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Master's Thesis

MA Tourism

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UNCOVERING PLACE IDENTITIES OF RIGA:  
HOW LOCALS OF RIGA SEE AND PERCEIVE THEIR  
CITY?

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## Abstract

With the rapid growth of globalization, the place branding practices are becoming more spread and called-for, as the competition for mobile resources is proportionally becoming tougher too. Besides, the necessity to distinguish oneself on the market also requires particular actions; therefore, the place municipalities actively lay their hopes on place branding. However, often the concept of place branding is perceived very superficially, and interpreted as a controllable communication tool, narrowing it down to the design of a logo and tagline.

On the contrary, the current thesis examines the concept of place branding as a comprehensive and dynamic phenomenon, which is co-constructed by multiple stakeholders. Thus, within the context of the current study, the attention is concentrated on locals and residents of the place and their role within place branding. Moreover, throughout the thesis, the complexity of the place branding concept is gradually reducing to the concept of place identity, which is frequently seen as an internal aspect of a place, and as the direct opposite of place image. Besides, it is claimed that the residents of a place are identity-holders, which in turn coincides with the focus of the present work.

Therefore, the objective of this thesis is to reveal multiple place identities of Riga, the capital of Latvia, by examining how Riga's locals perceive and see their city. In this place branding research, the extensive questionnaire supplemented with two focus groups with locals, as well as the in-depth interview with a manager of a Destination Management Company, reveals the existence and diversity of Riga's place identities, following the model of Baxter and her colleagues (2013).

The findings reveal 23 place identities of Riga that are both complimentary and non-complimentary. Moreover, during the research, it was found out that locals do not fully agree on how the local authorities display Riga and Riga's insiders in their new promotional videos. Thus, the Riga's officials need to re-think the approach to place branding by starting to investigate on locals' perception. Besides, despite the limitations in data, the current findings can be used as the starting point for the trustworthy place brand formation.

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## 1. Introduction

In the race to become notable on the market, place officials are adopting branding strategies for distinguishing themselves among a multitude of other places (Zenker & Beckmann, 2013). The concepts and tools that are used for branding a place (including cities, countries, regions, etc.) are the premises of place branding (Kemp et al., 2012). It is argued that frequently a desire to set up a place as a brand is guided by the belief that “a place brand is a controllable and fully manageable communication tool and that once place brand “fits all” target audience” (Zenker & Beckmann, 2013, p. 6). Besides, the interest of officials to place branding is nourished by the possible positive gains in the face of economic development (Hankinson, 2004).

However, the persuasion regarding a place brand’s controllability is wrong, as a place is multidimensional in nature, which involves heterogeneous stakeholders that carry different interests towards a place (Kemp et al., 2012). Furthermore, a place brand cannot be adequately controlled since “city brands are per definition co-constructed by their stakeholders” (Vallaster et al., 2018, p. 53). Thus, by acknowledging the latter fact, the importance of stakeholders is recognized. However, in its majority, it is an external group of stakeholders that draw municipalities’ attention (Braun et al., 2013; Vallaster et al., 2018; Jørgensen, 2015). Dependent upon external influences, such as media, the officials are more preoccupied with a place’s external image, omitting the interests of internal audiences and neglecting the role of residents within place branding (Ločmele & Moustén, 2016).

In turn, it was found out that place officials might reap the benefit of the locals’ involvement, as, for example, they have power of enriching a place brand and its reputation (Braun et al., 2018), diminishing the negative image of a place (Zenker & Erfgen, 2014), as well as transmitting positive information to potential residents (Braun et al., 2013). Alternatively, the neglect of locals might provoke serious conflicts and protests from their side. Locals of a place might go on disputing due to the feeling of exclusion (Zenker & Beckmann, 2013), or in case if officials inadvertently hand their fundamentals and identity over to other benefits (Ločmele & Moustén, 2016).

Thus, taking into account that the internal audiences can backfire, the officials should be fully confident that they understand how a place’s insiders think and feel about their city in order to create the place brand, which would be in line with residents and locals (Ločmele & Moustén, 2016; Baxter et al., 2013). The mentioned resistance to authority’s choices occurred in Riga, the capital of Latvia, where the intense focus on external stakeholders (e.g. tourists) and the city’s image creation still prevail. Therefore, due to

the personal interest in the city, as well as curiosity in the topic of locals' involvement in place branding, Riga was chosen as a case for researching.

### 1.1. Research area

Latvia re-stored its pre-war independence from the Soviet Union only in 1991. The latter fact means that Latvia is a relatively new country, which is still making itself known for the other world. However, the historical past leaves traces on the country's tourism development until nowadays. As an example, speaking about Riga, it "has retained the post-Soviet image even after Latvian's accession to the EU" (Rozite & Klepers, 2011, p. 63). Until the restoration of independence, there were no purposefully adapted concept of place branding towards Riga, which would involve the communication of "the name and the identity, in order to build or manage the reputation" (Anholt, 2007, p. 4), as well as "unique benefits that the tourists will experience while visiting" (Kolb, 2006, p. 18). Rozite and Klepers (2011) have identified Riga as a re-emerging city, as despite its rich history and long existence, "it has only returned to the world of international tourism to any degree in the past 20 years" (Rozite & Klepers, 2011, p. 70). Thus, multiple, various, and sometimes contradictory attempts to brand the city show the brand's ongoing formation process.

