, the addition of cultural heritage would give the center Balkbrug a boost. Something that was very much needed, according to the locals.

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Introduction

Background

With the ongoing globalization, the world is becoming more interconnected and homogenous. Areas around the world have to compete with each other since the competition is now globally. According to Hospers (2020), the Dutch village life has changed dramatically in the last decennia. He argues that the village life used to be isolated from the city. However, due to the intensifying of automotive mobility and the arrival of the internet, the villagers became more connected to the surrounding cities. This has resulted in them becoming some sort of city dwellers themselves who happen to live in a neighboring village. At the same time, with the ongoing covid-19 pandemic, people are asked to work from home. If this would continue to be the same after the pandemic is over, then the need to travel to work would decrease. This could affect people's choices to live in certain areas. These factors can be of influence for the local identity of villages.

This ongoing phenomenon could put pressure on the regional or local identities of areas because on the global scale; local areas may look the same (Ger, 1999). Therefore, a need may arise to create some form of reputation or place brand to make villages stand out. In order to create a place identity place branding can be used (Mittilä & Lepistö, 2013). Boisen et al. (2018) say that place branding should be a holistic concept that tries to manage the reputation, image, perception and association of a given place. It should influence the first thing people would think of when a place is mentioned. Moro et al. (2020) build on this by saying that place branding is about the construction and communication of an identifying, distinctive image of an area, which would result in getting the attention from a preferred group of people. This is not to be confused with similar terms like place marketing or place promotion, which are more market oriented terms. For example, if someone mentions Rotterdam, people would often think about the large seaport city in the west of the Netherlands. At the same time, place branding can also have economic implications. People within a certain business would prefer to lean towards a place that may already have established itself as a key figure within said business, like Paris for fashion. Urban design or urban planning can be used to influence the 'brand' of a certain place. Budapest, for example, has marked itself as a touristic brand with the repurpose of old or vacant areas for pubs. Now, the city is renowned for these 'ruin pubs'.

Research problem

One way of creating a brand identity is with the help of the built environment. However, using the built environment for place branding proves to be a challenge. An example of this would be the plan to give an economic impulse to the coastal town of Scheveningen. Here, the planners wanted to compete or brand themselves as a contemporary international center to the city center of The Hague by revitalizing the coast (Oorschot, 2014). In the end, plans to regenerate the coastline of the town were thought to add value objectively. However, they could not get the locals on board. One of the reasons was the economic crisis at the time. However it lacked subjective value, which resulted in the hindrance of the plans. With this in mind, it is interesting to dive deeper into the subject by looking at recent examples which could play out differently. Therefore, this research will be looking at a plan that encompasses place branding with the use of the built environment. To stay in the Dutch rural context, the focus of this thesis, is the village of Balkbrug. This village is located in the province of Overijssel, the same province that is discussed in the article of Hospers (2020). However, balkbrug is not mentioned. The reason why this research focusses on Balkbrug, is because his village is an example of the increase of mobility. Balkbrug thanks its existence to the construction of a bridge over a canal which ran from Hasselt to Coevorden. It acts as a central area between several larger towns

in the area. Because of this, many people have to cross the village daily. In order to cope with the increase in traffic, the canal was replaced with a provincial road, namely the N377. This led to the removal of the bridge which Balkbrug is named after. An intersection was constructed in its place in the 1960's. This can be considered a loss of local identity that stood for almost 60 years. That situation has changed in recent years however. In the last couple of years, plans were made to improve the traffic situation of the village. The intersection would be reconstructed to a tunnel, with on top a new bridge.

Societal relevance

Place branding can increase the connection between the inhabitants and their local area. This would result in an increased sense of community and cohesion. Therefore, such research would be deemed relevant in a societal sense. At the same time, the inhabitants of Balkbrug could be stimulated to think about their village in a new way.

Academic relevance

Lessons from such projects are that it is important to have an insight in the values of the possible end users. Because of this, it is relevant to find out what possible subjective values people would have regarding a plan. This way, planners would have a better insight in the elements they would need to include in their plans beforehand. A possible result from this would be that the end users or actors involved would be quicker to comply with the plans, resulting in a smoother planning process. At the same time, this case study could provide as an example for plans that attempt place branding in a Dutch rural context.

Research aim and questions

This research is about finding out how the reconstruction of the intersection can boost local identity of the village of Balkbrug. This will be done by finding out what the values of the end-users are, both objectively and subjectively and in what way the plan would be an addition to the village of Balkbrug. With this in mind, it is necessary to find out what the end-users' opinions are regarding the current intersection that acts as the 'village center', what they think is typical for Balkbrug, and how they see the plan. This will be done with the following research questions.

RQ: in what way will the reconstruction of intersection in Balkbrug add to the objective and subjective values of its end users?

This will be answered with the following sub questions:

SQ1. How is the Tunnel project place branded?

SQ2. What are the values of the end-users regarding the town of Balkbrug?

SQ3. What are the values (both objective and subjective) of the end-users regarding the tunnel?

Structure

The following chapter the theoretical framework and conceptual model will be presented. The methodology for this research can be found in the third chapter. The fourth chapter will provide a further explanation of the case study as well as the survey results. The discussion of these results, as well as drawn conclusions can be read in the fifth and last chapter. After that the references and the appendix can be found.

Theoretical framework

The increase in mobility, both digitally and in the real world, has allowed people to move more freely, this enable people to work further away from their place of living. At the same time, people that used to live in cities have an easier time moving to the countryside, since everything the increased mobility makes it so that everything keeps getting closer together in a way. Because of this, villages or rural areas could almost be seen either as extensions of the cities or even as suburbs. At the same time, places found themselves to be competing in a global competition. This has a negative effect on the local identity (Anholt, 2015; Grenni et al, 2019; Hospers, 2020).

