Applying the Zaltman metaphor elicitation technique on understanding place image

Danang – the livable city of Vietnam in the minds of students

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Abstract

Purpose – Danang – a heritage gateway, a socioeconomic urban of Central Vietnam – has been known as a livable city, a fantastic destination and a leading position in the Provincial Competitive Index. Since branding Danang appears to be unfocused, it is suggested that the city follow a strategy to meet the shared expectations of stakeholders instead of trying to create separate images toward different audiences. The paper aims to discuss these issues.

Design/methodology/approach – Therefore, this study selects the bottom-up approach from the viewpoint of Danang students whose requirement is consistent with those of investors, citizens and tourists.

Findings – The finding represents the initial associations of students about Danang as a livable, friendly, dynamic, modern coastal city of tourism and development with many opportunities, potential, attraction, integration and hometown feel. These salient images are exceeded from city characteristics, such as natural endowment, leisure places, beautiful scenes, diverse cuisine, peaceful, suitable living environment, orderly traffic, infrastructure and local people. Besides, crowded caused by development and population growth leads to an unpleasant feeling about narrow spaces but can be overwhelmed by the bustle. Although the result shows the success of Danang in communication, it also figures out the loss of the livable image in local students' minds.

Practical implications – Hence, Danang must boost the positive effects of tourism development and limit its negative side. University–city cooperation through co-branding strategies can be considered a solution.

Originality/value – The study contributes not only to branding Danang but also to the literature because this is the first complete application of the Zaltman metaphor elicitation technique in city branding.

Keywords Vietnam, Place image, Consensus map, Danang city, Zaltman metaphor elicitation technique

Paper type Case study

1. Introduction

According to Acharya and Rahman (2016), places nowadays gain reputation and competitive advantage globally by branding and marketing strategies. The authors explore that place brand identity and its role in place branding development are the major research issues mentioned within ten recent years. The next themes are stakeholder aspect, planning, and strategy. The term "place" here indicates country, city, region, or location (island, continent, town, state and rural area). Notably, almost studies focus on places located in Europe (The Oresund Region), UK (Liverpool), rarely conducted for North America, Africa, Asia. No matter conceptual, case, or research studies, place brand image is the theme that

only accounts for small ratios (6, 6.5 and 9.8 percent, respectively). In Asia, the salient attempts of place branding are usually attached to mega-city brands with mega-events, heritages (Berg and Björner, 2014), or destination branding (Ahn *et al.*, 2016; Asseraf and Shoham, 2017; Foroudi, 2016; Hazime, 2011; Williams *et al.*, 2014). Besides, Acharya and Rahman (2016) aggregate reviews from previous scholars (Gertner, 2011a, b; Lucarelli, 2011; Lucarelli and Brorström, 2013) to state the following: place branding literature is a cross-disciplinary mix research domain that is concerned with business, management, marketing, branding, public diplomacy, urban studies, design and geography.

Under integration challenges, cities must become global localities with the most imageable cultural amenities. In Vietnam, cities have been employing various strategies to promote themselves. Although some places are known along with festivals (Hue, Dalat), "young" (Binh Duong), red flamboyant (Hai Phong), "capital" of Western Cochinchine (Can Tho), "capital" of Vietnamese coffee (Daklak), thousand years of civilization/city for peace (Hanoi), and pearl of the Far East/sleepless city (Saigon/Ho Chi Minh), their images may be spontaneous and not always be the results of their branding efforts. There is the fact that the bigger cities are, the more difficult for them to position themselves distinctly. Besides, the dominance of tourism leads to developing festivals/events not based on Vietnam culture (Ha Long, Vung Tau) or sleazy impressions because of lacking preparation (Soc Trang).

Known as a livable city, Danang, a center in Central Vietnam, is the flagship in city branding. Using the advantages of a central point connecting three UNESCO World Heritage sites (Hue citadel, Hoi An ancient town and My Son Sanctuary) and leading position on Provincial Competitive Index (PCI) since 2013, Danang has been trying to promote the image of a livable city and tourism destination while attracting investors at the same time. However, Danang has been confronting with urban issues, such as immigration, increasing of individual vehicles, economic growth not from internal sources, environmental awareness and planning management (JICA, 2016).

Besides, the human resource issue is the salient concern of entrepreneurs in their investment decisions (Tran, 2018). This concern does not conflict with the fact that Danang is the leading city in talent attraction. Actually, the talent policy of Danang mainly focuses on public areas, as declared in the Resolutions/Decisions of the city government (107/2017/NQ-HĐND dated July 7, 2017, 922-QĐ/TU dated February 11, 2011, 27/2011/QĐ-UBND dated September 10, 2011 and 13100-QĐ/TU dated April 23, 2015). Therefore, investors or entrepreneurs seem not to benefit from the policy. While struggling with the criteria of a livable city, Danang positions itself as a fantastic and dynamic city toward two stakeholders (tourists and investors) and recently as an inspiring city proposed by Le (2018). However, how to harmonize their benefits to select a consistent place brand image?

To solve this problem, Glinka (2017) figures out education as the shared expectation of three typical target groups (students, investors/entrepreneurs and citizens). Students need a place of qualified education with employment opportunities while businesses need an educated workforce besides appropriate infrastructure. As consequences, residents can be satisfied by work condition, entertainment and qualification improvement. When these conditions are ensured, cities can attract tourists also, especially the cultured travelers who contribute to developing localities sustainably. Instead of nourishing from the root to the top of the brand image tree, Danang seems to be doing the opposite.

Despite aiming to become an ASEAN research and training center with an increase in educational infrastructure investment (Danang UPI, 2013), Danang has not paid attention to the unique stakeholder – students. Students can stay longer than ordinary cultural tourists and can become valuable citizens, entrepreneurs or potential creative class. According to Richards (2004), given that cultural consumption is linked to education strongly, students who can be young travelers take an essential role in cultural tourism. Additionally, highly educated

people tend to consume much culture more than others. Hence, focusing on this group is not only suitable for cultural enhancement but also a solution for the high-quality labor force.