However, dropping the historical facts, after scrutinizing the subject thoroughly, it became clear that at the moment, city officials of Riga are utilizing place branding, mainly concentrating on the brand image and external audiences. Moreover, it was found that there is a lack of understanding of ultimate aims that are trying to be reached, as the officials are focusing on various targets and goals simultaneously. As an example, in the prescribed development strategy, it is stated that by 2030, Riga is seen as a European center of culture, tourism, and business (The City Development Department, 2014). At the same time, on the official webpage of the Riga Tourism Development Bureau (the local Destination Management Organization or DMO) is stated that their "main task is [to] promote and establish Riga & Latvia as a perfect meeting and events destination in Northern Europe" (Meet Rīga, 2019). The following quote significantly displays another issue that was expressed by Inta Kotāne (2010) and which consists in the inability of the officials to decide what they want to popularize – the country or the city.

Furthermore, the local DMO (called 'LIVE RĪGA') created contradictory promotional videos "Insider's Guide to Riga" that are aiming at promoting Riga for "city-break travelers in various age groups (from 18 – 65)" (CIFFT, 2019), as well as "be appealing to a younger crowd" (CIFFT, 2019). However, it should be stressed out that in the above-mentioned development strategy, it is stated that the municipality of the

city is going to develop and implement the city brand strategy until 2030 (The City Development Department, 2014).

Thus, taking into consideration the intentions of the municipality to establish the place branding strategy, it would be highly suggested to start with investigating on locals' perception of the city, as "[...] place strategies should be based on reality and not simply promote desirable aspects" (Baxter et al., 2013, p. 1083). Moreover, there is incontrovertible evidence that "effective place brands are rooted in the involvement of stakeholders" (Jørgensen, 2015, p. 152), as well as the successful brand might occur only in case of both a city's and residents' support (Vallaster et al., 2018). Finally yet importantly, the place brand that the locals can relate to generates an attractive external image (Ločmele & Moustén, 2016).

## 1.2. Research question

Considering all the above mentioned, the author found it necessary to investigate on Riga's locals' perception of their city, ipso facto initiating the creation of a trustworthy place brand. Thus, the following research question arose:

### **How Riga's locals perceive and see their city?**

The objective of the established research question is aiming at studying how locals of Riga see the city, trying to reveal both tangible and intangible assets and characteristics of the place through the lens of insiders.

## 2. Literature review

### 2.1. Place branding

The general theme of the present research is place branding, which gradually turns into city branding (case of Riga) that is perceived as a sub-concept of place branding (Ma et al., 2019). To start with, it is essential to set the right direction by identifying what place branding is as a whole, and for the current study.

#### 2.1.1. Defining place branding

Place branding is an umbrella term that includes various sub-concepts and extensions (Oguztimur & Akturan, 2016; Ma et al., 2019). Being a relatively new field that covers and touches upon multitude disciplines, the generally accepted definition for place branding was not been established yet (Zenker & Erfgen, 2014; Zenker & Braun, 2017; Lucarelli & Brorström, 2013). Moreover, at large there is no clarity



regarding agreements about terminology within the domain (Anholt, 2005). The confusion is deteriorated even more by interchangeable usage of terms and concepts in the literature (Oguztimur & Akturan, 2016). As a result, often place branding is perceived as place selling, focusing fully on promotional features of branding (Zenker & Jacobsen, 2015).

There are multitude of opinions how place brand can be defined and what aspects of it should be emphasized. As an example, a 'brand' is often understood as a "name, term, design, symbol, or any other feature that identifies one seller's good or service as distinct from those of other sellers" (American Marketing Association as cited in Zenker & Jacobsen, 2015, p. 2). However, the stated quote was highly criticized for being unsuitable for such complex concept as places. Meanwhile others claimed that a brand is "nothing more and nothing less than the good name of something that's on offer to the public" (Anholt & Hildreth, 2005, p. 164).

Notwithstanding, researchers concur that in general a place brand can be defined "as a network of associations" (Zenker & Braun, 2017, p. 273) (Braun, Kavaratzis, & Zenker, 2013, p. 19) or "as a set of associations in the mind of place consumers" (Zenker & Erfgen, 2014, p. 226). It is important to emphasize that researchers (e.g. Zenker & Erfgen, 2014; Zenker & Jacobsen, 2015) acknowledge the significance of 'place consumers' that consist from visitors, businesses, as well as residents and workers. The last group of place consumers is of particular interest for the current thesis. Therefore, considering that in the scope of this studies place branding is going to be examined as the social construct and through the lens of place consumers, namely locals, it was decided to identify the concept of place branding as:

*[...] a network of associations in the consumers' mind based on the visual, verbal, and behavioural expression of a place, which is embodied through the aims, communication, values, and the general culture of the place's stakeholders and the overall place design (Braun & Zenker, 2010, p. 5).*

### 2.1.2. The Origins of Place Branding

The notion of place branding has developed gradually over the last 40 years (Ma et al., 2019). In the process of the concepts' evolvement, such sub-sets as "regional branding, city branding, and to a less extent, town branding developed, each focusing on a different spatial scale" (Ma et al., p. 1). Meantime, place branding originates in the concepts of place promotion and place marketing (Ma et al., 2019; Almeyda-Ibáñez & George, 2017). The following image displays the chronological timeline of place branding evolution and critical factors that have impelled changes:

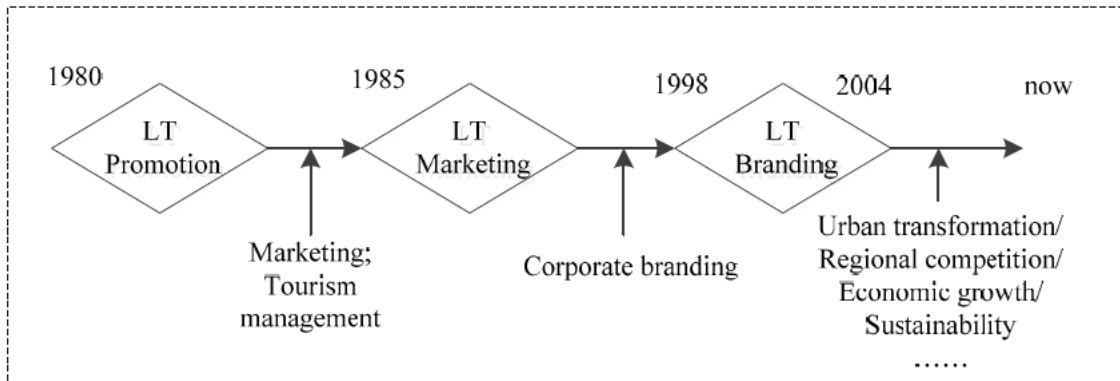


Figure 1: The evolution of place branding and its key factors (adapted from Ma et al., 2019, p.11)

To clarify, the abbreviation ‘LT’ in the figure stands for ‘location-type’ that, depending on the context, might imply a place/destination/city/urban (Ma et al., 2019). After carefully scrutinizing the subject, Ma and her colleagues (2019) revealed that formerly place branding literature was exclusively aimed at examining place promotion. Back then, place promotion was understood as a concept for advertising locations as attractive tourism destinations. Therefore, the concept of place promotion was mainly researched within the tourism context and examined how to “attract different visitor segments to a city via pragmatic tactics, such as advertising activities or urban image design” (Ma et al., 2019, p. 11). Thus, place promotion was targeted at beautifying the place/city for desired visitors, rather than its actual development (Ma et al., 2019).

With the steady increase of urbanization and globalization, the necessity to differentiate a place and obtain competitive advantages led to the transition of the place promotion concept to place marketing concept (Ma et al., 2019; Van den Berg & Braun, 1999). The appearance of this transition was also corroborated by the newly emerged field, like business management, that had a concern in implementing marketing instruments on cities (Ma et al., 2019). In comparison with the former concept, place marketing emphasizes “the application of a coherent, visible, attractive and unique set of marketing strategies and tactics designed on make cities more attractive” (Ma et al., 2019, p. 12), what by-turn urged on the urban development (Ma et al., 2019). Back then, O’Leary and Iredale (1976) identified place marketing in the same vein by stating that the current concept is “designed to create favourable dispositions and behaviour toward geographic locations” (O’Leary & Iredale, 1976, p. 156).

By revising the literature, Zenker and Braun (2017) indicated that at that time researchers were interested in place marketing for its promotional features, ability to reconstruct a place’s (city) image, attract new investors, as well as urge urban regenerations and economic reconstructions on. Nowadays, place

marketing is also understood as an umbrella term that encompasses such branches as location marketing and metropolitan marketing, as well as city marketing and destination marketing (Zenker & Braun, 2017; Ma et al., 2019; Braun, 2012).

The rapid economic and urban development, as well as the usage of corporate knowledge in application to human geography, contributed to the last transition - from the concept of place marketing to place branding (Ma et al., 2019). Comparing with the preceding concepts, place branding tends to cover inner aspects of a place and create long-term changes, as well as “garner positive associations in the place consumer’s mind” (Zenker & Braun, 2017, p. 272). Place branding is not just about ‘selling a place’ and allocating resources, but rather about influencing “the long-term reputation” (Ma et al., 2019, p. 12), paying attention to the “attitudes within (city) organizations and target groups” (Ma et al., 2019, p. 12), and aligning “cities’ visions, missions, and strategies using a more systematic perspective” (Ma et al., 2019, p. 12). Speaking about developed branches of place branding, city branding and destination branding can be mentioned (Oguztimur & Akturan, 2016; Ma et al., 2019).

### 2.1.3. The link between corporate branding and place branding

The following chapter is stimulating an interest in the mentioned application of corporate branding and techniques within place branding, as in the following chapters the aspects of corporate branding will periodically arise. As can be seen from Fig.1 (see above), corporate branding can be seen as a factor that triggered the transition to and formation of the concept of place branding. With the occurred shift, it became the widespread practice among urban planners to apply concepts of products and corporate branding to places, namely cities (Kavaratzis, 2009). Despite the criticism, researchers assert that there are undoubtable similarities between corporate and place branding (Kavaratzis, 2009). Therefore, taking into account that corporate branding exists longer and is better theorized, it is assumed that the important lessons can be extracted from the latter and applied to place branding (Kavaratzis, 2009). Drawing parallels between corporate branding and place branding, researcher stress out common features such as:

- multidisciplinary origins;
- involvement of various stakeholders;
- both concepts deal with complexity and impalpability;
- both require a long-term development and time-management;
- involve social responsibility, as well as
- deal with numerous identities (Kavaratzis, 2009).

Besides, researchers agree that both concepts are dynamic and include the interplay between various essential aspects, as culture, image and vision/identity of a company/place (Kavaratzis, 2009; Kavaratzis & Hatch, 2013; Hatch & Schultz, 2002). Moreover, the central element for both concepts is multiple stakeholders (Kavaratzis, 2009).

In spite of numerous commonalities and similarities, several researches emphasize the need to be careful in applying corporate branding to places (Kavaratzis & Ashworth, 2006; Andersson, 2014). By employing corporate branding, there is a need to treat a place “as the whole entity of the products, in order to achieve consistency of the message sent” (Kavaratzis, 2009, p. 30), what by-turn in more challenging in comparison with corporations. In the same vein, Andersson (2014) stated that the creation of conceptual frameworks for place branding adopting concepts from corporate branding leads to oversimplification of a place’s complexity. The latter statement coincides with the opinion of Kavaratzis and Ashworth that “the adoption and projection of a single clear identity, ethos and image by cities is deemed more difficult [...], if desirable at all” (Kavaratzis, 2009, p. 29).