End-user values

People have the desire to stand out and have value in things they regard as part of their identity. A distinction between values can be made, namely between objective and subjective values. Objective values are the values that resides in the object itself. For instance, the costs of materials used in a product, the productive output of a product, the reliability (or safety), or the overall quality of something. The subjective value however, is the way people perceive the object. The example Den Ouden (2012) makes is the use of an old-timer car. These cars are often not safer, cleaner or more reliable than modern cars. However, enthusiasts still prefer to drive these cars than the modern ones, because of the values they hold for them. The same thing can be said for villages. Villages often lack the facilities and services larger cities can provide; like a larger supply of stores, movie theaters, institutions for higher education. Some people living in such villages would not move to the larger cities, since they would feel more at home in the village. The village is a part of their identity, and with that, they grow an –often unintentional- desire to make said place stand out (Mommaas, 2002). As was mentioned in the introduction, place branding can be used to make places stand out. Place branding aims at influencing the mindset of people making use of a place with the help of an authentic place identity (Chang & Marafa, 2013). Anholt (2015) says that it is necessary to make use of place branding strategies for a long period of time. These strategies need to have substance, symbolic actions and strategy. Next, a strategy for creating substance with the help of a local cultural narrative and ways of making symbolic actions that fits the context of the case study will be discussed.

Substance

According to Kunzman (2004), a local cultural link is needed between place and place brand. Place branding can be seen as the combination between identity, image and experience (kavaraztis & Hatch, 2013). It is thus more than marketing techniques and slogan creation (Govers, 2013). The conclusion from these authors is that the attempt for creating place brands needs some form of substance to be convincing to both the locals and outsiders to be able to get a foothold into the place of choice. Klijn et al. (2012) validate this notion in their research about stakeholder involvement. Here they have seen a positive influence in the effectiveness of place branding when the local population was included in the branding process. The reason for this is that places do not have a singular identity. Each person has a different view or attitude towards a place. Including these different views and attitudes in the place branding process can make for a better picture of the area. This will result in a better substance on which the place brand can be built. However as Antholt (2015) said, more is needed for successful place branding than just substance. Symbolic actions can be seen as the implementation of the substance in the world.

Commented [E1]: Wat hebben policies hier nu ineens mee te maken?

Urban planning as symbolic actions

With the help of the cultural narrative, impulses in the built environment can be made that compliment the ideas that the place brand wants to convey. Evans (2015) remarks two strategies for creating local identities with the help of urban planning. The first one focusses on iconic architecture, where old buildings, architecture or cultural facilities are refurbished or revitalized. To do this, research can be done on the history of a place. An example of this is shown in the article of Fan (2014), where they tried to boost tourism around Shouxian in China. The idea was to make use of cultural heritage to brand the place. The town in question is the location of the origin of tofu. Because of this, the village was branded as 'Tofu Village'. At the same time, architecture from that time was reintroduced for new buildings to give the idea that this architecture has always been the mark of that area.

The second strategy focusses on urban design, where new urban landscapes are being built with a particular notion that the people from there want to advocate. This strategy is often implemented by cities or places that want to bring a message into the world about grand ambitions. The best example for this would be the Guggenheim museum in Bilbao. Other examples for this strategy are relatively new places that are built from the ground up with large-scale grandeur building projects, like the United Arab Emirates that used to be just deserts 40 years ago.

For such interventions mentioned above, urban quality is an important factor. The quality of an urban place is a strongly subjective term. In the book about the playtime concept, Moro et al. (2020) use a guiding principle for urban quality that they call βίος (Bios). They talk about what the conditions are for revitalizing life in areas. It incorporates five elements that, if used correctly in a design, can form a synergy that would improve the urban quality of the area. These elements are color, nature, light, people and movement.

Conceptual model and hypothesis

The reasoning and concepts that are described above has led to the following hypothesis: The plan was adjusted to fit the local cultural narrative by the influence of the subjective values of its future end-users, which can result in a place brand. This idea is illustrated into a conceptual model that is shown below.

The concepts mentioned above can be integrated into a conceptual model that would be relevant to the case study of Balkbrug. Although, not often clear from the beginning, it is believed that the values mentioned in this model can be noticed in the project in Balkbrug. In the model below, such situation is shown. The strategy for place branding would be to take opportunity of new urban planning projects by adjusting existing plans to the subjective values of the locals. With that strategy, substance can be created with the help of a local cultural narrative, and adjusting the original plans with the substantiated narrative can then be regarded as symbolic actions.

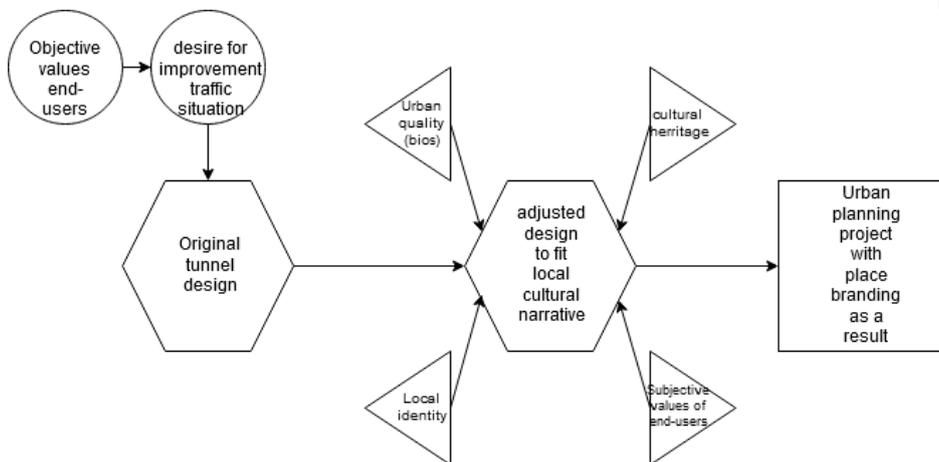


Figure 1 Conceptual model for the place branding process of Balkbrug

Methodology

This research is exploring the possible ways of place branding in a Dutch rural context. This will be done by conducting a case study about a rural area in the east part of the Netherlands. This rural area is the town of Balkbrug in the province of Overijssel. This research will be conducted with the help of open question surveys.

