
Enhancing the urban identity of the surrounding area using iconic buildings

Final version of Bachelor's thesis

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Table of contents

Abstract	2
Introduction.....	2
Background.....	2
Research problem	3
Structure of the paper.....	4
Theoretical framework.....	4
Global Outlook: Inclusive Level	5
Urban Setting: Macro Level.....	5
Environmental Framework: Medium level.....	6
Personal Perspective: Micro level	6
Conceptual model	6
Methodology	7
Primary data collection	7
Data collection instrument.....	7
Data analysis scheme	8
Secondary data collection	8
Data collection instrument.....	8
Data analysis scheme	9
Results	9
Case study: Groninger Forum.....	9
What is the identity of the surrounding area?.....	9
What is supposed identity designed by the stakeholders?.....	10
What is the perceived identity of the iconic building?.....	10
Case study: Hubei Landmark Tower	11
What is the identity of the surrounding area?.....	11
What is supposed identity designed by the stakeholders?.....	12
What is the perceived identity of the iconic building?.....	12
Comparing the case studies	13
Conclusions.....	13
Literature.....	15
Appendices	17
Appendix 1: The Case descriptions.....	17
Groninger Forum, Groningen, Netherlands.	17
China Resources Hubei Landmark Tower, Shenzhen, China.	17
Appendix 2: The semi structured interview.	18



Abstract

This research article is used to create an understanding how iconic buildings can enhance the urban identity of the surrounding area. To create this understanding the research question “How can iconic buildings enhance the urban identity of the surrounding area?” is being answered. Enhancement of the identity is important because due the ongoing globalization cities are prone to placelessness (Arefi, 1999). This article analyzes the urban identity based on the multi-level strategy of urban identity designed by Cheshmehzangi (2015). Using this tool two case studies are compared based on the different levels of urban identity to determine the strengths and weaknesses of those cases in enhancing the urban identity of the surrounding areas. These case studies are iconic buildings under construction in Groningen, Netherlands and Shenzhen, China. Through interviews of inhabitants of surrounding area in Groningen and literature of Shenzhen this research shows which factors determine the success of enhancing the identity of surrounding areas of the iconic building. The important factors found in this research are identity “stronghold” in the surrounding area which make it possible to absorb the impact of a new iconic building and which the identity of the iconic building can build. It also shows that a strong focus on branding and broadcasting an image by using an iconic building may lead to increasing the placelessness of the area instead of creating a unique identity. These and more answers on how iconic buildings can enhance the urban identity of the surrounding area are concluded in this article.

Introduction

In this section of the paper the background, research question and structure will be explained. It will be made clear why this research is relevant and what it will contribute to the science and society.

Background

Globalization is as ever present as it was before. This phenomenon has a lot of influence on many cities all over the world, it molds and restructures the cities as a whole (Cheshmehzangi, 2015). It is rewriting cities itself and the image of a city to express a global city. With these changes comes a social-spatial transformation of the urban environment. All these changes are raising awareness for the importance of the very identity of our urban areas (Short, 2004). Driven by modern telecommunications globalization introduced a new phenomenon, namely placelessness (Arefi, 1999). This placelessness signifies the loss of meaning of a particular place. This phenomenon has been observed all around the world. Places become more and more uniform and people claim that there is a loss of actual sense-of-place. This is fueled by the overwhelming power of global capital which overrules other considerations like politics, identity and religions (Relph, 1976). One could argue that placelessness does not exist because there is always agency or history, but if a lot of places become the places lose their identity and therefore can become placeless. This loss of spatial identity turns out to be a problem because people use places to make sense of the world and use it to drive their actions (Sack, 1992).

To counter this effect of globalization the world is shifting from globalization to an age of identification. People and its' cities try to create an iconic identity to stand out in this globalized world (Stagno, 2001). This counter movement against globalization has blurred the lines between place based meanings and placelessness. Driven by this need to create a unique identity place branding started to emerge and policy-makers used this potential to regenerate certain areas of or complete cities. Besides regeneration purposes urban branding has become a business strategy in cities (Turok, 2004). It is used to make an area distinguishable from the masses and thereby make it more attractive. This results in the usage of unique and iconic buildings to create a particular identity for an area. Cheshmehzangi describes a really good example of this phenomenon namely the

Guggenheim Museum of Bilbao. It made the city more successful not because of the functionality of the museum but because of its unique identity (Cheshmehzangi, 2015). Because of the success of several iconic buildings to create a unique identity of a city this concept is used all over the world. One may ask if the implementation of this approach globally would mitigate the effect of the iconic buildings on place identity. This study tries to find a way to implement iconic buildings without increasing placelessness. Therefore, the hypothesis states that “an iconic building can enhance the identity of the surrounding area”.