#### 2.1.4. The gains of place branding and its critique

Place branding is a quickly evolving practice that takes a pivotal role in a present-day place management agenda (Ashworth et al., 2014). Place branding is usually perceived as “the general phenomenon of marketing, branding, promoting and regeneration of a particular city, region and/or location [...]” (Lucarelli & Brorström, 2013, p. 65).

Ashworth and his colleagues (2014) stressed out five reasons why place branding is essential. The first one has to do with its ability to single out a location/city/region on the oversaturated market, and add competitive advantages to a place “in the increasingly intense arena of *interplace competition*” (Ashworth et al., 2014, p. 4). The authors highlight that the mentioned benefit is the most common reasons for the practice’s implementation. It is assumed that the successful place brand is able to help with strengthening a place’s position on the market, as well as compete “for limited, hypermobile financial, human or cultural resources” (Ashworth et al., 2014, p. 4). The stated reason of the place branding utilization coincides with the finding of Hulberg (2006) in relation to corporate branding, which explains the increased interest to the latter concept due to its ability to differentiate an organization.

The next reason of the practice’s importance consists in its ability to guide the officials for place development strategically. Authors claim that a place brand might serve as a beacon by picturing the desired future for a place. Therefore, by aiming at an ideal scenario, the needed developments and

implementations will be carried out. Continuing, the authors stated that a place brand has the potential to provide “a basis for stakeholder cooperation” (Ashworth et al., 2014, p. 4), meaning that a place includes various stakeholders and allows them to co-create mutual aims and co-operate for reaching them.

A fourth reason for the practice’s usage consists in its ability to provide “solutions to practical/functional place-related problems” (Ashworth et al., 2014, p. 4), meaning that a place creates a needed context in which particular issues might be solved. Finally yet importantly, it is argued that a place brand might “maximise positive place experience” (Ashworth et al., 2014, p. 4). By shaping place users’ expectations, a place brand has the power to influence their experience. By-turn, by meeting the expectations and providing promised experience, there is a possibility to increase the place users’ satisfaction.

Nevertheless, despite all positive and beneficial attributes that place branding can potentially give, there is a multifaceted critique of the concept. Being in popular demand, the numerous “best practice” concepts in relation to place branding were created and broadcasted among local governments (Andersson, 2014). In turn, this produces a “paradox of similarity,” as places are utilizing identical strategies for the development (Andersson, 2014). As it was already mentioned above, it is argued that the adoption of corporate branding towards place branding tends to oversimplify places or cities. Adding to that, it is asserted that “best practice” concepts favor disregard for the complexity of places and the role of local authorities (Andersson, 2014). Also, besides the gap in theoretical and conceptual frameworks, there is a lack of empirical evidence regarding the effectiveness of place branding in toto (Andersson, 2014). “This is in contrast to the increasing evidence in the press that branding, at least as a concept, is increasingly being applied to locations” (Hankinson, 2001, p. 129).

#### 2.1.5. The sub-field of place branding - city branding

As it was mentioned before, city branding is considered as a subset of place branding, and was evolving along with the place branding concept, rooting in place marketing literature (Oguztimur & Akturan, 2016). During the past decades, place branding has been fertilizing urban studies (and vice versa); thus, place branding is highly applicable to cities (Insch & Stuart, 2015). Besides, taking into account that the current study can be perceived as a case of the city of Riga, it was decided to include the current chapter for better disclosure of the topic.

Nowadays, city branding has gathered its remarkable momentum among city authorities (Kasapi & Cela, 2017). In general, urban planners one and all are trying to place cities as brands, in order to promote and

differentiate themselves for desired target groups, as well as for social and economic benefits (Kavaratzis & Ashworth, 2005). The mentioned objectives can be traced back to place branding, as well as corporate branding. However, similar to place branding, it is argued that cities possess more complex and multilayered nature than organizations (Kasapi & Cela, 2017). Therefore, utilizing corporate branding in relation to cities, “[...] there is a need to adapt [...] models to the specific requirements of places, and cities specifically” (Kasapi & Cela, 2017, p. 136) .

Speaking about the definition of city branding, consensus has not been achieved yet (Kasapi & Cela, 2017). Alike place branding, city branding is seen as a complex and multidimensional phenomenon with numerous stakeholders in its core (Merrilees et al., 2009; Kasapi & Cela, 2017). Therefore, depending on the chosen perspective and the angle of conceptualization, city branding can be understood in different ways. Nevertheless, cities are initially tinged with economic qualities, as a city is “[...] a space in which trade and commerce dominate agricultural activities” (Oguztimur & Akturan, 2016, p. 357). Meanwhile, Merrilees and his colleagues claimed that city branding “[...] emphasizes the marketing and branding of cities to the residents (and potential residents) as a place to live and to businesses as a place to invest” (Merrilees et al., 2009, p. 362). The latter citation is valuable for the current thesis due to its focus on a place’s insiders. Concluding, Vallaster and her colleagues stressed out that a city brand is “[...] formed through a network of stakeholders and its management requires a collective approach involving the public and private sector” (Vallaster et al., 2018, p. 53). Hereon the topic of a place’s insiders, namely locals, are going to be discussed.

## 2.2. Locals in place branding

As it was already mentioned above, places are complex and heterogeneous by their nature, and these features are more intensified by the involvement of multiple stakeholders that carry on different interests and opinions (Insch & Stuart, Understanding resident city brand disengagement, 2015). In a nutshell, Kotler and his colleagues (1993) identified three main segments of place consumers, including:

- businesses and industries;
- a place’s visitors, and
- a place’s residents and workers.

The latter segment is of particular interest within the scope of the current studies, namely locals and residents of the city of Riga.