Research method

There have been several studies conducted where the end-users are asked about their perceived image for a place regarding place branding. However there has not been a confirmed best option in how to engage actors properly in such studies (Grenni et al, 2020). Researchers in perceived image studies have often opted for quantitative methods (Chang & Marafa, 2013). This however does come with its own limitations. Closed questions, or even questions that consists of how much you approve or disapprove of something – for example the Likert scale-, would be limiting in the way people could give answers. With such closed questions, people could only voice their stances, without proper reasoning. This would leave out subtle background information that could be considered crucial to get the cultural narrative picture complete. Conducting interviews could have been an option; however, there are several factors to why this is not the method that will be used. For starters, the nature of the participants make it so that it is difficult to find the best suitable candidates for the research. Everyone can have different reasons for their attitude towards the plans, thus focusing on a small group of people for their reasoning would leave out possible stances that would be important for this research. Additionally, the ongoing pandemic would make it difficult to find people who both have the time and motivation to participate in an interview.

Because of these reasons, a mix of qualitative and quantitative methods is necessary to compensate for both its shortcomings (Zenker & Martin 2011). Next to that, there is not a clear confirmed method that is the most suitable for this kind of situation. With these factors in mind, a creative method can be used for this research. This is the reason why this research will be conducted with the help of an open question survey. The survey will be available online, so that it is accessible for the relevant participants. At the same time, the open questions are in essay form, so that they have the space necessary to voice that opinions properly. With these factors in mind, it should be considered a method with a ‘best of both worlds’ approach.

Finding participants

For this research, participants are needed for filling out the survey. The characteristics of said participants are as following. For starters, they should be possible end-users of the plan. The easiest way to get end-users is to contact inhabitants of the village. In order to reach out to the locals, it is best to make contact with a local central body that can ask them if they are willing to participate in the research. For this, the local interest group *plaatselijk belang Balkbrug* and homeowner associations are asked if they are willing to ask their members by email to fill in the online survey.

Ethical concerns

Because of the nature of this method, filling out the survey is voluntary. At the same time, the real identity of the participants is not relevant. The only personal information that is being asked is their sex and age. This is asked in order to get a better understanding of the demographic that was willing to participate in this research.

Data analysis.

The data that is gathered will be coded with the help of Atlas. Questions that directly ask about the opinion regarding an element in the plan is labeled as either positive (+), negative (-) or neutral/indifferent (.). This coding setup is shown in the appendix. The reasoning for the negative, positive or neutral opinions are labeled as well. If certain labels are similar to each other, these will be grouped together. This will allow for a clear picture of the values of the end-users in regard of the plan. The criteria for this question was as following. If the arguments were overall negative, then it would be marked as center-, if it was positive center+. For indifferent (or neutral), center. then that would mean that it was not clear that they had a negative or positive opinion. For instance, if they would call it dull and give it a rating of 5 or 6, it would be labeled as 'center.', or just give a short description of what is there without any clear undertone (e.x. it is just an intersection). the labels are followed by one or more other labels that would give the reason why they think that way. Therefore, the number of reasons are more than the amount of ratings for the center.

The Tunnel project in Balkbrug

The realization of a tunnel in the heart of the town of Balkbrug is part of a series infrastructure plans located on the roads N377, N48 and N340. These roads have been dubbed the 'Vechtdalverbinding' (vechtdal connection). The province of Overijssel had made plans to improve both the traffic flow and safety on said roads. In the two figures below, you can see the old intersection (Figure 3) and the new design of the tunnel (Figure 4).



Figure 3 birds view of the intersection, snapshot from Google maps, 2020.



Figure 4 early design illustration of the tunnel, Provincie Overijssel, 2018

Almost all plans of the improvement package consist of reshaping road crossings to improve the situation for cyclists. The addition of a cyclist tunnel under the intersections, or the widening of an island between two road lanes would mostly do this. These improvements are for the most part not in an urban area, but along intersections on the countryside. However, the plan in balkbrug stands out in these plans. Here the main intersection, what is considered the center of the village by its inhabitants, is completely overhauled. This would change the feel of the village drastically. Thanks to its central location between several large towns, it is always rather busy during the day. Currently it serves as the intersection for people commuting between towns like Hoogeveen, Ommen, Zwolle, Hardenberg and Coevorden –even Germany in that sense-. When this plan is finalized, it would mean that these commuters would not be clogged up at the traffic lights in Balkbrug anymore, but could be driving through it without having to stop. Next to the large change in traffic flow, it would also change the look of the village. The intersection that was there before the construction of the tunnel was built in the 1960's. It has been there for almost 60 years. This would mean that for 60 years people's image of the town was for a large part the intersection. The tunnel would probably also have another impact on the image of the village, namely an historical impact. Before the intersection, there was a canal, called the Dedemsvaart. This canal ran from the town of Hasselt to the river the Vecht in the town of Gramsbergen. On the part of the intersection where the new tunnel will be built, there was the bridge where Balkbrug got its name.



Figure 5 'Brug te Balkbrug' postcard from 1960-1980.