This study aims to explore the brand image of Danang City on students' view. The perceived image is the outcome of brand positioning that reflects the success of communicating Danang identity. By using the Zaltman metaphor elicitation technique (ZMET) to construct the consensus map of students, this paper offers a prime understanding of Danang brand with deep metaphors. Only one study conducted by Brandt and de Mortanges (2011) uses ZMET to identify the dimensions of students' beliefs of a university town as a base to form a brand concept map of Liège instead of following all steps of ZMET. This study, therefore, not only contributes to literature but also identifies the strengths and weaknesses of Danang for city marketing strategies.

2. Research context
General context
The Resonance (2017) ranks the best city brands of the world based on six categories including place (perceived quality of natural and built environment), product (key institutions, attraction and infrastructure), programming (arts, culture and entertainment), people (immigration and diversity) prosperity (employment, GDP and corporate head offices) and promotion (articles, references and recommendations). The top-ranking cities are London (capital of capitals), Singapore (livability and innovation-oriented Asian financial powerhouse), New York (open and creative heritage urban), Paris (ideal destination), Sydney (friendly, warm and rich), Amsterdam (asset optimization), Los Angeles (fantasy, suntans and traffic), Tokyo (against calamity and host the world), San Francisco (beautiful, witty and influential) and Toronto (the city of nations). Interestingly, instead of Hanoi, which is the capital city of Vietnam, Ho Chi Minh (shown as Saigon in the report) ranked as the 97th city in top 100 with high scores on product, people and prosperity. In the years 2018 and 2019, no towns of Vietnam appear on the top 100 of this ranking. Among the top 10 cities in 2017, only London remains its first position within two years later, Singapore has dropped down dramatically, and New York and San Francisco remain stable. Notably, Paris, Tokyo, Barcelona and Chicago added in 2018 have attained high ranks in recent years (The Resonance, 2018, 2019) (see Table I).

According to Mason (2017), cities in Southeast Asia (i.e. Tokyo, Osaka, Karachi, Jakarta, Delhi, Mumbai, Shanghai, Manila, Seoul and Beijing) are shaped by sustainable urbanization and place branding. Given that the region includes many largest and fastest growing cities all over the world, city marketers should approach ASEAN cities' branding as urban branding concerning sustainability to ensure brand longevity. The author

Rank	2017	2018	2019
1	London	London	London
2	Singapore	New York	Paris
3	New York	Paris	New York
4	Paris	Moscow	Tokyo
5	Sydney	Tokyo	Barcelona
6	Amsterdam	Singapore	Moscow
7	Los Angeles	Dubai	Chicago
8	Tokyo	Barcelona	Singapore
9	San Francisco	San Francisco	Dubai
10	Toronto	Chicago	San Francisco

Source: Aggregated from Resonance Consultancy Ltd(The Resonance, 2017, 2018, 2019)

Table I.
World's best
city brands

mentions that some cities brand themselves as a going place city (Ho Chi Minh, Vietnam), a "live work play" city (Singapore), or a captured time city (Yangon, Myanmar) to attract talent, visitors and investors.

Case of Danang

Vietnam cities are well known by their features, such as Saigon (sleepless city), Hanoi (thousand years of civilization capital), Danang (coastal city), Dalat (foggy city), Hoi An (lantern city), Hue (dream city) and Ha Long (port city) (Duong, 2017). Among them, Danang is considered the pioneer in city branding. The city prestige is attached to the high speed of urbanization and remarked with its strategic role in 2003 It shows that branding Danang is supported by the Vietnam government. According to the Vietnam Political Bureau (Resolution No. 43-NQ/TW, 2019), Danang aims to the vision of an ecological, smart urban, an innovative entrepreneurial center, and a livable coastal city in Asia, taking advantages on geopolitical position, urban spaces, hosting critical events and potentials to become one of the big socioeconomic centers of Vietnam and South East Asia.

The city image is enhanced by the ASEAN Environmentally Sustainable City award (2011) and Excellence in City transformation award (2015). Additionally, the Danang Sustainable City Development Project in collaboration with The World Bank (from April 2013 to June 2019) remarks the city improvement in drainage and wastewater, bus rapid transit development, urban strategic roads, technical assistance and capacity building. Moreover, priority infrastructure investment is continued from the Danang Priority Infrastructure Investment Project during the 2008–2013 period (The World Bank, 2017). Given that the newest resolution mentions five areas needed to be focused, Danang has been working to propose a unique mechanism to government. Hitherto, Danang has earned its efforts to promote the images of a fantastic city and dynamic city at the same time (see more in Figure 1). Remaining the parallel brand images may consume resources and can be an obstacle to build a consistent brand image that is easy to memorize for different stakeholders.

Moreover, urban agglomeration and tourism development bring challenges to Danang to become a green and livable city, especially on environmental problems. The city must define which stakeholder can spread community-conscious most effectively to reach this vision.
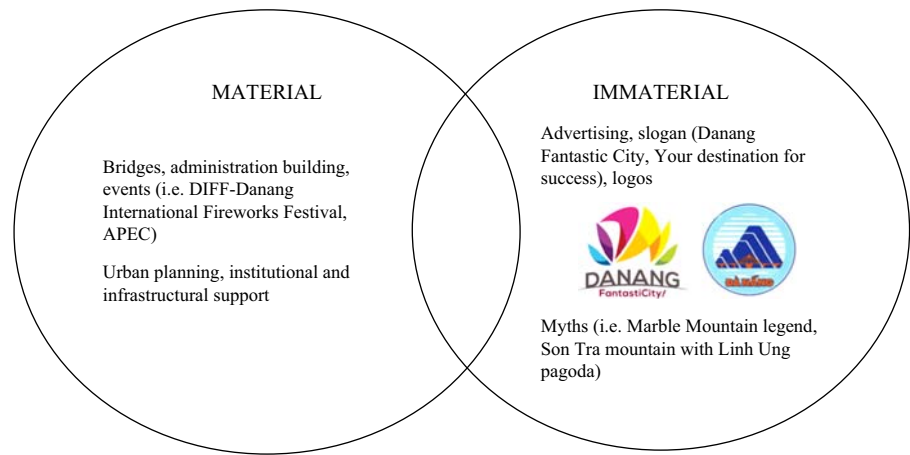

Figure 1.
Danang Urban branding strategies

Sources: Adapted from Jansson and Power (2006). Image source: A – danangfantasticity.com; B – danang.gov.vn

As mentioned earlier, focusing on students – with the role of education in sociocultural development also emphasized in Resolution No. 43 – is the suitable choice. Therefore, this study chooses a bottom-up approach to understand Danang's image in student minds. The findings will be the basis for considering the remaining audiences to promote Danang more appropriately.