Research problem

The movement to the age of identification and the correlated place branding has as result that a lot of places try to create a unique structure. These structures try to broadcast a certain identity to the outside world. The usage of these “starchitect status” buildings is already globally defined as the “Bilbao-effect”, which refers to the drastic changes a city experiences based on the symbolic architecture (Landry, 2003). The question arises that if these buildings create such a strong identity what happens with the already existing identity of the surrounding area? A very important link between these iconic structures and their surrounding may be missing, namely the very essence of identity. Identity itself is derived from both the content (the iconic structure in this case) as well as the context (the environment or culture), where the content is actually the inherent value (Relph, 1976). In some cases there seems to be some sort of disconnection between the identity of the iconic structure and the surrounding area. There could be an opportunity to enhance the already existing identity of a place instead of constructing a new superficial identity, which is disconnected from its context.

Derived from this problem the central question of the research arises namely; “How can iconic buildings enhance the urban identity of the surrounding area?”. To create a solid groundwork for answering this question this paper investigates several sub questions.

- What creates an urban identity?
- What makes the usage of iconic buildings to create identity a success or a failure?
- How can the identity of a surrounding area be identified when impacted by iconic buildings?

A case study is part of this research to partially answer the main question. The case study will consist of two cases, namely: The China Resources Hubei Landmark Tower in Shenzhen, China (Goettsch Partners, 2018) and the Groninger Forum (NL Architects 2007) in Groningen, Netherlands. The Hubei Landmark Tower is a very large scale redevelopment in Shenzhen to create an iconic image of the fast growing city (Goettsch Partners, 2018). The Groninger Forum is an iconic structure, which is built to house cultural and new media functions. More information on the cases can be found in *appendix 1*. These cases are chosen for this research because they are both projects which are partially aimed to create an iconic urban identity for their city. Both projects are also within already existing context. The *Hubei Landmark tower* is located next to the historic village of Hubei and the *Groninger Forum* is located in the historic city center of Groningen. The cases are relevant to each other because of the similarities based on the iconic branding and on the historic context.



Hubei Landmark Tower
(Goettsch Partners, 2018),
Groninger forum (NL
Architexts, 2007)

However, their relevance also lays in their differences in institutional level, culture and scale. The different scale levels will show two different showcases of how the different urban identity levels of Cheshmehzangi (2015) work on different scales. How these cases are compared and analyzed using the different levels of urban identity is explained in the theoretical framework and methodology.

One may ask why the main question is relevant to both science and society. The scientific relevance is found in the match between content and context in relation to specific iconic structures. There has been a lot of research covering identity of a place, but there is interesting ground to be made on the topic of how iconic buildings can actually enhance the already existing identity. And how the surrounding area in its turn can derive meaning from the iconic structure. The social importance can be found in the economic and social gain of the usage of iconic structures. The identity of the iconic structure becomes more inclusive if the context is taken into account, and the effect may be stronger. Because an urban identity cannot be defined solely on physicality alone (Cheshmehzangi & Heath, 2012). Another argument for social importance is that not only the city image profits from the iconic structure, but also the people in the surrounding area. This because when an iconic structure enhances the local identity, people can give more meaning to the place. This is important because people derive meaning from places (Davenport & Anderson 2006).

Structure of the paper

This paper is structured as followed: firstly the theoretical groundwork is laid out with the conceptual model. This functions as the base of analyzing the phenomenon and answering the research question. After this groundwork the methodology is made clear to transparently communicate how data is collected to support this articles main arguments. Following are the results of the interviews and literature research. These are structured following the sub questions of the research question. Each case study is subdivided in the existing urban identity, the supposed identity of the iconic structure, and the perceived identity. Within these subdivisions connections are made with the multi-level urban identity of Cheshmehzangi (2015) to make clear why these findings are relevant to this research. After the results, the case studies are compared and main conclusions are drawn from that information and literature research.

Theoretical framework

To structure this research and to keep the focus of the question a theoretical framework is constructed. The key theories and concepts to support this research are defined and explained in this section.

The central theory is the connection between the content and context which forms the identity of a place (Relph, 1976). Ralph argues that the meaning of place is rooted in the physical setting, such as objects, but the meaning completely part of the physical setting. The meaning is a property of the human experience and intentions. Therefore can be concluded that urban identity is a relationship between self and otherness and not a mean to distinguish self and other (Cheshmehzangi, 2015). The importance of the context is vital to understand how a physical iconic structure connects with the context, because the iconic structure partially creates the context.