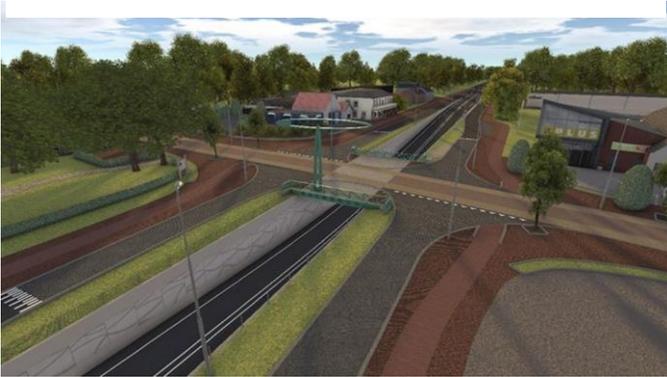


Figure 6 Kunstwerk Balkbrug (Vechtdalverbinding), A&E Architecten, 2021

When looking at the design in the figures below, a clear parallel can be seen with the past. This was also the intention of the designers. On the website of A&E Architecten, they literally state they wanted to return the bridge design in the plan as a phantom image of the past. At the same time, it would serve as an image that would stand out to the people traversing the village on the main road (A&E Architecten, 2021). They say that such new elements in the heart of the village could boost the village center.

Survey Results

The respondents

in the table below, the results of the first three questions are shown. Below the table the results will be described. In the appendix the results are shown as well, however those results are shown per question with graphs included. The results below are grouped together.

Number of respondents	Mean age respondents	Distribution male/female		Inhabitants of Balkbrug	
		Male	Female	Yes	No
46	48,06	19	27	43	3

The Center

Questions 4 and 5 were about the current village center, which is why they are grouped together for the result. The residents of Balkbrug give their village center an average mark of 4,89 out of a 10 before the start of construction of the tunnel. Next to that, they were asked to describe what they thought of the center. Five respondents were generally positive about the village center. Three of them said that it was functional. The other two described it as having a nice atmosphere (*gezellig*) and that it has some bustle (*bedrijvigheid*). Lastly, the negative comments regarding the center were as following. The majority of the respondents thought that they did not have a center. Eight people have literally stated that, while another eight said that it *'it was just an intersection with traffic lights'*. Another thing that was mentioned several times was the fact that the intersection cut Balkbrug in half.

The project

The majority of people were positive about the project. Thirty respondents were in favor of the tunnel, although not everyone included an argumentation as to why they are in favor. An increase in traffic flow and safety of the place is the main reason why people are in favor. Another argument is that it would connect the northern half with the rest of the village. The bridge would offer a direct connection between the halves. Because of the absence of traffic lights, travelers will not have to stop. Some noted that it could provide new chances and interests for the town. Others liked it for aesthetic reasons, since they liked the look of the tunnel more than that of the intersection. Most answers that were deemed neutral or indifferent mostly spoke about them not wanting a main road through the village at all. However, they remarked that they would make the best out of the situation. The people that have a negative stance on the matter say that the project was deemed too expensive and took too long to be implemented. There was a concern that local shops would not benefit from the tunnel. Ongoing traffic would not have to stop in the center anymore due to the absence of traffic lights. This reasoning is also found in the answers of question 10, which asked if the project would improve the flow of traffic. The vast majority thought it would (39 yes, 2 no, 4 do not know). The main reason why the two cases do not think it would improve the traffic flow, was because you would have two lanes of traffic in opposite direction of each other. Nevertheless, the argument for an increase in traffic flow, is that ongoing traffic that passes through town can continue without having to stop because the absence of traffic lights. This is noted 12 out of 39 times. Other things that respondents mention in their answers is that it would offer a better connection between

the north and south side, and that it would improve safety. Lastly, one case claimed that the flow already is improved with the current traffic measures that were taken for the construction of the tunnel; to make sure the tunnel could be built without traffic redirection; the intersection was changed into an egg-shaped roundabout.

The idea that this project could be creating more recognition for the village is divided 50/50 (or 23/23) between the respondents. The main argument of why people would think it would put Balkbrug more on the map is because of its unusual design (directly mentioned 10 times). Variants would be that it would be authentic, that it would stand out, that it would make people look twice, that it would be promotable and that people already talk about its implementation due to the long planning process. In addition, the design is related to its history (mentioned 4 times).

The biggest reason why people think it would not put Balkbrug more on the map is that the new traffic situation would allow ongoing traffic to keep going without having to stop. (Mentioned 10 times). Another reason is that they do not think that a traffic situation or the village itself is anything noteworthy. This was mentioned 9 times. In addition, it was stated three times that the town is famous for different things.

Addition to the project

The following questions were about the addition of brick pavement and an extension of the already existing tree lane from the Ommerweg to the Meppelerweg. The majority of people that gave an argumentation in favor of the extended tree lane liked it because of the added greenery in the heart of the village. Additionally, some stated that because you would get a tree lane from both sides, it would increase the unity of the center. Lastly, a reason why people liked it was that in the area there were trees being removed as preparation for the built of the tunnel. Therefore, they see that as compensation. People reacted neutral or indifferent because they think either it was not achievable, not necessary or they just did not care. Lastly, the main reasons why some are not in favor of extra trees in the heart of the village is that they believe that it probably would not be achievable to plant trees on the proposed areas (*Nice but not functional*). One case stated that trees there do not fit the area.