Before moving further, it is essential to account for the meaning of the term 'local' in this studies, and the reason why it was preferred to the term 'resident' in the research question. As Pelach (2018) emphasized in his work, "(l)ocals are residents and actors in the community" (Pelach, 2018, p. 8); however, the term 'local' is broader than the definition of a resident, as it is not so limited to the territory. While residents are only understood as "[...] those people dwelling in the immediate vicinity of the (place) [...]" (Pelach, 2018, p. 8), locals can belong to other communities. In the current case of Riga, locals include commuters; students and pupils that live outside the city but study in Riga; departed residents, who grew up and lived in Riga but moved to other places for studying or living, but still perceive themselves as locals; as well as overall residents of the city. Still, both terms are used throughout the work; however, they are not used interchangeably.

### 2.2.1. Role of locals in place branding and their importance

There are numerous theorized advantages of locals' engagement in the place branding processes (Insch & Stuart, 2015). Notwithstanding, it is still more common for the officials to utilize the top-down approach for place branding, what by-turn leads to the neglect of the crucial role of a place's residents and locals (Insch & Stuart, 2015; Eshuis et al., 2014).

Several researchers claim that it is essential to perceive locals of a place as co-creators of a place brand and engage them in the creating processes of a brand, due to valuable benefits that they can add to (Insch & Stuart, 2015; Jørgensen, 2015; Zenker & Erfgen, 2014; Insch & Florek, 2008). There are evidences that engaged residents are able to fill a place's image with emotional aspects (Jørgensen, 2015); reduce and minimize the established negative image of a place (Zenker & Erfgen, 2014), as well as act as brand ambassadors, and transmit positive information about a place (Braun et al., 2013). The latter statement is of a particular importance, considering that many places are lacking funding when it comes to branding (and marketing in general) (Stubbs & Warnaby, 2014). Therefore, in that case, locals and residents of a place can be perceived as carriers of a brand (Stubbs & Warnaby, 2014).

It is also claimed that involved residents are tend to display more pro-active and positive behavior (Insch & Florek, 2008). By-turn, Braun and his colleagues (2013, p. 21) asserted that the engagement of locals in the place branding creation "[...] will lead to increased ownership of the brand and therefore more sense of responsibility for its development, management and external reputation".

Not the least of the finding, which was discussed by Zenker and Seigis (2012) in their research, consists in the ability to increase locals' trust toward the officials and authorities by involving them in the creation

processes of place branding. In addition, it was found out that the type of participation in a brand’s co-creation process does not play a crucial role for people (Zenker & Seigis, 2012). Meanwhile, Eshuis and Edwards (2012) claim that overall branding has power to positively affect the urban democracy only if “[...] it is embedded in a participatory process through which citizens’ emotions, feelings and stylistic preferences are included in both the brand and concrete urban policies, and if citizens are seen as co-owners of the brand” (Eshuis & Edwards, 2012, lpp. 16). Contradictory, in case of the locals’ neglect and exclusion from the branding processes, there might occur antagonism among the society, in case if branding activities present a place inappropriately or untrustworthy according to locals’ opinions (Stubbs & Warnaby, 2014).

### 2.2.2. Ethnic heterogeneity of Riga’s locals

Considering that the author of the current studies grew up in Riga and can be considered as an insider, it felt right to include the following description of Riga’s locals for the purpose of being critical and realistic.

The need to describe the residents and locals of Riga arises from its considerable heterogeneity concerning ethnic identity. Due to the historical events, there is a significant minority of Russian-speakers living in Riga, which makes up approximately 45% of the total number of residents (The City Development Department, 2014). The following table displays the ethnic composition of the city’s population:

<b>Ethnic group</b>	<b>Percent of the population</b>
Latvians	43%
Russians	39%
Byelorussians	4%
Ukrainians	4%
Poles	2%
Others	8%

*Figure 2: Ethnic composition of Riga's population (The City Development Department, Rīga Skaitļos, 2018)*

Therefore, it can be concluded that the society of Riga is composed of two different groups: ethnic Latvians and the Russian-speaking minority, which includes such ethnic groups as Russians, Byelorussians, Ukrainians, and presumably Poles.

It is crucial to keep in mind that associations of a place are influenced by “[...] the aims, communication, values, behavior, and the general culture of the place’s stakeholders [...]” (Braun et al., 2013, p. 19). Dropping all political disagreements and taking into account only social and cultural aspects, it is undoubtedly that both examined groups carry on essentially different languages, traditions, cultures, historical backgrounds, and, therefore, mindsets.



There was no established goal to examine differences between the two groups regarding how they sense and perceive the city. Within the scope of this thesis, the research was aimed at finding out the points of contact, namely common aspects and features of the place that are shared between both groups. However, it is important to admit that there might be distinctions of opinions due to the mentioned above differences. In author's opinion, it is vital to approach this uniqueness of Riga, namely its considerable ethnic heterogeneity, wisely. Taking into account that "a community's history, heritage and culture are important in brand projections" (Merrilees et al., 2009, p. 363), it is crucial to develop the trustworthy Riga's place brand, which could be supported by both communities.

### 2.3. Place and its Identity

After scrutinizing the literature on place branding, it became clear that the starting point of a successful place brand has to be rooted in the place's identities, which in-turn are hold by the place's locals and residents. Therefore, the concept of place branding is narrowed down to one of its components that goes very well with the established research question, namely the concept of place identity. The following chapter introduces the notion of place identity, while in the conceptual framework (see chpt. 3) more theorized knowledge is presented.