A very important concept in this research is the usage of “levels” to describe and analyze the urban identity of a certain area. The aim of using the levels is to identify the roles of different urban identities on different scales of urbanism (Cheshmehzangi, 2015). One should take into account that the different urban identities are not only to promote a pleasant and stable urban image, but to grasp the whole concept of relations (Lynch, 1960). The different levels are as follows and are illustrated in *figure 1*:



1. The Global Outlook or “Inclusive Level”
2. The Urban Setting or “Macro Level”
3. The environment Framework or “Medium Level”
4. The Personal Perspective or “Micro Level”



Figure 1 (Cheshmehzangi, 2015)

These different levels will be used to compare the different case studies on the basis of the different levels. Iconic buildings (and also in the case studies) are generally used to boost the overall image of an area (Stagno, 2001), but this research is aimed at identifying if an iconic building actually connects to all of the different levels. To understand this concept the different levels will be explained.

Global Outlook: Inclusive Level

This is the level where a city is globally acknowledged and the relations with this level are for the most part visual and perceptual. People relate on this level to the city based on our knowledge and/or image (Cheshmehzangi, 2015). Generalizing this level it can be identified as a symbol or a broad image one has of a city. According to Cheshmehzangi (2015) a city needs to be at least attached to one fundamental factor of this level, which are respectively: Singularity, Function, Economic, Perceptual, Geographical and historical factor. The Singularity factor is in relation to iconic buildings the most interesting factor, because it is the factor that expresses the distinctive characteristics of a particular city. This is severely influenced by the aspects of a “landmark” (Cheshmehzangi, 2015). The “Bilbao Effect” which is described by Landry (2003) refers to the dramatic transformation of the symbol of a city fits perfectly in this level of urban identity. Using this technique a building can become the major or only symbol of a city. This is certainly the case when a particular city before construction of an iconic building has no overall image and was therefore almost impossible to visualize (Cheshmehzangi, 2015). One can conclude from this that most iconic structures are designed to relate to this factor on this specific level. Creating an iconic urban identity (a broad image in this case) is namely the objective of most policy makers or businesses which want to create an iconic building. But to create a truly inclusive urban identity in the sense of a successful iconic building on all levels must take the other levels also into account.

Urban Setting: Macro Level

On this level the emphasis lays on the image of a place. It is also defined in the concept of urban branding or urban industry (Cheshmehzangi, 2015). This level has strong relations to the connecting levels because an area holds its own characteristic, while it is still connected with other surrounding parts. The urban setting is namely not identified on a global scale, but it is branded on a regional or national scale (Cheshmehzangi, 2015). A good example of this level is the district of Soho in London. This district is very well known because of its cultural and entertainment industries such as the film

industry, music industry and nightlife entertainment (Johnson, 2006). As mentioned before, Turok (2014) argues that policy-makers use this potential of unique features to regenerate certain areas of a city. This shows that urban identity on macro level can be used to create a distinct image for a specific area. From this can be concluded that an iconic structure needs some sort of connection with this level to become a success as urban branding strategy.

Environmental Framework: Medium level

This is the level where “place identity” takes the stage. The relations between place and society are not yet personalized but they form a comprehensive framework (Cheshmehzangi, 2015). Cheshmehzangi (2015) also argues that the relations between the place and society create a social connection which is based on the sociospatial understanding of a particular place. This is where the connection with the theory of Reph (1976) can be made. The place identity is namely a connection between the content and the context. Content which is related to this level can be considered as the major social elements of a city and they can function as “conceptual anchor points in our cities” according to Lynch (1960). Concluding from this can be said that an iconic building which functions on this level of urban identity is more connected to its actual surroundings because it creates an anchor point in the urban fabric.