People are mainly in favor of bricks because it would create a better atmosphere (*gezelligheid*). Some of these answers were related to the village feel. Some liked the idea because it would remind them of the past. Some because it adds character. One respondent elaborated on that by stating he *"would be in favor of real baked bricks or that they should be in different colors"*. For people neutral or indifferent about brick pavement, it is nice but not functional (*slipperiness*). One answer that stood out was that it would be less inviting for cars because of noise nuisance. Other answered did not have an opinion or did not care. The reasons why people are not in favor of the brick pavement are safety reasons and nuisance. Bricks are more slippery in wet weather than asphalt, can sink because of heavy traffic and make more noise when driven over. Only comment about the looks of brick is 'nice but not functional'.

Typically Balkbrug

Another element of the plan that was asked in the survey was the incorporation of the old bridge design on top of the tunnel. Here the majority thought positively about it. Not many people gave a reason. However, the ones that did mostly said that it would be a reference to the history of the village. Next to that, several cases stated that they were positive about it since Balkbrug thanks its name to that bridge. One case lived too short of a time in town to have an opinion, which was the only case that was deemed neutral. Two cases were negative about it. The reasons were that it would not fit the plan or that there was no good reason for such addition. After that, the question

was asked what if they would think it would fit their own idea of what is typically Balkbrug. 32 cases said yes; with the main reasons, being that it fits the name of the village and that it references the past. Others would think the tunnel would be an authentic feature in the area. For the other answers, there was one that gave a reason. This case claimed that there is no water in the current 'canal', so it would not be deemed typical. The things that were mentioned the most as 'typical Balkbrug' would be the Veldzicht Centre for Transcultural psychiatry, the Frico Cheese factory and its steam whistle –which still can be heard every workday at noon and around 16:30. Others are the local swimming pool "t Heuveltjes Bosbad", natural area "Het Reestdal", "de Ommerschans", and party center "Takens:" – which was demolished after going bankrupt in 2015-.

Discussion and conclusion

Local identities can be put under pressure with the ongoing interconnectedness of places. The reason for that would be the increase in mobility and globalization, which makes places compete with each other. The increase in mobility, and the fact that people would work and live in different places made it so that more people have to travel. To cope with this, places were reconstructed, which led to the disappearance of local landmarks. The bridge of Balkbrug is a good example for this. To keep up with traffic growth, the canal was replaced with a road and the bridge was removed. This left a whole in the cultural identity of Balkbrug. Place branding in rural areas could be of use to bring villages local identities to the forefront. In order to create a proper place brand, it should have some form of substance in the form of a cultural narrative. With this, the local population needs to be included in the branding process to be able to capture their values. This thesis delved deeper into a place branding situation in a Dutch rural context. The village of Balkbrug was used as a case study for this thesis, since the reconstruction of the intersection made it so that a lost local cultural element – the bridge – could make a return. Participants were asked to voice their values regarding both the plan and the village of Balkbrug. With this in mind, it is necessary to find out what the end-users opinions are regarding the current intersection that acts as the ‘village center’, what they think is typical for Balkbrug, and how they see the plan. With the help of an open question survey, the participants could provide argumentation along with their opinions. With the inclusion of the argumentation, it would be able to provide a cultural narrative based on the values of the end-users.

The results indicate that the former traffic situation was in need of change and that the village has lacked a proper village center. Most people could only speak positively about it in an objective way, since it was deemed practical and safe, since everyone had to wait their turn for crossing it. However, further results show that the intersection was seen as neither practical nor safe, which was because of children’s exposure to heavy traffic. Answers stated the village had a nice atmosphere when describing the center. However, this can be regarded as an answer for describing the village as a whole instead, since the vast majority of people stated that there was no center present. With this in mind, the only reason why people would think positively about the center would be because they feel attached to the village; which can be regarded as a subjective value.

The project itself was received fairly well, since 60 percent of the respondents was in favor of the tunnel. The prominent answers of why people were in favor of the tunnel was because it would make the village stand out with references from the past. The intended purpose of the tunnel was to make ongoing traffic to travel through the village without stopping. The vast majority of respondents had faith in the design. However, they were clearly divided on whether the village would get more recognition with the arrival of the tunnel. Most thought that the historic view of the village would provide some form of recognition. However, others were skeptical about it, because they did not think Balkbrug as noteworthy to begin with.

The addition of brick pavement and the tree lanes is well received. Factors for urban quality – as mentioned by Moro et al (2020) - was recognized within the answers of the respondents. The majority thought that the usage of bricks as pavement would give out a village feel. This is due to their brown colors. At the same time, the tree lanes would offer more greenery in a place that was formerly regarded as a lake of asphalt. Movement was a noticeable factor as well. The bridge would offer a way for the inhabitants to travel from one half to the other easier. This would make the place more people-friendly, which is another factor of the concept. Light was not a factor in the plan that

was noticed. The only concerns were in the sense of safety and practicality, something that would be considered as objective values.

The results show that the majority of respondents were in favor of the addition of the old bridge design. This is in line with the theory of Evans for the inclusion of historic heritage in place branding, since parallels can be made with the story of Fan (2014). In both this project and the tofu village, past iconic elements were brought up to give an identity boost to their places. This is evident, since most arguments for the bridge were that such design would stand out more, with a clear reference to the past; and of course, Balkbrug is named after that type of bridge.

As stated in the hypothesis, the idea of place branding within this project was a way to make the tunnel project fit in the cultural narrative for the locals. However, it was not a priority to do this at the start. When linking the survey answers with the concepts discussed in the theoretical framework, it could be regarded as a form of place branding, mostly comparing it to the methods used in the tofu village. There was a greater concern for the objective values of the inhabitants from the start; which were values regarding traffic safety and traffic flow. The end-users believe that these elements are solved with this project. At the same time, the subjective values of the end-users are taken into account as well. In the answers, it becomes evident that the inhabitants are attached to the village. The village feel was a reason that was mentioned multiple times. There was also a concern for unity in the village, since the intersection had cut the village in half for more than sixty years. That was believed to going to be solved as well, since the bridge would allow people to move freely without the need for stopping. The reconstruction of the intersection into a tunnel would improve the traffic flow and safety of the village, as well as provide a new center within a local cultural narrative. Balkbrug serves as an example of a project that was initiated to improve the traffic situation, while at the same time improves the overall look of the village in line with a local cultural narrative.