Researchers described the notions of identity and place identity as 'elusive' (Erickson & Roberts, 1997) and 'moot' (Marzano, 2015). Erickson and Roberts (1997) described the concept of identity as "the qualities which make an individual, or place, capable of being specified or singled out, which make it unique and separate" (Erickson & Roberts, 1997, p. 36). At the same time, researchers accurately emphasized that identity in its nature can also allude to 'perfect sameness,' meaning that subjects or objects are reaching for being identical (Erickson & Roberts, 1997). Despite that the concept of identity can be understood "as a range between these two extremes" (Erickson & Roberts, 1997, p. 36), within the scientific field, the concepts of place and city branding are most frequently investigated in the former meaning of the word, namely 'to mark out' (Erickson & Roberts, 1997). The following quotation of Kavaratzis and Ashworth supporting the latter statement regarding identity's notion within place and city branding:

*All branding tries to endow a product with a specific and more distinctive identity, and that is, in essence, what most city marketing seeks to do for cities. A place needs to be differentiated through a unique brand identity if it wants to be, first, recognized as existing, secondly, perceived in the minds of place customers as possessing qualities superior to those of competitors and, thirdly,*

*consumed in a manner commensurate with the objectives of the place* (Kavaratzis & Ashworth, 2005, p. 189).

### 2.3.1. Towards the understanding of place identity

To start with, there is no generally accepted definition of place identity due to the concept's intricacy and impalpability; therefore, the current subject remains atheoretical and unconceptualized in relation to place branding (Kavaratzis & Hatch, 2013). Nevertheless, retracing the literature, the collective agreement was found, namely that "place identities are constructed through historical, political, religious and cultural discourses; through local knowledge, and influenced by power struggles" (Govers & Go, 2009, p. 17). The latter quotation displays that place identity is based on intrinsic, fundamental aspects, as well as is an interactive phenomenon. However, within the academic field, researchers have apparent differences of opinions on the nature of place identity: (1) static or (2) dynamic.

#### ***Place Identity as a Static Phenomenon***

Due to the lack of a well-defined link between place branding and place identity, the researchers have not been able to join the mentioned concepts yet (Kavaratzis & Hatch, 2013). As a result, the static viewpoint on place identity occurred and can be still considered as a prevalent approach within the academic field in relation to place branding (Kavaratzis & Hatch, 2013). The distinctive feature of the current point of view consists in the supposition that "identities are internal to the place and disconnected from outsiders" (Kavaratzis & Hatch, 2013, p. 74), meaning that identity is about "how we see ourselves" (Kavaratzis & Hatch, 2013, p. 74).

The static viewpoint on place identity simplifies the phenomenon, by supporting the assumption that "[...] it is practice or art of distilling the essence of the place" (Mayes, 2008, p. 125) for the purpose of its further projection (Mayes, 2008). The latter citation also displays place identity as a fixed and pre-existing phenomenon, that can be extracted and broken down into manageable elements for its better communication (Kavaratzis & Hatch, 2013). Thus, the static approach adds to capitalization and marketization of place identity, what by-turn was criticized (Kotler et al., 1993; Kavaratzis & Hatch, 2013). Besides, the utilization of the static approach restricts the nature of branding itself, as it limits the latter concept to "a communication-promotional tool with emphasis on visual strategies that might convey to others the place's identity" (Kavaratzis & Hatch, 2013, p. 74).

### ***Place Identity as a Dynamic Phenomenon***

Opposite to the discussed static approach, the dynamic approach examines place identity inseparably from place branding, as well as perceives it as a process rather than a fixed phenomenon (Kavaratzis & Hatch, 2013). According to researchers, who support the dynamic nature of place identity, it is incorrect to study the concepts of place branding and place identity separately, due to the assumption that place branding initially involves “the link between identity, experience and image” (Govers & Go, 2009, p. 23). Besides, Kavaratzis and Hatch (2013) refute the prevailing opinion regarding the separation from external audiences within the concept of place identity, concluding that the latter “is neither internal nor external but the dialectic process between the internal and the external” (Kavaratzis & Hatch, 2013, p. 78). In the same vein, Kalandides (2011) with Kerr and Oliver (2015) advocated fluidity of place identity, as well as its liability to both internal and external sources. Therefore, researchers emphasized the importance of continuous monitoring of place identities.

Besides, contradicting the static approach, Kerr and Oliver (2015) underlined that places hold multiple place identities, meaning that there is no single place identity to distil. Moreover, identities (or identity-set) may consist of laudatory and unpleasant identities, because “(t)he uniqueness and distinctiveness of a place is subjective to those who live there and is relative to their experiences (Kerr & Oliver, 2015, p. 67)”. Extending the latter citation, researchers clearly identified in their work that residents are the identity holders, who accurately understand “who (or what) we are as a place” (Kerr & Oliver, 2015, p. 66). That is why it is claimed that “if the brand is not based on identity, then the branding effort can only lead to a brand alien to the place, particularly to its internal audiences” (Kavaratzis & Hatch, 2013, p. 75). Thus, considering the all above mentioned, place identity is understood as the dynamic phenomenon within the current thesis.

#### **2.3.2. The example of identity ignorance: case of Riga**

Considering the above-mentioned facts, the importance of place identities in the creation of place branding cannot be overestimated, as well as the role of locals/residents, who are actually the identity-holders (Kerr & Oliver, 2015). Notwithstanding, the top-down approach for building a place brand is still prevailing, where the officials simply advertise desired aspects (Baxter et al., 2013; Insch & Stuart, 2015). However, as Coghlan and Castley emphasized, “(a)ctions by place managers inevitably create, transform and sometimes destroy place meanings and the individual and group identities of people associated with them” (Coghlan & Castley, 2013, p. 682). By-turn, the ignorance of locals and encroachment on their identities can lead to unpleasant consequences (Ločmele & Mousten, 2016; Vallaster et al., 2018). Thus,

the relevance of the exhaustive examination of locals' opinions and identities is presented in the following example that took place in Riga.