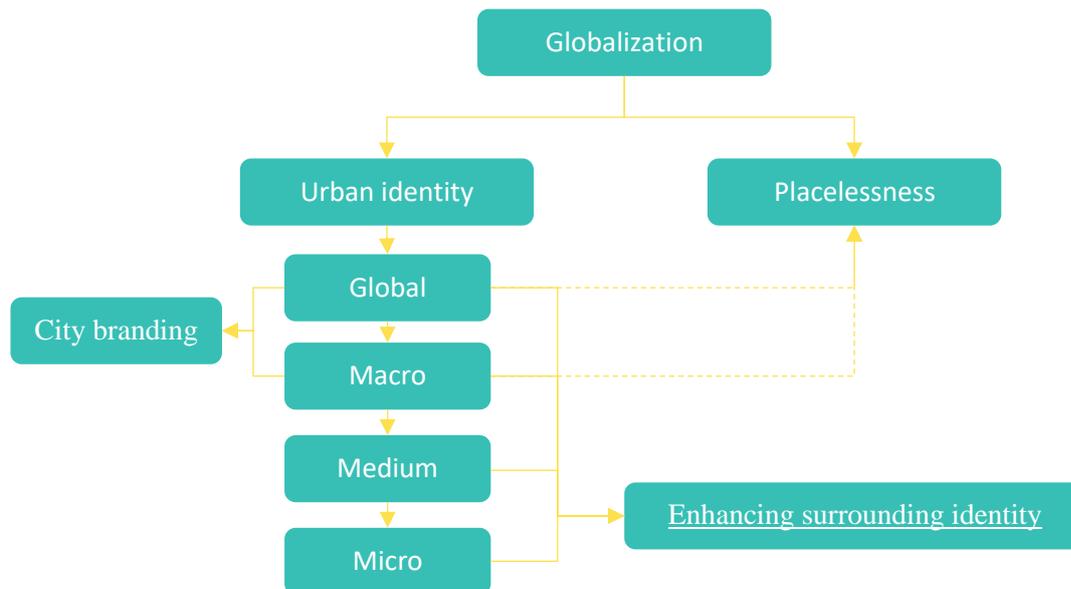
Personal Perspective: Micro level

This is the most specific level of urban identity of them all, it is based on culture, location, experience and individuals. The observations and feelings of people in relation to the urban fabric differ on the personal outlook and senses of a person (Cheshmehzangi, 2015). The different perspective of people provides different meanings and experience of places without actual reflection (Relph, 1976). Worth noting is that many cities are changing their image in such a way that a single perception is no longer sufficient to understand this level of urban identity (Neill, 2004). The place identity is however not only based on personal reactions and relations to the place, but also on memories and meanings a person has of a place (Hague & Jenkins, 2005). This again states the importance of this level of urban identity, because as said by Davenport & Anderson (2006) “People assign meanings to places and derive meaning in their lives from places”. It can be concluded from this that an iconic building has impact on how people remember an area but also that people actually derive meaning from a specific urban identity.

The levels of above are explored in such detail because they form a fundamental groundwork on which the different cases from the case study will be compared and analyzed. The global and macro level are the main aim of iconic structures because they alter the external image of an area, such as the Petronas Twin Towers in Kuala Lumpur (Cheshmehzangi, 2015). However looking at the other levels it can be concluded that iconic structures could have more impact on the lower layers of urban identity.

Conceptual model

The conceptual model is visualized and explained in this section. The background story begins by the process of globalization, which introduced the existence of placelessness and the counter reaction in the form of the age of identification, which resulted in the explicit development of the urban identity (Stagno, 2001). The different roles of urban identity are then derived from the urban identity and structured in the levels developed by Cheshmehzangi (2015). On the global and macro level, policymakers use iconic symbolic images to counter the placelessness and to make an area more attractive which again may lead to placelessness.



This conceptual model applies on both of the cases from the case study. The cases will be analyzed based on the different levels, but also on the influence of the global and macro level on placelessness.

Methodology

To thoroughly answer the research question data collection is needed. Because of the qualitative form of urban identity mainly qualitative data has been used. To understand how iconic buildings can enhance the urban identity of the surrounding area, both cases (Shenzhen & Groningen) are analyzed based on the urban identity levels. A more detailed description of the cases can be found in *appendix 1*. The data needed for this comparison is gathered via literature research, secondary data and semi structured interviews. The case of Shenzhen is entirely literature research and secondary data research because of the practical distance problem. The case of Groningen is based on both literature and semi structured interviews. This is to gain an in-depth understanding of the function of the iconic building and the effect it has on its surrounding area.

Primary data collection

To create a better understanding on the subject primary data collection is needed. The focus of this research is mainly on secondary data collection, because of the in-depth look on the concept of levels and urban identity. To support the sub questions of the main research question the multi-level approach of Cheshmehzangi (2015) is used. The aim of using these levels is to identify the roles of the different urban identities on different scales of urbanism (Cheshmehzangi, 2015). They are explained thoroughly in the theoretical framework of this research.

Data collection instrument

The primary data is collected via semi-structured interviews. The main interest is the in-depth understanding of the cases and the function of these iconic buildings in urban identity. A questionnaire would give a too broad of understanding of this phenomenon. Because of that the semi-structured interview will be used. A semi-structured interview attempts to obtain information from the person by asking specific questions. Although these questions are predetermined, the interview unfolded in a conversational manner (Clifford *et al.*, 2010). This informal use of the

predetermined question is important, because the interviewed needs to explain the issues that they feel that are important (Clifford *et al.*, 2010). This is what is needed for this research which focuses on the urban identity as a very qualitative subject. The people who are interviewed are inhabitants of the surrounding area. The interviews did take place at the homes of the interviewee themselves, this to use the context of the area to give their answers more precision. This resulted in 4 in depth semi-structured interviews of around 50 minutes. The interview questions can be found in *appendix 2*. The questions form the backbone of the interview but did not predetermine the whole course of the interview. This is needed to receive open responses instead of simple 'yes or no' answers to the questions (Clifford *et al.*, 2010). The questions form a base for further questioning and interesting dialogues. Because of the need for an open qualitative conversation this research did not use too many questions. The questions are there to steer the interview in the direction of the answers which are needed.