Reflection

This research is in many ways not the answer to try and capture stakeholder values in the place branding process. As Grenni et al. (2020) have stated there was not a clear method in order to include stakeholders in place branding. This could be interpreted as room for creative approaches. Because of that, the method of open question surveys was used. The idea was to get some form of compromise between interviews and short answer surveys. The reason for that was to try to fill in the shortcomings purely qualitative and purely quantitative methods had. It was expected that the participants would make proper use of the open question format. However, most participants did not include any argumentation with their answers. Because of this, the answers were rather limited, which made it harder to get a better picture of the value narrative of the inhabitants of Balkbrug. At the same time, analyzing the data proved to be a large task as well. There were 11 questions that needed to be transcribed, times 46 (which were the amount of usable responses). For future research, a larger focus is needed to make the type of answers clear in the survey; in this case, to make sure participants include argumentation. At the same time, more time has to be spend to work out the research method properly.

Nevertheless, it can be said that this research can be deemed useful in the world of place branding literature, since it provided a creative research method that proved to not be useful. Sometimes if you cannot find ways that work, it is good to find ways that do not work. Either way, it would narrow the scope of possible research methods for stakeholder involvement in place branding, which is a contribution in itself.

Recommendation

This research only captured the values of the end-users in this moment. The project itself is not finished, so the participants have based their answers on what they think the plan would look like. When the project is finished, the participants will be the end-users, which could change their view regarding the tunnel. Thus for future research, it is recommended to look at the long-term effects of the tunnel project in Balkbrug. At the same time, scoping out on a single project in a place and focusing on said place as a whole could be a better option for future research. Because in the respondents' answers it became clear that the village has more things to offer than an empty village center.

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Appendix

Survey

In Dutch:

Question	Question type
Wat is uw geslacht?	Male/female
Wat is uw leeftijd?	Age
Komt u uit Balkbrug?	Yes/no
Hoe zou u het centrum van Balkbrug voor de start van de bouw kunnen omschrijven?	Open
Welk cijfer zou u het centrum geven?	1-10
Welke dingen in Balkbrug zou u beschouwen als typisch balkbrugs?	Open
Wat is uw mening over het idee van het tunnelproject?	Open
De bomenlaan van de ommerweg wordt doorgetrokken naar de meppelerweg, wat is uw mening hierover?	Open
Daarnaast wordt de wegen rondom de tunnel ingeklinkert, wat is uw mening hierover?	open
Wat voor effect zou dit project na voltooiing volgens u hebben op het verkeer?	Open
Wat vindt u van het idee om de oude brug terug te laten komen in het plan?	Open
Zou het bij kunnen dragen aan uw idee voor 'typisch Balkbrug'?	Open
Denkt u dat dit plan balkbrug meer bekendheid zou kunnen geven?	Yes/no
Waarom denkt u dat?	Open
Over welke elementen van het plan die nu nog niet aan bod zijn gekomen bent u positief?	Open
Over welke elementen van het plan die nu nog niet aan bod zijn gekomen bent u negatief?	Open
Heeft u nog opmerkingen/vragen?	Open

In english:

Question	Question type
What is your gender?	Male/female
What is your age?	Age
Do you currently live in Balkbrug?	Yes/no
How would you describe the village centre before the start of construction?	Open
How would you rate it?	1-10
Which things would you regard as typical balkbrug?	Open
What is your opinion about the idea of the tunnelproject?	Open
As you can see in the plan, the lane of trees that goes from the Ommerweg is extended to the Meppelerweg, what do you think about this?	Open
The roads along the tunnel will be layed with bricks, what do you think about this?	open
Would you think the tunnel would solve traffic flow?	Yes/no
What do you think of the idea of incorporating the old bridge into the design?	Open
Would that add to your idea of typically Balkbrug?	Open
Do you think this plan would put balkbrug more on the map?	Yes/no
Why do you think that?	Open
What factors that are not mentioned yet do you find appealing?	Open
And which factors non-appealing?	Open
Any questions/remarks?	Open

Coding setup

Question	Question type	How to label	code
What is your gender?	Male/female		
What is your age?	Age		
Do you currently live in Balkbrug?	Yes/no		Yes/no
How would you describe the village centre before the start of construction?	Open	Label Postive negative indifferent answers as different codes add reason as extra code	Centre+ centre- centre.
How would you rate it?	1-10		1-10
Which things would you regard as typical balkbrug?	Open	Label answers, group together	
What is your opinion about the idea of the tunnelproject?	Open	Label Postive negative indifferent answers as different codes	Tunnel+ Tunnel- Tunnel.
As you can see in the plan, the lane of trees that goes from the Ommerweg is extended to the Meppelerweg, what do you think about this?	Open	Label Postive negative indifferent answers as different codes	Trees+ Trees- Trees.
The roads along the tunnel will be layed with bricks, what do you think about this?	open	Label Postive negative indifferent answers as different codes	Bricks+ Bricks- Bricks.
Would you think the tunnel would solve traffic flow?	Yes/no	Label yes or no, that subgroup the reasons	Flowyes Flowno
What do you think of the idea of incorporating the old bridge into the design?	Open	Label Postive negative indifferent answers as different codes	Bridge+ Bridge- Bridge.
Would that add to your idea of typically Balkbrug?	Open	Label yes or no, that subgroup the reasons	Bridgetyp+ Bridgetyp-

Do you think this plan would put balkbrug more on the map?	Yes/no	Yes/no	Balkfameyes Balkfameno
Why do you think that?	Open	Label answers, make groups	
What factors that are not mentioned yet do you find appealing?	Open	Label answers, make groups	
And which factors non-appealing?	Open	Label answers, make groups	
Any questions/remarks?	Open	For self reflection	

Results

Question 1, 2 & 3.