3. Literature review
City branding
On the basis of corporate branding, places branding or city branding are used to boost economic development (Allen, 2007; Cleave and Arku, 2015; Cleave *et al.*, 2016). City branding can be used as a strategy to attract different city stakeholders, including the talent (Kong, 2012). Even being more complicated than corporate branding, several conceptual frameworks have been built to measure a city brand. Kong (2012) observes similarities among them and divides a common frame into four stages: city brand planning, brand identity development, city brand implementation and city brand monitoring. The author also mentions the City Brand Index of Anholt (2006) of which premise focuses on people's perceptions instead of the reality of the city. A prosperous city branding must create the unique brand identity that represents the city culture, heritage, people and make it mutually agreeable to different stakeholders. However, attaining this agreement is difficult because of different lens or filter are used to interpret a city brand (Merrilees *et al.*, 2012).

According to Gibson (2005), selling city living can broaden economic, public educational, and housing development. This aim can be attained through urban branding with a cultural approach. Jansson and Power (2006) divide urban branding into two kinds including inward (identity building and citizens' pride strengthening toward residents, and businesses) and outward branding (external communication toward investors, knowledge workers, visitors and tourists). The authors explore that bottom-up branding strategies increase opportunities to involve the local population who can be valuable brand ambassadors.

Recently, Oguztimur and Akturan (2016) have a synthesis review of city branding and categorize the matters into four areas: branding concept, processes and measurement; branding strategies; social urbanism; branding culture and tourism. City brand image belongs to brand attributes, which is grouped into the second trend. The authors propose a more holistic approach, which is a combination of city marketing and planning. Likewise, Green *et al.* (2016) figure out the evolutionary path of city branding in practice, including five stages: primitive, boosterish, entrepreneurial, formalized and brand-focused. Therefore, the ongoing wave of city branding from 2000 to present considers it as an essential component of urban place management in which city image is treated as a brand. In terms of city branding research, progressive approaches are only salient after 2010 when multiple stakeholders are paid considerable attention.

No matter places are/have brands, Boisen *et al.* (2018) agree with Zenker and Braun (2017) that a place brand is a network of associations in the consumers' mind, in which, identity and image are centralized. In other words, city branding is the identity-driven reputation-management attached by image orchestration as a place to live, to work, to visit. Although identity-image match affects to place branding positively, stimulating discussion and debate in this process can lead to further conflicts among stakeholders (Braun *et al.*, 2018). This fact can explain why earlier city branding studies commonly focus on the perception of separate audiences, such as residents (Aryanti, 2015; Braun *et al.*, 2013; Hereźniak and Florek, 2018; Merrilees *et al.*, 2009; Rukayah *et al.*, 2016), entrepreneurs (Kaya and Marangoz, 2014) and visitors (Gómez *et al.*, 2018; Zhang and Zhao, 2009). However, various stakeholders have interrelationships (Maheshwari *et al.*, 2014), and aligning their different perspectives is very important in place branding (Henninger *et al.*, 2016; Kotsi *et al.*, 2018).

City brand image and connection with culture

The brand image of a site is one of the elements that reflect the success of the place branding (Braun *et al.*, 2014) given that city branding mainly focuses on the brand image of city (Merrilees *et al.*, 2009). The dominant place image attributes are landscapes, cultural attractions, nightlife and entertainment, shopping facilities, price/value/cost and residents' receptiveness (Govers and Go, 2009). Depending on the level that the place image reflects the place reality (profound, denature, mask absence and not related), the place planners can utilize proper selling tactics (Zavattaro, 2014).

Cities can be promoted via cultural amenities, and the nature of the city image is the intersection between city branding and city identity (Riza *et al.*, 2012). In other words, city identity reflects city culture and is indicated by the city image (Kavaratzis and Hatch, 2013). Cities and culture are put in a mutual relationship in which cities produce culture and culture reversely reshape cities (Miles, 2007). Hence, it is easier for culture-led cities to develop cultural tourism, cultural industries and cultural policy. This connection is proved in some studies, where cultures are expressed via festivals and events (Hassen and Giovanardi, 2018), architecture (Evans, 2015; Michelson and Paadam, 2016), arts (Ooi and Stöber, 2010). Given that identity helps cities position themselves in the minds of their stakeholders, understanding the image of cities perceived by their "audiences" can define how strong the brand is. The more connected the city image is to local culture, the more successful a city's communication is, and the city owns a sharp brand image as a result.

Students – cultural audience

Although a brand image should retain the consensus of different place stakeholders, a large number of studies focus on tourists while some studies give attention to investors (potential) residents, politicians or entrepreneurs. Some studies can be listed as destination image (Baloglu *et al.*, 2014; Echtner and Ritchie, 1993; Govers and Go, 2004), antecedents of residents' city brand attitudes (Merrilees *et al.*, 2009), city branding in European capitals (Gómez *et al.*, 2018), an assessment of the image of Mexico (Crompton, 1979), or the formation of a composite urban image (Stern and Krakover, 1993). However, limited studies evaluate the perceptions of students who select a location for their higher education. Moreover, the disadvantages socioeconomic groups (less income, unemployment and crime levels) still can engage with the same city image because of social network usage and community facility access (Merrilees *et al.*, 2014). Hence, toward an urban area with high agglomeration and young population, city marketers should give attention to students who have high rates of social media usage and community activity participation to spread the positive brand image of the city.