Riga was the European Capital of Culture in 2014, and for that purpose, the city's sign was re-semiotized in order to make it more internationally visible and recognizable (Ločmele & Mousten, 2016). For reaching that, the Riga City Council replaced a diacritic mark above the letter 'I' (instead of 'Ī') with a heart in blue and white colors that supposed to resonate with the city's flag (see the images below) (Ločmele & Mousten, 2016). Unfortunately, the residents found the new sign to bear a great resemblance to the Russian flag (Ločmele & Mousten, 2016). Moreover, some citizens demonstrated their political views by editing a yellow color to the heart, thus recreating the Ukrainian flag, and thereby "mirroring Ukrainian events in the summer of 2014, and the protests against the Russian invasion into Ukraine" (Ločmele & Mousten, 2016, p. 211).

Because the changes were aimed only at external audiences, residents backfired the attempt to change the sign due to the neglect of their identities. By scrutinizing the current case, Ločmele and Mousten identified that people reacted negatively, because of "the violation of copyright and language norms" (Ločmele & Mousten, 2016, p. 211). In addition, the activist described the created sign as naïve, superficial, and primitive, which did not match with the city of Riga (Ločmele & Mousten, 2016).

However, the researcher pointed out the essence of the conflict, which origins in "[...] the historical development of Latvia as an independent state and with Riga as its capital, and in turn Latvia's standing identity as an independent nation" (Ločmele & Mousten, 2016, p. 213). Thus, in replacing a diacritic mark, people saw the attempt against the Latvian language, their independence, and history, as well as local heritage and identity. As a result, citizens voiced their resentment with the created place brand. In turn, the latter reaction of locals resonates with the place branding literature (Insch & Florek, 2008; Insch & Stuart, 2015).



Figure 3: The original sign of Riga (LETA, 2014)



Figure 4: The re-semiotized sign of Riga (LETA, 2014)

## 2.4. The current state of Riga's place branding

The current studies examine the case of the city of Riga. Therefore, the city's branding situation is investigated in order to gain the better understating of the current state of affairs for the further analysis. But first the historical background of the city is briefly covered, as it explains *why* there is still no the properly developed place branding strategy.

### 2.4.1. The influences of historical events on Riga's place branding

As it was mentioned in the introductory chapter, Riga, a capital of Latvia, can be perceived as a relatively new city for the tourism market, due to the fact that Latvia gained its independence back from the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (hereafter the 'USSR') only in 1991 (Rozite & Klepers, 2011). Thus, Riga falls into the group of the re-emerging capitals, which involves cities of the post-Soviet area (Rozite & Klepers, 2011). The historical events have greatly influenced the development of Riga in relation to tourism, what can be seen even nowadays. As a part of the USSR, Riga still had economic significance and a strong image as the most westernized city of the USSR (Rozite & Klepers, 2011). Nevertheless, due to the strict control of tourism during the Soviet regime, local administrations were not involved in the marketing and planning processes of tourism (Worthington, 2003). Thus, for a long period of time and until the independence of Latvia, the place brand management of Riga was not considered as an essential and purposeful tool, meaning that there was no reason seen for "communicating the name and the identity, in order to build or manage the reputation" (Anholt, 2007, p. 4). As a result, the image of Riga has developed by itself without special control of anybody; however, nowadays it is used by brand managers of Riga (Rozite & Klepers, 2011). It is noteworthy, that the long-lasting oppressions "[...] has prevented the native population from expressing its identity in the city" (Rozite & Klepers, 2011, p. 62). Thus, it might be assumed that the current place brand management is not including real identity of a location that is held by residents.

### 2.4.2. The undertaken attempts of Riga's branding exploration

After restoring Latvian independence, there were several attempts undertaken for researching on national brand and identity of Latvia. At the call of Latvian University, in 2003, the researchers from Oxford University conducted a study for making a pilot brand identity for the country (Frasher et al., 2003). Next, in 2008, the Latvian University requested the help of the well-known policy advisor Simon Anholt for revealing the competitive identity of the country (Anholt, 2008). Interestingly, in the provided report, the researcher much focused on Riga, suggesting to brand Latvia through the capital, as "most of Latvia's land area was never going to be easy to 'brand' anyway" (Anholt, 2008, p. 6). Besides, Anholt (2008) suggested to utilize the aspects of Scandinavian imagery (adding 'Scandi-ness') in order to present and position Riga

as the 'New North Star'. Despite, according to Rozite and Klepers (2011) "it is not possible to view Riga as a clear symbol of national identity, because Latvian identity has always been linked with the countryside, whereas Riga has always been a cosmopolitan city with an international population" (Rozite & Klepers, 2011, p. 71). The latter citation coincides with today's state of affairs regarding ethnic heterogeneity of Riga's population (see chpt. 2.2.2.). The topic regarding the need to establish the national brand is still problem of today, and was discussed recently on the seminar (Magnetic Latvia, 2019). Even though that national branding is not a topic of the current studies, on the mentioned seminar it was acknowledged that branding should be treated as a bottom-up process and come from grassroots (Magnetic Latvia, 2019). The latter understating of branding correlates with its notion within the scope of this research. Unfortunately, returning to the topic of Riga, there were no results found regarding thoroughly conducted researches in relation to the city's place branding or marketing. In affirmation, Kotāne (2010) has highlighted that the city's marketing strategy was studied only as a part of the city's development programs.

#### 2.4.3. The current state of the city's place branding

Scrutinizing information of published articles and the Internet sources, it became clear that Riga is still in the process of forming its place branding. The latter can be explained by the observed inconsistency of the approaches towards Riga's place brand and how it is trying to be presented.