These questions are used to get an idea of who the people are that have answered the survey and are not used to answer the research questions.

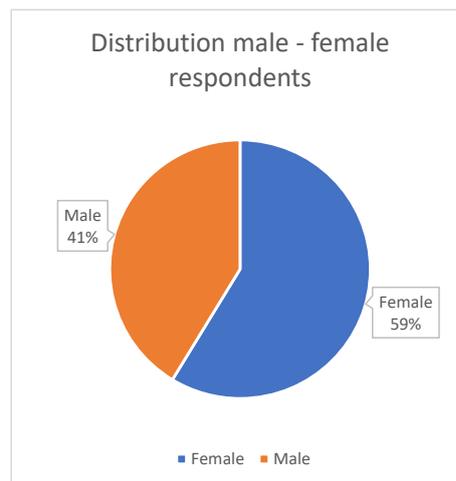
The first three questions the respondents of my survey were asked to answer were their gender, age and whether they are residents of the town. I have used these questions to give an idea on who the respondents are without revealing their identity. Because of privacy reasons and because their names would not give relevant information on the subject, I did not feel the need to ask them to fill out theirs. The three cases that are not residents of Balkbrug are most likely students who officially live in the city they study in, while their parents still live in the village.

Number of respondents: 46

Mean age of respondents: 48, 06

distribution male-female: 19-27

From balkbrug: 3 no, 43 yes



Question 4 & 5.

these questions are about the current village center, therefore I have grouped them together in the results. Firstly I will show a graph of the average opinion of the respondents regarding the town center. Then I will give a short list or summary of the reasons behind their opinions.

Mean rating of village center: 4,89

center+: 5

center.: 14

center-: 26

one person did not fill in this question

The criteria for this question was as following. If the arguments were overall negative, then it would be marked as center-, if it was positive center+. For center. (indifferent or neutral), then that would mean that it was not clear that they had a negative or positive opinion. For instance, if they would call it dull and give it a rating of 5 or 6, than that would be labeled as 'center.', or just give a short description of what is there without any clear undertone (e.x. *it is just an intersection*). the labels are followed by one or more other labels that would give the reason why they think that way. Therefore the number of reasons are more than the amount of ratings for the center.

Here is a list of the arguments people would make for the three options:

Rating	N	Reason
Center+	5	Only 5 respondents were generally positive about the village center. 3 said it was functional, 1 said it had a nice atmosphere (Gezellig) and 1 said it had some bustle (bedrijvigheid)
Center.	13	4 have stated that it is either an intersection, some traffic lights or a small center. It was mentioned 5 times that the intersection cuts the village in half as well as that it was busy (especially during rush hours). Other remarks are that it is safe and functional.
Center-	26	The most frequent answer here is that most people do not think they have a village center at all, since it was mentioned 8 times. At the same time it was mentioned another 8 times that it was just an intersection with traffic lights. 7 times it was mentioned that the village was cut in half. In addition, people found it aesthetically not pleasing, since such varieties of answers were mentioned 10 times. there were 9 different answers regarding traffic nuisance, being long wait times, busyness or noise/air pollution. Lastly it was mentioned 2 times that there was a lack of activities.

Question 6.

I have asked the respondents what they would regard as typically balkbrug. Out of 32 of all different answers, 16 were only mentioned once. In order to keep it relevant or not too cluttered, I have decided to only include the answers that were mentioned two or more times.

	o Welke dingen in Balkbrug zou u beschouwen als typisch balkbrugs? Gr=45
o Veldzicht Gr=17	17
o Steam whistle from cheese factory Gr=10	10
o heuveltjes bosbad Gr=7	7
o Mill Gr=6	6
o Reestdal Gr=6	6
o village feel Gr=11	5

○ Ommerschans Gr=3	3
○ open and tolerant community Gr=3	3
○ Takens Gr=4	3
○ heuveltjes bos Gr=2	2
○ i don't know Gr=4	2
○ Intersection Gr=8	2
○ nature around town Gr=2	2
○ nothing Gr=2	2
○ plus supermarket Gr=2	2
○ quiet center Gr=2	2

Question 7.

Here I will present how people are looking at the tunnel project in general. Be it positive, negative or indifferent. At the same time I will present additional answers people gave to argue why they have their opinion.

Rating	N	Reason
Tunnel+	33	Although 30 respondents were in favor of the tunnel, although not everyone has added an argumentation why they are in favor. The main reason why people are in favor is because they think it would increase the traffic flow and safety of the place. A different argument is that it would connect the northern half with the rest of the village, because of the absence of traffic lights. Some noted that it could provide new chances and interests for the town. Lastly, people like the plan because they think it looks better than the current intersection.
Tunnel.	6	Preferred to have no main road through town at all. Hopefully it would solve the problems of the intersection. Hopefully the right people are involved. Hopefully a proper village center would be created.
Tunnel-	6	Too expensive, not necessary, not beneficial for local shops and planning time took too long.
Missing value	1	

Question 8.

Here I will present how people are looking at the trees that will be added. Be it positive, negative or

indifferent. At the same time I will present additional answers people gave to argue why they have their opinion.