Students who are considered the belongings of the academic community are the primary cultural audiences of the city (Klaic, 2012). Students are viewed in interconnection with many others, such as leisure shoppers, second house owners, entrepreneurial immigrants, business travelers and volunteer hosts regarding tourism (Gale, 2009). In addition to consuming popular culture, university students can re-image cities through their activities (Chatterton, 1999). They can be tourists motivated by food/shopping, city-driven or culture (Huang *et al.*, 2013) and influenced by place images emotionally (Lulić *et al.*, 2016). They enter higher education institutions that receive many advantages from the host localities. Notably, place images affect students' selection as destinations for tourism or education (Gertner, 2011; Glover, 2011; María Cubillo *et al.*, 2006). Convenience in living conditions and transportation in the host localities also can be the reason for their choice (Abubakar *et al.*, 2010). Similarly, accommodation, community-consciousness, safety and cultural scene are the most vital traits of their satisfaction (Insch and Sun, 2013). Consequently, culture and education are the most critical attributes of talent-oriented city attractiveness (De Noni *et al.*, 2014).

Some earlier representative studies investigate this group using unstructured methodology are the brand concept map analysis of the university town Liège (Brandt and de Mortanges, 2011) and measuring the brand image of Hamburg (Zenker and Beckmann, 2013a, b). Given that students can be cultural tourists and the concentration on this group can harmonize inward and outward branding, this current study selects them as the beginning point of rethinking about branding Danang.

4. Conceptual framework

In a review of Chan and Marafa (2013), a qualitative method is the dominant approach of the topics such as place identity/image, place communication and stakeholder relationship. On the basis of reviewing the literature above, this study uses the attributes of place image as the basis to detect which constructs are included in the city image of Danang through the metaphor analysis that will be illustrated later.

In this framework (Figure 2), the constructs of the city image cannot be decided in advance, but the researchers can expect which ones will appear in the consensus map. The map reflects the cause and effect, in which rhombuses represent whether the city communicates appropriately or not. Independent constructs shown in oval shapes are originators that lead to the final perception of the audiences – dependent constructs or receivers. Among them, culture is reflected by material factors (Landscapes), immaterial factors (Cuisine and People), or both (Cultural attractions).

5. Methodology

This study applies the ZMET to form the mental model of students toward Danang City. This technique is proposed by Dr Zaltman – a professor at Harvard University in the 1990s, and later admitted as the US patent. Although most communication occurs nonverbally (Zaltman, 2001), most researchers have been using verbal-based tools. One of the reasons is the image-based elicitation technique ZMET requires the lengthy time of interviewees with trained interviewers (John *et al.*, 2006). Hence, ZMET usage is appropriate in this study as students are willing to spend more time than any other stakeholders. Besides, the origin of ZMET, which is related to Nepal villages, proves its suitability in understanding place image.

According to Coulter and Zaltman (1994), this is a research tool with deep metaphors to understand the brand images well and provide information for marketing decisions. Exceeding from previous theories on nonverbal communication, metaphors, the authors develop ten core steps to build the consensus map of customers. Later, Zaltman (1997)
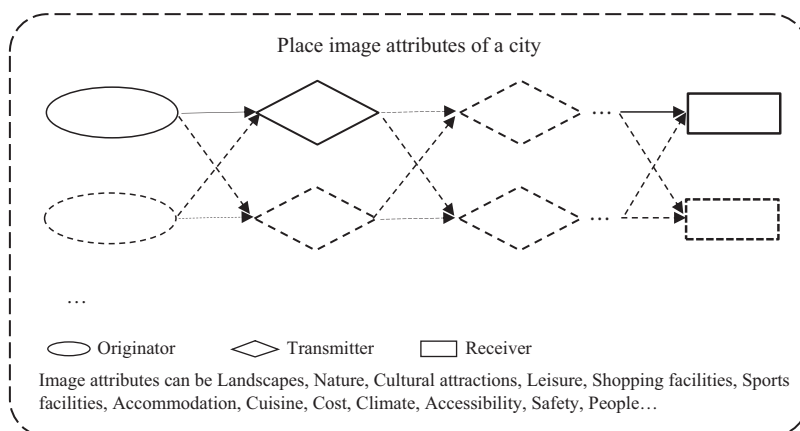

Figure 2.
Conceptual framework

proposes nine premises to construct the mental map with further detail. These premises mention the nature of thought and communication that can be elicited through metaphors. The author supposes that thought, emotion, and learning occur without awareness and mostly image-based, nonverbal. A mental model can explore brand equity, representing thought structure that orients toward the brand. ZMET has proved its power on elicitating the root thinking of customer in different fields (Brandt and de Mortanges, 2011; Christensen and Olson, 2002; Coulter and Zaltman, 1994; Khoo-Lattimore and Prideaux, 2013; Natarajan and Kumar, 2016; Soni and Jamaiyar, 2017; Tseng and Tseng, 2012; Van Dessel, 2005; Vorell, 2003; Wilson and Elliot, 2016; Zaltman, 1997; Zaltman and Coulter, 1995). The technique is particularly appropriate in culture-related cases. Hence, this qualitative method is a proper way to elicit the thought of students from different cultural backgrounds.

This study selects the interviewees who are students of the University of Danang (UD) – the regional university in Central Vietnam. The UD, a state-owned university, has strong connections with the Danang government not only on city plan deployment but also on city image communication. The image of a livable city is always promoted by Danang University's members to attract prospective students. In this paper, 16 students who are willing to participate in the interviews are chosen. Beside four local students, four international students, eight remaining ones are non-local. This sample size meets the requirement for conducting ZMET. The gender distribution rate is not too different, with the percentage of male students being 56.25 percent. Every respondent is required to attend two times of the interviewing process depending on the interviewees' convenience. The interview stages last from December 2018 to January 2019. Unlike Danang graduate students who select a location for higher education because of many other reasons than the image of place the universities locate, undergraduate students tend to choose a university attached by the city image. Therefore, the sample here only includes undergraduate students. Students have received the mobile phone card for encouragement after finishing the interviews.

6. Research process
To explore the perceived image of Danang in students' mind, the researcher needs a pre-interview preparation with the ZMET protocol. In general, this study tries to define the constructs of Danang brand image through thoughts and feelings of undergraduate students who have already chosen Danang as a higher education destination. At least one week before the official interviews that take approximately two hours, the interviewer meets every student separately to introduce the research objectives, procedures, forms, schedule time and place for the next meeting. The participants are requested to find twelve pictures, or photos present their thoughts and feelings on Danang City to answer the question "What do the associations come to your mind when you think about Danang City?". They can look for pictures/photos from any source, such as books, newspapers, magazines, and photos taken by themselves. The images must be metaphors, not include any name, symbol attached to Danang. The metaphor explanation must be conducted carefully during first-time meetings. Students are instructed not to select images directly illustrate Danang such as attractions or historical sites (i.e. Ba Na Hills, Dien Hai citadel), iconic building (i.e. the administrative building, Dragon bridge), city advertisements, the city logo.