With the data collection ethical considerations were taken into account. Firstly, the interviewee were collected at random and via contacts without selecting on personal traits. Secondly, all the interviewee were aware that their interview was either recorded or noted. They all approved the quotes which were put into this paper and their data is kept anonymous because nothing but their statements is documented.

Data analysis scheme

The direct recordings of the interviews are transcribed into summaries which contain the essential information about the central questions of the research. The answers given to the semi-structured questions (appendix 1) are the core of the transcription as well as unexpected responses which are of interest to the subject. The answers are identified using color coding based on the multiple levels of Cheshmehzangi (2015) to better understand the unique urban identity on the different levels. The quality of the semi-structured interviews proved to be good, because they gave some new insights which helped creating a better understanding on what influences the success of an iconic building and how iconic buildings could enhance the identity of a local area. However, in to further explore this topic more data collection is needed.

Secondary data collection

To better understand the influence of iconic structures on the urban identity of the surrounding areas secondary data collection is needed. It is also needed to analyze the case of: the Hubei Landmark Tower in Shenzhen, China. Because of the distance direct interviews are complicated to conduct. The secondary data collection is needed to create an understanding of the identity, because not only the content (in this case the iconic building) but also the context is needed (Relph, 1976). Therefore it is needed to understand how this contextual identity is formed

Data collection instrument

The data and literature is collected via different resources. For the Hubei Landmark Tower case data is collected from *URBANUS*, which has information on the Hubei Old Village Urban Regeneration Research. They are a group of people with a background in culture, art, social studies, urban planning and architecture. Also information from the *Goettsch Partners* (Architectural firm of the planned building) has been collected. They have project data available on the iconic building. To grasp the urban identity of the surrounding area photographs are used. They are from *PhotoInter* an institute from the *China Photographers Association*. The pictures can illustrate the unique identity of the surrounding area without the need to visit the distant site.

Data analysis scheme

The secondary data is also analyzed using the multi-level approach from Cheshmehzangi (2015). Using this theoretical framework the different cases can be compared on the same levels. This is needed because of the large differences in scale and the image of the two different cases. The data used as secondary data proved very useful and provided understanding in how the cases should create identity according to the architects and companies. The photos also provided a very useful tool to experience the identity. For further research it may be preferable to let people make photos themselves to create an even more in depth view of the identity.

Results

After thorough literature research and several semi structured interviews, several results can be stated. These results are discussed and shown in this section of the paper. First the case studies are discussed separately, after this analyzation the different findings are compared. The cases are structured following the research questions, within these structure several findings are connected to the theoretical framework.

Case study: Groninger Forum

Firstly the primary and secondary data from the case study of the Groninger Forum will be analyzed and discussed. Following the structure of the paper, first the findings of the identity of the surrounding area of the iconic building will be discussed, after that the supposed identity designed by the stakeholders and the perceived identity of the building, and lastly the impact of the iconic building on the identity of the surrounding area. This to answer the three sub questions of the main research question

What is the identity of the surrounding area?

To find out how the iconic structure can enhance the identity of the surrounding area, the identity of that area has to be identified. The surrounding area has no homogeneous identity. This was to be expected because of the different functions within the city center. The participants of the interview described 4 very broad distinct identities of the area, each on a different side of the Groninger Forum location.

Shown in *figure 2*:

Purple: Center of the city, the meeting place of people.

Orange: Closed of atmosphere with an solemn identity.

Green: Calm atmosphere with an messy identity.

Blue: Vivid and dynamic identity where leisure meets housing.



Figure 2. Identity areas around

The very different functions give these areas a different identity perceived by the participants of the interview. They are also different very per time of day. When one participant was asked to describe the identity of the blue area in one word he answered “studentsquare”. And later added that this only applies in the afternoon and evenings. During the day the area can be quite desolate. This area is also characterized by dynamic change, the catering industry companies change by the month and a lot of companies come and go in this area. Different participants described this, and they said that it creates an interesting and unique identity. A very interesting finding in relation to this ever changing area is a constant factor named by 3 participants, namely: the old buildings from before WWII. They all described that they create a sense of place and continuity in the very dynamic area, and that his is one of the very important success factors of this area. Deducting from these findings can be said that these elements are identity strongholds which create a basis on which the new identity can be built.

What is supposed identity designed by the stakeholders?