Rating	N	Reason
Trees+	33	The majority of people that gave an argumentation in favor of the extended tree lane liked it because of the added greenery in the heart of the village. Next to that, some stated that because you would get a tree lane from both sides, it would increase the unity of the center. Lastly, a reason why people liked is, was because in the area there were trees being removed as preparation for the built of the tunnel. Therefore, they see that as compensation.
Trees.	5	People reacted neutral or indifferent because they either think it was not achievable, not necessary or they did not care.
Trees-	6	Main reasons why some are not in favor of extra trees in the heart of the village is that they believe that it probably would not be achievable to plant trees on the proposed areas. (nice but not functional). one case stated that trees there do not fit the area.
Missing values	2	

Question 9.

Here I will present how people are looking at the brick pavement that will be added on the tunnel. Be it positive, negative or indifferent. At the same time I will present additional answers people gave to argue why they have their opinion.

Rating	N	Reason
Bricks+	30	People are mainly in favor of bricks because it would create a better atmosphere (gezelligheid). Some of these answers were related to the village feel. Some liked the idea because it would remind them of the past. Some because it adds character. Some stated that they would be in favor of 'real baked bricks' (echt gebakken stenen), or that they should be in different colors.
Bricks.	7	For people neutral or indifferent about brick pavement, it is nice but not functional (slipperiness). One answer that stood out was that it would be less inviting for cars because of noise nuisance. Other answered did not have an opinion or did not care.
Bricks-	5	The reasons why people are not in favor of the brick pavement are because of safety reasons and nuisance. Bricks are more slippery in wet weather than asphalt, can sink because of heavy traffic and make more noise when driven over. Only comment about the looks of brick is 'nice but not functional'.
Missing values	4	

Question 10.

here I will present in a graph whether people think the flow would improve. In addition the respondents arguments will be added as well.

table, and list of reasons why

Would you think the tunnel would solve traffic flow?	n
Yes	39
no	2
Don't know	4

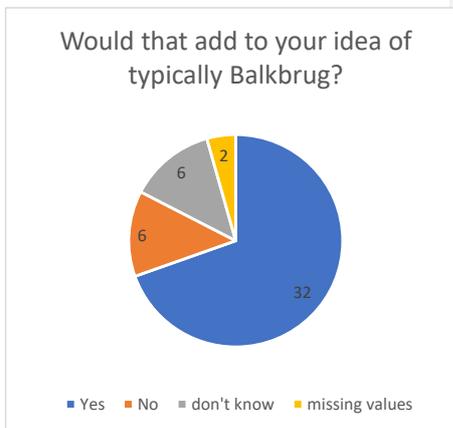
The main reason why the two cases do not think it would improve the traffic flow, was because you would have two lanes of traffic in opposite direction of each other. Nevertheless, for the rest that think it would be, is because the absence of traffic lights will allow for the ongoing traffic that passes through town to continue without having to stop at the lights. This is noted 12 out of 39 times. Other things that people mention in their answers is that it would offer a better connection between the north and south side, and that it would improve safety. Lastly one case claimed that the flow already is improved with the current traffic measures that were taken for the construction of the tunnel; to make sure the tunnel could be build without traffic redirection, the intersection was changed into an egg-shaped roundabout.

Question 11 & 12.

these question are grouped together because both are about the incorporation of the old bridge in the design. Firstly there is a graph that shows how people look at the idea, be it positive, negative or indifferent. In addition, a graph is shown whether people would regard it as typically balkbrugs. The respondent's arguments will be added as well.

Rating	N	Reason
Bridge+	38	The majority did not give an argumentation for their opinion; they mostly answers with 'yes' or 'fine'. Most were in favor because it references the town's history (9 times), with some notable answers saying ' <i>heritage is good for branding</i> ' or ' <i>it is in the name</i> '. Other reasons that were given was about the looks of the center. Which was mentioned 4 times.
Bridge.	1	This person lived for too short of a time in Balkbrug to have an opinion
Bridge-	2	It was mentioned two times that they did not like the idea of the old bridge, one did not think it fitted the plan. The other did not see a reason for such addition
Missing values	5	

Rating	N	Reason
Yes	32	Twelve gave a reason. 6 said it is in the name. 4 said that it is a reference to the past, with one stating that there should be sign with historic info placed at the site. Other answers include an increase in authenticity and looks.
No	6	Only 1 case gave a reason, that of the fact that there is no canal anymore
Don't know	6	Only 1 case gave a reasons, that it is a reference to the past
Missing values	2	



Question 13 & 14.

Both questions are grouped together. Firstly a graph is shown about the opinion whether it would put Balkbrug more on the map. Next to that, some most recurring arguments will be added as well.

Do you think this plan would put balkbrug more on the map?		reason
Yes	23	The main argument of why people would think it would put Balkbrug more on the map is: - because of its unusual design (directly mentioned 10 times). Variants would be that it would be authentic, that it would stand out, that it would make people look twice, that it would be promotable and that people already talk about its implementation due to the long planning process. - Also, the design is related to its history (mentioned 4 times)
No	23	The biggest reason why people think it would not put Balkbrug more on the map is that the new traffic situation would allow ongoing traffic to keep going without having to stop. (mentioned 10 times) - Another reason is that they do not think that a traffic situation or the village itself is anything noteworthy. This was mentioned 9 times. in addition it was stated three times that the town is famous for different things.

Question 15.

the main things that have been answered by the respondent was about the planning process and the way the construction is taken care of. Also they hope that the plans would be successful and that the north and south side of the town would be better connected.

the negative factors are mostly about the lack of facilities in the center. Over the years, there were several business that came and went. In addition, it was mentioned twice that there was not a clear village center plan excluding the tunnel.