The official interviews obey ZMET steps (Coulter and Zaltman, 1994):

- Step 1 Storytelling: student describes the content of each picture. Probe questions can be used to understand student insight.

- Step 2 Missed images: student illustrates the pictures unable to be obtained and explains the relevance. Describing any issues student cannot find a pertinent picture allows him/her to address concerns may have come to mind after collecting images or

during the interview process. For instance, the participant D1 describes a party at the beach in the afternoon while another family goes for sightseeing at the other corner of the picture. Two extremes of Danang – bustle, and peace are integrated into this picture which she cannot find from anywhere. She explains this image as a contradiction in unity that makes Danang unique.

- Step 3 Sorting task: student sorts the pictures into meaningful piles.
- Step 4 Construct elicitation: basic constructs and their irrelevances are elicited. Triad task and extended metaphors can be applied.
- Step 5 Most representative picture: student selects the most representative picture of Danang image.
- Step 6 Opposite images: student describes the reverse image of Danang. That is, the participant I1 illustrates a dirty city with a traffic mess, exorbitant prices toward international tourists and garbages everywhere.
- Step 7 Sensory images: student uses other senses to illustrate what does and does not represent the concept being explored.
- Step 8 The mental map: student creates a map using the constructs have been mentioned earlier.
- Step 9 The summary image: student creates a summary image with the assistance of powerpoint.
- Step 10 Consensus map: researcher creates a map involving the most important constructs.

All steps are conducted during the interviews, except for Step 10 needed to be dealt with after coding and doing statistics.

7. Result

The interviewer defines key themes or constructs mentioned by the participant on the basis of hidden thought exploration via each interview. Thereafter, the aggregated list of constructs is formed. This study applies the criterion for mutual construct selection proposed by Zaltman and Coulter (1995). The cutoff level is often between one-fourth and one-third of the number of study participants (Christensen and Olson, 2002). It means that every mutual construct must be mentioned by at least between four ($1/4 \times 16$) to six ($1/3 \times 16$) participants given that the total students are 16. Hence, this study selects 31 mutual constructs that are mentioned by five or more students of the 16 participants ($N \geqslant 5$). Among them, tourism and development are the constructs mentioned by 13 students, followed by crowded mentioned by 11 participants.

After creating the construct list, the construct pairs that represent the causal relationships between two constructs are coded. These pairs are typically exceeded from steps 1, 2 and 4 stated earlier (Zaltman and Coulter, 1995). Thereafter, paired-constructs have to be chosen by the cutoff level at one-fourth or more of the total participants (Tseng and Tseng, 2012). In other words, a pair-construct here will be selected if four ($1/4 \times 16$) participants state it ($n \geqslant 4$). Given that the number of study interviewees is 16, each paired-construct appears on the consensus map of Danang should be mentioned by four or more students (see Table II).

However, there are differences among the three groups of students. Foreign participants do not mention opportunities and potential (maybe because of language barriers in job hunting). They have associations of sea, while only one person in the remaining group mentions this construct. The impression unpleasant is also mainly mentioned by foreigners

Casualty construct	Number of students who mention
Natural endowment → sea	4
Natural endowment → tourism	5
Leisure places → tourism	4
Beautiful scenes → tourism	6
Cuisine → tourism	6
Tourism → integration	4
Tourism → development	8
Tourism → attraction	4
Traffic → development	4
Development → opportunities	6
Development → potential	5
Development → modern	4
Infrastructure → modern	4
People → friendly	9
People → crowded	5
People → dynamic	5
Crowded → unpleasant	5
Peaceful → home	8
Living environment → liveable	4

Table II.
Paired-constructs
appear on the
consensus map

and local students, while only one interviewee in the non-local group has this feeling. Perhaps the reason for this negative feeling is crowded people and vehicles. Non-local students tend to accept this situation much more than the others because they are immigrants. Reversely, the image of a livable, dynamic city with good living environment seems not fit to local students (no one mentions these constructs).

Figure 3 shows the consensus map of Danang City. The figure shows nine independent primary constructs or originators, which are natural endowment, leisure places, beautiful scenes, cuisine, peaceful, people, traffic, infrastructure, living environment. In total, 11 final constructs here are sea, attraction, integration, opportunities, potential, friendly, dynamic, home, modern, unpleasant, livable. Modern is the final construct of infrastructure, or traffic through only one transmitter. On the aggregated map, after excluding eight independent
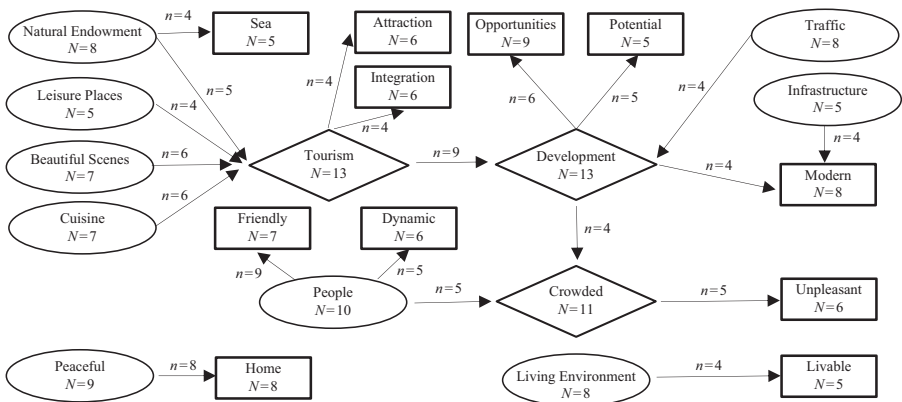

Figure 3.
Danang consensus
map in students' mind

Notes: N: the number of students who mention the construct; n: the number of students who mention the paired-construct

◯ Originator ⬡ Transmitter ▭ Receiver

constructs without any irrelevance, 23 constructs remain. This exclusion is suitable for the rule mentioned by Zaltman and Coulter (1995).