To find out: “what makes the usage of iconic buildings to create identity a success or a failure?” it is needed to understand the goals of the stakeholders, the identity of the building and the perceived identity by the local residents. According to NL-Architects (2007) “The Groninger Forum aspires to invent the cultural information center of tomorrow”. They also state that the forum should form an extension of the Public Space and create a place where different people can meet and debate, it should be a cultural icon for the city of Groningen (NL Architects, 2007). This is represented in the design of the building which represent the interaction between the different media and cultural functions. Looking at this image it can be stated that this kind of design corresponds with the first level of urban identity (global level) shown by Cheshmehzangi (2015). Namely the building will give the city a uniqueness because of this combination of functions in such a unique building. But Cheshmehzangi (2015) also argues that a design like this works not like the “Bilbao Effect”, because that is based on not in the function of the building but on the act of symbolism to create a bigger image for the city. The Groninger forum is based on its several functions, thus does not fit the “Bilbao Effect” and has less effect on the global level. To find out on which level the Groninger forum will resonate it is needed to look at the perceived identity of the building.

What is the perceived identity of the iconic building?

The interviews gave an insight in the perceived identity of the Groninger Forum. Several interviewee said that they were firstly very hesitant against the new building. This because they did not know how the building will be affecting the surrounding area, and the design is also very bold. Interestingly most of them stated that after a while when the building began to take form in the urban landscape they started to like the new iconic structure. This was not because of the design but because it became more clear what functions would be implemented in the building. This shows that the personal perception of identity changes over time. Which corresponds with the macro level of identity. In which Cheshmehzangi (2015) states that this level of identity depends on meaning, memory and identity. These elements are prone to changing over time, which explains why the identity perception also changes over time. Another interesting finding is that one interviewee said that the identity of the surrounding area influenced his opinion on how much he liked the Groninger Forum. This was because the pre-war buildings in the surrounding area gave structure to the area to absorb the impact of an iconic building. This finding corresponds with the macro level of urban identity, on this level the area is distinguished based on distinctive features while still remaining in relation with the surrounding areas (Cheshmehzangi, 2015). This is based on function, and the Groninger Forum adds a new function to this already distinctive area. The focus on function of the building makes it that it also resonates with the medium level of place identity (local identity), this because as Relph (1965) states identity goes beyond the physical and visual attributes, according to him it is a place of expression and assimilation, which the forum is. This becomes clear because NL-Architects (2007) state that the forum will function as a building that dissolves the cultural elements into a cultural information center.

From the results can be stated that the Groninger forum has more impact on the macro-,medium- and micro-level of urban identity. Which does not correspondent with the predictions made in the beginning of this research. It shows that with the focus on the functions within the building instead of the image it has more impact on the lower levels of urban identity. This because of the focus on local function creates an link with the existing identity of the surrounding area. In the conceptual model is shown that those lower levels have the most influence on enhancing the urban identity of the surrounding area. The Groninger forum therefore could be seen as an example for how an iconic structure could enhance the already existing identity of the surrounding area, because in adds more value instead of destroying the already existing identity. One of comments is that the surrounding area needs an already strong identity (in this case the pre-war buildings) to absorb the impact of the new iconic structure.

Case study: Hubei Landmark Tower

Because this research is done within the Netherlands, the data collected from the Hubei Landmark Tower is primarily based on secondary data. Nevertheless will these two cases be compared based on these findings.

What is the identity of the surrounding area?

The Hubei Landmark tower is part of a larger development plan to redevelop the Old Hubei village in Shenzhen and the surrounding area. *Figure 3* illustrates the development area (red) and the old village (blue). URBANUS (2014) a group of people with a background in culture, art, social studies, urban planning and architecture started analyzing the area when the announcement was made to revitalize the area. The old village (green on the picture on the right) is a 500-year old aboriginal village and consists of a “three vertical and eight horizontal” village pattern (URBANUS, 2014). It has a still a very characteristic look with many of the old villagers still living there. The village is also the last remaining historic village within the Shenzhen city region (URBANUS, 2014). Li Zhenlan a photographer went to the Hubei Old village and documented the area. These pictures in *figure 4* provide valuable information to show the identity of the neighborhood. The Shenzhen city encircled the old fishing village and surrounded it with so-called *handshaking buildings* (cheap tall rental buildings from the 80’s) creating a unique enclosed site (Zhenlan, 2016).