The map shows the reasoning process between primary constructs or originators (circles), transmitters or connectors (diamond shapes) and destination or ending points (rectangles). Among them, primary constructs lead to other constructs while final constructs are dependent consequences. Transmitters represent the linkages between them and between originators and other connectors. Therefore, fundamental constructs and transmitters engender the remaining ones. In this study, nine originators (natural endowment, leisure places, beautiful scenes, cuisine, peaceful, people, living environment, traffic, infrastructure) and three connectors (tourism, development, crowded) should be paid attention more in Danang communication strategies.

Features of key constructs are illustrated hereafter:

- Natural endowment: the advantages Danang receives from nature such as sea, river, and mountain.

- Leisure places: places are suitable for leisure, including natural places, coffee, milk tea shops, landmarks and entertainment spots.

- Beautiful scenes: beautiful, inspirational views of Danang.

- Cuisine: clean and delicious seafood, fruits, and diverse specialities that represent the local culture.

- Peaceful: positive feeling, not thinking, slow rhythm of life.

- People: lenient, connected people who used to live or have been living in Danang.

- Traffic: dense but systematic, orderly vehicles are moving on streets.

- Infrastructure: physical structures and facilities of Danang that contribute to a clean environment.

- Living environment: socioeconomic space and natural environment where people live in.

- Tourism: tourism takes numerous advantages and is the experience of many people.

- Development: Danang is a big center of Central Vietnam with hi-tech, highly competitive and pressure, talent recruitment, symbolized by the hotels and resorts along the beach, skyscrapers. Development is the motive of self-improvement, represents the proper policy.

- Crowded: an increase in the number of people and population.

- Sea: sea is the salient feature of Danang City, locates near the city center, of which cleanliness represents a clean city. Going to the sea is the habit of citizens.

- Attraction: Danang has the power of arousing participation.

- Integration: the cultural promotion goes along with multicultural, open-minded lifestyle.

- Opportunities: the development of Danang brings career chances, information accessibility and students' progress.

- Potential: Danang has been being on the way of overall progress, leading an increase of cross-culture, business and immigration.

- Friendly: willing to help even a stranger, easy to make friends.

- Dynamic: representative of youth, festivals, economic growth.

- Home: comfortable, safe, affinity feeling and the flavor of hometown.

- Modern: reflection of human element on constructions.

- Unpleasant: negative feeling because of narrow space, hot weather, vehicles' smoke but can be overwhelmed by the bustle.

- Livable: affordable prices, many opportunities and enjoyable feeling.

Appendix shows the metaphors of these key constructs. Among them, the images of waterside buildings, beach, fruits, firework, indoor activities, city full of lights, modern architecture, seafood, sharing behavior, shaking hands, bed, crowded stadium, crowded vehicles, tourists, multilanguage, entertainment spot, water park, traffic commander, pressure of work, and development arrows have the number of frequencies much more than the others. As can be seen, the impressions of students about Danang are the beach, waterside activities, seafood, firework, sharing, orderly crowd, leisure places and modern.

8. Discussion

On the consensus map of Danang, three transmitters, which are tourism, development and crowded, have the highest frequencies mentioned by students. These associations take an essential role as the bridges between nine originators and 11 receivers. The original construct people – only comes after the transmitters, leading three final constructs including friendly, dynamic and unpleasant. Friendly reflects the communicative aspect of people while dynamic is representative of youth through activities such as festivals. In other words, these two constructs are similar to items of location mentioned by Truong (2016). The author modifies the issue regarding sociocultural activities in the big city proposed by Keskinen *et al.* (2008) to dynamic environment after the qualitative stage. Dynamic is also the highest evaluated item in the location of education destination, followed by the living environment with proper living cost and rhythm of life. People element in terms of communication and natural ingredients such as climate and beautiful scenes have the dominant factor loadings (Keskinen *et al.*, 2008).

As compared with the study of Nguyen (2013) regarding the measurement of Danang brand image as a destination in tourists' mind, there are some similarities. The author also applies unstructured techniques to explore the holistic image and unique image of Danang City. The results show the striking comprehensive image of the beach (usually mentioned by the name China beach), seafood, transport infrastructure, new, modern/developed city, friendly people, friendly atmosphere, feeling of relaxation and quiet. Meanwhile, the negative images are many vehicles and crowded streets. Mentioning unique images, foreign tourists memorize the favorite spots for tourism and the Han river with bridges. These are consistent with the critical constructs, including sea, cuisine, traffic, infrastructure, modern, development, friendly, people, peaceful, unpleasant and leisure places in this study. The constructs remaining on the aggregated map of Danang seems to fit 56 percent (14 attributes) with beliefs of students when they choose a university town in the first study of Brandt and de Mortanges (2011).

Another research of Zenker and Beckmann (2013a, b) that makes a comparison between the internal and external groups of a city shows the equivalence in the impressions of students. The authors analyze that the significant differences between creative class people and students are their core associations. Creative class people tend to memorize trading, economic conditions while students care much more about leisure activities. Students also have a strong connection between associations. The image of a home/place to settle down, the city at the waterfront, multicultural, red-light and party district, natural and free space, bars and restaurants, river, beautiful, likable, and helpful people have an analogy with constructs home, natural endowment, leisure places, beautiful scenes, friendly and people in this study.

Basically, the result reconfirms the strength of Danang city in terms of nature, cuisine, transportation, friendliness, people, feelings of relaxation appeared in earlier studies. However, the reverse side of Danang urbanization also represents via the connector crowded that leads to the final construct unpleasant. These negative aspects have never appeared before in studies about Danang as a destination image. The lens of different groups can explain this feeling. Tourists are too familiar with the crowded scenes of tourist spots while students choose a destination not only for studying but for the living also. Fortunately, the uncomfortable feeling can be balanced by the bustle. Besides, students tend to perceive Danang in relevance with career opportunities which are not mentioned by tourists. Moreover, the other studies about Danang only use the frequencies or structured methodology that cannot define which associations are more important for city marketers. This study figures out that the city communicators should focus on three connectors caused by nine oval-shaped constructs.

Despite not directly mentioning typical culture as in the other cities, the cultural element of Danang is included in sea (habits of the citizens), cuisine (represents the local culture), leisure places (coffee and milk tea shops, landmarks, entertainment spots), people (behaviors of sharing), dynamic (through festivals), integration (cultural promotion, multicultural and open-minded lifestyle), potential (an increase of cross-culture) and living environment (socioeconomic space). The other cultural aspects such as art, urban architecture heritages have not made any impression to students. It means that Danang has the advantages of immaterial cultural values attached to the characteristics of a young modern urban. Nevertheless, the nature of unpleasant feelings is not because of crowded people merely, in which narrow space and vehicles' smoke are the warnings of urban planning related to accommodation, environmental issues and public transportation.

Overall, Danang appears as an ideal destination for visitors (nature-based attractions, beautiful scenes, leisure places, cuisine and hospitality), for living settlement (livable, peaceful, hometown feeling, working environment and modern), for entrepreneurs (potential, development, dynamic and infrastructure). As can be seen, the absence of elements related to higher education is the issue that investors may concern.

9. Implication

According to Zaltman (1997), the mental model can help evaluate the overall brand equity and its components. In general, Danang is successful in communicating and retaining the image of a livable city, showing the small brand gap between brand image and brand identity. The result of this study represents the loss of the livable image in local students' mind, although they still have the associations of a peaceful city in which they feel safe, comfortable and familiar flavor. Besides, tourism and development always bring two side effects. As unpleasant is caused by crowded but can be overwhelmed by the bustle, the city government must have a proper policy to control the crowd orderly, similar to the way of operating traffic. Communication about the sense of queuing and environment protection to reduce the pollution of smoke, noise, and garbage is necessary for Danang.

Listening to the voice of students is the way to slow down the high speed of urbanization and tourism development. Danang does not need to imitate any city since its cultural values are unique. As can be seen, cultural activities occurred in Danang are firmly attached to nature endowment. A city with sea, river and mountains is naturally beautiful already. Leisure places, cuisine, especially seafood and friendly people, orderly traffic bring peacefulness, desired living environment to any student who selects this city for higher education. As the consequences, an attractive, modern, dynamic place with the flavor of hometown but still have plenty of opportunities, potential, integration is really a livable city. The urban planners should earn special positions for natural preservation and spread the sense of community via local people and students. In terms of communication, Danang must attract authentic tourists who are cultured visitors, and respect the city values.

History, art, folklore, and architecture heritage seem to be blurred in the mind of students. They tend to memorize places for leisure activities, cuisine and impressive by friendly people much more than the other manipulations of culture. To limit the negative aspect of tourism and development, Danang must put culture at the heart position. Students who can be cultural tourists with the length of stay much longer than ordinary travelers are the ideal group for cultural communication. Only the city governors cannot conduct this task.

From the results, it can be said that Danang is suitable for entrepreneurship than investment. Despite owning a commercial port with historical richness, the city is not memorized as a port city, showing its limited capacity in sea commerce. Besides, no key industries or local products are city weakness. In terms of education, the potential of universities has not been exploited properly. When mentioning Danang as a higher education destination, students think about university prestige with several students (Truong and Vu, 2019). Meanwhile, these traits are not strong enough to appear in Danang perceived image merely.

Hence, the connection between universities and the city government must be strong, not only in communication but also in educational activities that linked between them. By this way, universities can take advantages from the city brand image to attract prospective students and contribute to boosting the cultural values of the city also (see Figure 4).

As shown in the figure, universities located in Danang and the host city have the sharing attributes (in the interference) of the place image for branding to attract students. Although any university can borrow these associations to promote itself, co-branding strategies can be started with Danang University. The first reason is its advantage of owning the name of the host place in the university name. In turn, Danang University is well known as the regional university of Central Vietnam so it can boost the city prestige as well. Additionally, it is a public university that confronts with autonomy pressure from the government. Hence, the needs for connection with the city governors are much stronger than the others. The consensus map of Danang image in students' mind reflects a place that is suitable for living, doing business, tourism. A student-oriented city branding, therefore, can be the solution of branding Danang consistently toward the different stakeholders.

Future research can concentrate on associations for Danang as a higher education destination. Then researchers can make a comparison between the two maps. The more similarities between them, the more Danang City is ideal for university selection. By this way, universities can be the bridge for city branding through education and cultural tourism. Besides, ZMET also can be repeated toward different stakeholders of a city to evaluate whether the current communication strategy is proper or not.
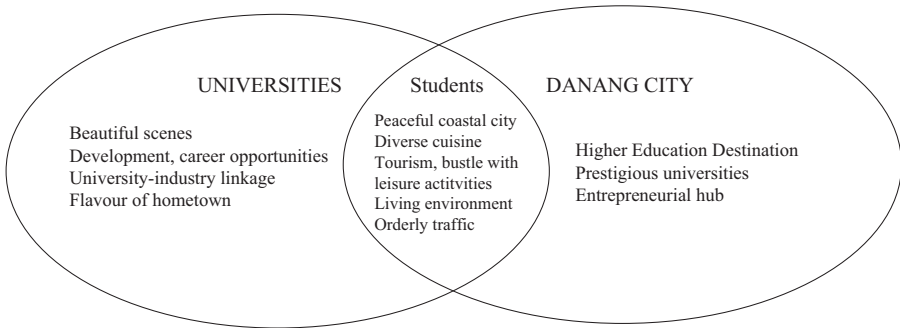
Figure 4.
Co-branding strategies between universities and Danang city

UNIVERSITIES

Beautiful scenes
Development, career opportunities
University-industry linkage
Flavour of hometown

Students

Peaceful coastal city
Diverse cuisine
Tourism, bustle with leisure actitvities
Living environment
Orderly traffic

DANANG CITY

Higher Education Destination
Prestigious universities
Entrepreneurial hub

10. Conclusion

With the origin of using imagery to describe life in a Nepal village, ZMET is useful to uncover people's thoughts. This technique is uniquely suited to discover the students' insights through an exciting tool, which is a profound metaphor. However, studies that apply this method to understand the brand image of a place are very limited. In this paper, ZMET is the sole technique to create the aggregated brand image model for Danang City. This study, therefore, contributes to the literature as the first complete application of the ZMET in city branding, explores the cause and effect of the place image attributes. Besides, it is the first one that supplies a new perspective of branding Danang regarding the perceived place image of Danang students who can be high-quality human resources and enter the creative class in the future.