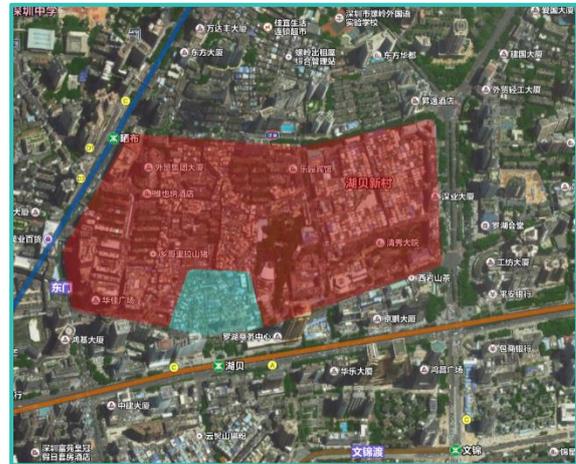


Figure3. Site area with historic



Figure 4. Pictures of Zhenlan, 2016

These pictures show how the old village has kept its own identity within the urban fabric. It is a very lively area and the inhabitants feel very connected to their unique village (URBANUS, 2014; Zhenlan, 2016). The inhabitants of this area are mostly working class although also a few are becoming millionaires because they own several apartment blocks which will be bought for the development for the Hubei village redevelopment (Terlou, 2017). This creates tension between people who own

properties themselves and people who rent. The people who are selling their property and making a lot of money do not have a problem with the redevelopment, the people who are forced to leave and get compensation have more attachment to the old village (URBANUS, 2014).

What is supposed identity designed by the stakeholders?

According to Goettsch Partners (2018) (the architectural company) the Hubei Landmark Tower will be a mixed-use tower with the intention to create a global landmark for the expanding metropolis Shenzhen. The design represents the technological and financial hub Shenzhen has become and the tower will be higher than all other structures in the neighboring cities of Macau, Guangzhou and Hongkong. Because of this symbolism the site of the old Hubei village was chosen, it represents the spiritual and physical center of Shenzhen, from fishing village to a megapolis (Goettsch Partners, 2018). The goal of representing the city at global level fits very well with the global-level of urban identity. At this level the identity of the city is connected to at least one of the fundamental categories of the global level, namely: “history,” “meaning,” “distinctive characteristics,” and “purpose” (Cheshmehzangi, 2015). Looking at the Hubei Landmark Tower the purpose is clear, Goettsch Partners (2018) stated that it represents the meaning of the city, with a physical connection to the historic center of the city. The construction of this tower can be seen as a counter measure against placelessness, because the policymakers try to create an iconic identity to make Shenzhen stand out in the globalized world (Stagno, 2001). However because multiple cities use this technique, the counter measure against placelessness could even create placelessness, this is also represented in the conceptual framework. For example in Jeddah Saudi-Arabia a similar tower is being constructed with the same idea in mind (Riepema, 2014). When every large metropolis constructs iconic buildings to be unique the effect fades away. When this happens the “Bilbao Effect” mentioned by (Landry, 2003) will have less effect and the expected returns may be lower. When this happens these grand iconic structures could become ‘cathedrals in the desert’, a big empty shell without connection with its context.

What is the perceived identity of the iconic building?

When the development plan was announced to the public, it was made public that the Old Hubei Village would be protected by “removing, demolishing and recreating” the village (URBANUS, 2014). This kind of protection caused widespread public debates about the village and most of the original inhabitants were against this kind of development (URBANUS, 2014). However the people living outside the historic village see the development as a very big improvement. They state that it will make the area more lively and modern and attract more businesses (Taolou, 2018). This shows how the micro-level of urban identity is prone to personal perception. The personal relation to the place changes how the spatial identity of the place is perceived (Neill, 2004). This contradiction also shows that there can be a mismatch at the micro-level of urban identity. At the global level where the main focus of this project lays is been broadcasted the image the city has in mind. This corresponds with the perception of the people living further away from the site, but the local perception is very different. Also at the medium-level of urban identity the image of the Hubei Landmark tower does not match with the surrounding area. When the old village will be reconstructed the relations between the site and the surrounding area will be distorted (Relph, 1976), which will decrease the understandability of the identity of the place. This may increase very the placelessness which it was designed to combat.

Comparing the case studies

Both cases have similarities based on their location within an old neighborhood with a distinct identity. The difference however are interesting, because the Hubei Landmark Tower is designed to broadcast identity on a global level and the Groninger forum is designed to function at medium and macro level of urban identity. In relation to how an iconic building can enhance the identity of the surrounding area however these differences are vital. The comparison shows that when a building is constructed within an area with already strong identity the building has the potential to enhance the identity. In Shenzhen however the demolition and rebuilding of the old village removes this vital aspect to successful enhance the already existing identity. This may be a political decision but it is still vital information that shows how an iconic building can influence it's surrounding area. The Hubei Landmark Tower creates a completely new identity for the area and the Groningen forum strengthens the existing identity by adding functions. In Shenzhen the meaning of the building is more important. The comparison shows how these different takes have different effects on the surrounding identity. In *table 1* is shows were the cases have their strengths in connecting to the levels of urban identity. Their strengths are highlighted with thicker text to show on which level the case excels and on which level there are still opportunities to make the iconic building more suitable to enhance the local identity.