The consensus map reflects the impressions of Danang students about a peaceful, livable city that brings comfortable, safe, and affinity feeling of/like home. A modern city like Danang with the natural endowment, diverse cuisine, friendly people, tourism brings development, many opportunities, orderly traffic and good living environment is an ideal place to settle down. Although there is an existence of the negative feeling (unpleasant) because of the crowded issue, this can be overwhelmed by the bustle. Not as expected, cultural elements are not mentioned directly. History, art, folklore and material culture have not been paid attention by students. The results show the weakness of Danang city on keeping and promoting cultural values, particularly urban architecture heritage. Only through culture, the city can develop sustainably. Despite this, the image of a livable city in Vietnam remains, representing the proper positioning strategy of the city planners. Despite being a pioneer in city branding in Vietnam, Danang strategies seem to be unfocused and struggle in the long-term. Instead of fostering from the roots, Danang cares too much about tourists and investors.

From the results, it proves that the students' perception of the city image can be the basis of city promotion toward the other groups. The findings of this study also imply universities-city cooperation as the solution to boosting city culture through higher education, starting with Danang University. Given that Danang cultural amenities are mainly exceeded from Nature Endowment, students (local people included) should be paid attention as a leading force to preserve nature, enhance community sense and attract authentic visitors.

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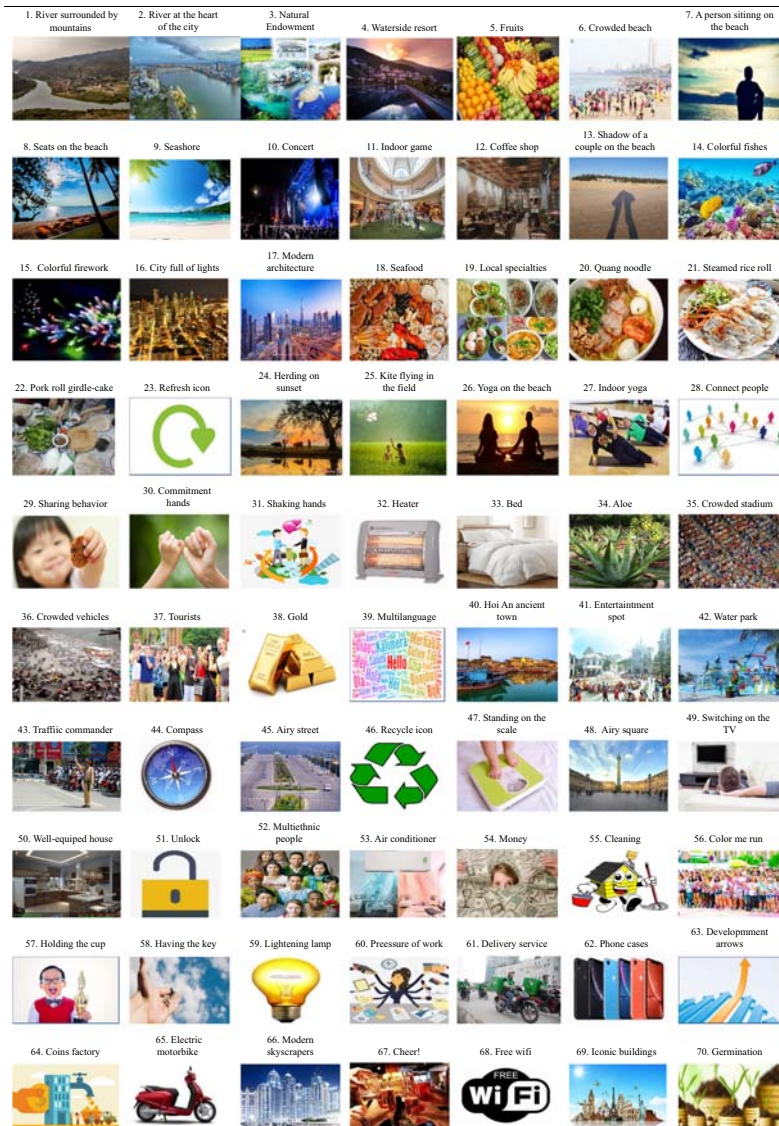
Appendix

1. River surrounded by mountains
2. River at the heart of the city
3. Natural Endowment
4. Waterside resort
5. Fruits
6. Crowded beach
7. A person sitting on the beach
8. Seats on the beach
9. Seashore
10. Concert
11. Indoor game
12. Coffee shop
13. Shadow of a couple on the beach
14. Colorful fishes
15. Colorful firework
16. City full of lights
17. Modern architecture
18. Seafood
19. Local specialties
20. Quang noodle
21. Steamed rice roll
22. Pork roll girdle-cake
23. Refresh icon
24. Herding on sunset
25. Kite flying in the field
26. Yoga on the beach
27. Indoor yoga
28. Connect people
29. Sharing behavior
30. Commitment hands
31. Shaking hands
32. Heater
33. Bed
34. Aloe
35. Crowded stadium
36. Crowded vehicles
37. Tourists
38. Gold
39. Multilanguage
40. Hoi An ancient town
41. Entertaintment spot
42. Water park
43. Traffiic commander
44. Compass
45. Airy street
46. Recycle icon
47. Standing on the scale
48. Airy square
49. Switching on the TV
50. Well-equiped house
51. Unlock
52. Multiethnic people
53. Air conditioner
54. Money
55. Cleaning
56. Color me run
57. Holding the cup
58. Having the key
59. Lightening lamp
60. Preessure of work
61. Delivery service
62. Phone cases
63. Developmment arrows
64. Coins factory
65. Electric motorbike
66. Modern skyscrapers
67. Cheer!
68. Free wifi
69. Iconic buildings
70. Germination

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