Level of urban identity	Groninger Forum	Hubei Landmark Tower
Global	Meaning is not very connected to one of the fundamental factors of the global level.	Meaning of the building is connected to the history of the city.
Macro	The building does not function as a brand for the city as a whole.	Creates a new global brand to produce a global image.
Medium	Focus in function within existing context.	Has a minor function within the existing context.
Micro	Building will be used extensively by surrounding inhabitants.	Will mostly be used for corporate housing and apartments.

Table 1. Case strengths and weaknesses

Conclusions

Looking at how iconic buildings can enhance the urban identity of the surrounding area, several main findings can be concluded. The multi-level approach of Cheshmehzangi (2015) shows that the medium- and micro-level are the most important to enhance the identity of the surrounding area and this also is stated in the different case studies. The Groninger Forum with its focus on functions connects with the medium-level by creating interaction with its surrounding based on culture and information. The interviews showed that the presence of “identity strongholds” like the historic pre-war buildings are essential to absorb the impact of a new iconic building. Thus making it essential to use an iconic building to enhance the identity of the surrounding area. The Hubei Landmark tower showed that by destroying these “identity strongholds” the identity of the surrounding areas goes lost. This research therefore strongly recommends to protect the strong points in the surrounding identity if one wants to enhance the identity of the surrounding area with an iconic building. Looking at the global and macro level, the Hubei Landmark Tower excels. It creates an iconic image, by using the “meaning” aspect of the global-level of identity as mentioned by Cheshmehzangi (2015). But using this strategy of building iconic buildings with broadcasting identity for many global cities could stop the positive effects of the unique identity because this technique becomes less unique, this could result in a paradox as shown in the conceptual model. Where the unique buildings which only function at the global level of urban identity and not on the lower levels lead to placelessness. Thus not all levels may be equally important, but all levels need to be taken into account to create an

iconic building which connects with the local identity to strengthen the identity and which also has a global image.

After conducting this research several improvements to this research topic could be made. To create a better understanding of the intended identity of the iconic cases interviews with the designers would be preferable, but this appeared difficult. Further studies could make this research stronger when these interviews could be deducted. These studies could focus on how the important factors like “identity strongholds” translate into actual design. However, without this information the secondary data already created a strong basis for the arguments made in this article.

Analyzing the strengths of both cases can be said that the focus on functions, the protection of identity strongholds and the unique global image result in an iconic building which enhances the identity of the surrounding area while giving the city an unique identity. This will be a relevant addition to the current debate where the use of iconic buildings fueled by globalization is criticized. This research shows that iconic buildings can be very useful in creating a global image, provided that it is connected to all levels of urban identity.

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Appendices

Appendix 1: The Case descriptions.

In this section the cases are explained in further detail.

Groninger Forum, Groningen, Netherlands.

The Groninger Forum will be a new cultural and informational center within the city of Groningen. The city of Groningen is an university city in the north of the Netherlands. Within the old city center the new forum will be built as seen in *figure 5*. The building will replace the old Forum which functions as an cultural center for the city. The new Groninger Forum will combine the cultural aspects with education and leisure and it will be an extension of the public space surrounding the building (NL Architects, 2007). The



Figure 5. Location of Groninger Forum

cultural aspects are a library with study places, a cinema, conference meeting halls and open space for socializing. The leisure will consist of several catering industries and an open rooftop. Next to these functions the Groninger forum will also function as an iconic building within the existing urban fabric. With its height of 45m it will rise above the old historical city, creating a new cityscape.

China Resources Hubei Landmark Tower, Shenzhen, China.

The Hubei Landmark tower is a skyscraper which will be built in Shenzhen. This tower and surrounding redevelopment is planned to create an iconic image for the fast growing city of Shenzhen. The iconic image the tower represents is connected to fast growth of the city. It represents the way in which the small fishing village of Shenzhen grew to a global mega city (Goettsch Partners, 2018). The fast growth of the city was made possible because it was the very first economic zone in China which was open to international companies. The tower is located on the original site of the old fishing village, this location can be seen in *figure 6*. The original plan is to demolish the original fishing village and rebuild it as an historical site with tourist attractions. The surrounding area will be redeveloped as mixed use apartments and offices. The lower grounds of the structure will house several big malls and tourist attractions.



Figure 6. Location of Hubei Landmark Tower

Appendix 2: The semi structured interview.

The semi structured interview:

Question	Relation to theoretical framework
What is the most iconic part of Groningen?	Global level
How would you describe the identity of Groningen?	<i>Macro level</i>
How would you describe the identity of the surrounding area of the Groninger Forum?	<i>Macro level</i>
If you could describe the identity of the surrounding area in one world what would that be?	<i>Medium Level</i>
What are characteristic elements of the area surrounding the Groninger Forum?	<i>Medium Level</i>
What is your personal opinion on the building? -Has this opinion always stayed the same?	<i>Micro level</i>