To start with, during the short time of Latvia's self-government from 1918 until 1940, the officials of Riga were aspiring to sophisticated influences of western cities, such as Paris (Kahn, 2000). Thus, in the 1930s the city of Riga got nicknames, namely 'little Paris' or 'Paris of the North' (Kahn, 2000). Despite the further oppression and inability to develop the brand during the USSR regime, the image of 'little Paris' is not forgot and still in use (Rozite & Klepers, 2011).

Next, back to 2002, the city of Riga tried to make itself known within the tourism market though the created brand "Inspiration Rīga", which was aimed at promoting the city as an international business and conferences destination (Kotāne, 2010; TV NET, 2002). Besides, the mentioned brand pursued a goal to present the city as attractive, dynamic, modern, and at the same time traditional (TV NET, 2002). However, a new destination marketing organization (Riga Tourism Development Bureau) was found in 2009, which subsequently has replaced the existing place brand with newly developed, namely 'LIVE RĪGA' that is in use to date (Rozite & Klepers, 2011; Kotāne, 2010). In turn, the brand 'LIVE RĪGA' levels at popularizing Riga as a great Nordic metropolis (Kotāne, 2010), as well as "establish Riga & Latvia as a perfect meeting and events destination in Northern Europe" (Meet Rīga, 2019). Nonetheless, Kotāne

(2010) stressed out that the crucial condition in building the successful place brand - not to change the brand. Besides, as it was mentioned in the introductory chapter, the citation above shows the already established view that place managers of Riga are not able to decide what they what to popularize – the country or the city (Kotāne, 2010). The author of the current thesis sees the direct link of this indecision to the proposed ideas of Anholt (2008) regarding branding Latvia through Riga. However, it is assumed, there was no initiative to delude the authorities and persuade them to approach both the city and the country equally. There is a need to differentiate places in order to avoid sending contradictory messages. For example, “[...] in 2011 the ‘LIVE RĪGA’ brand was integrated into Latvia’s new overall tourism brand with the slogan ‘Best Enjoyed Slowly’” (Rozite & Klepers, 2011, p. 69). The latter brand was aimed at calling tourists to calm down their pace of life and enjoy detailed-oriented vacation (Luka, 2017). Later, it was acknowledged that the communicated messages of brands did not coincide, considering that the ‘LIVE RĪGA’ brand is focusing on business progression and youngsters’ attraction (Luka, 2017; CIFFT, 2019).

Continuing, it should be said that at a given time, the city of Riga does not have its logo and slogan. According to the literature, often the city authorities narrow down place branding to the design of a logo and tagline, thinking that “[...] they can change their identity by simply changing colour; a new logo, a new marketing campaign and perhaps new management” (Kavaratzis & Hatch, 2013, p. 74). Such vision limits place branding to a communication-promotional tool (Kavaratzis & Hatch, 2013). Nevertheless, it is admitted that logos and taglines can be seen as useful practical tools within place branding strategies, which are able to enhance the communication of the place brand (Kavaratzis & Ashworth, 2005; Baxter et al., 2013).

In 2015 there was an attempt to create the logo and tagline for the city of Riga with the help of an open competition (DELFI, 2015). The winning logo was used within the entire year of 2016 as a decorative design on the various city’s events (DELFI, 2015). The winner was chosen by a vote among residents (DELFI, 2015). The following logo and slogan received 1967 votes (in comparison with 4447 people who marked that they were not supporting any provided logo and slogan) (DELFI, 2015):



*Figure 5: The winning logo and tagline for the city of Riga (Rīgas dome, 2015)*

The tagline says “Riga – here people meet”. The conducted competition caused heated discussion among designers, managers and residents in the Internet in relation to adequacy of choosing the visual identity of the city though the competition (Nozare.Info, 2015; Cowles, 2015). Looking ahead, it should be stressed out that by the conducted survey for the current thesis among 418 locals, it turned out that 80% have never seen the logo, while 81% are not familiar with the tagline and 44% of them do not get the meaning of the slogan (see Appendix 2).

The examination of various publications also produced an impression that the city’s officials do not have a particular target group in mind. Thus, the desire to promote Riga as the meeting and event capital identifies that business travelers are in favor. However, as it was already mentioned, the Riga Tourism Development Bureau recently created the award-winning promotional videos, called “Insider’s Guide to Riga” that are aiming at promoting Riga for “city-break travelers in various age groups (from 18 – 65)” (CIFFT, 2019), as well as “be appealing to a younger crowd” (CIFFT, 2019).

The creation of the mentioned above promotional videos “Insider’s Guide to Riga”, and the claim that the burden of the ‘LIVE RĪGA’ brand’s activities add up to the philosophy “Good for the Riga’s locals – Good for tourists”, gives the impression that the officials are trying to implement the bottom-up approach of place branding, which is considered to be right within the scope of the current thesis (LIVE RĪGA, 2019). Unfortunately, after appealing to the Riga Tourism Development Bureau, it was found out that no researches were done for investigating on how actually insiders of Riga perceive their city. Therefore, the promotional videos are still based on managerial opinions and show the city through the officials’ lens.

Considering the all above mentioned, it can be said that Riga’s place branding is still in its infancy and the officials are more focused on the image-approach, as well as external audiences. However, it should be remembered that the “communicated image should reflect the place (brand) identity” (Braun et al., 2018,



p. 23). Looking from the positive perspective, it is a good chance to create a strong and trustworthy place brand. Additionally, Anholt (2008) stressed out that Riga possesses positive, but weak image. Nevertheless, it is easier to promote “a weakly positive image than a strongly negative one” (Anholt, 2008, p. 8). Concluding, the necessity to engage insiders to the processes of place brand creation is stressed out by Anholt (2007), who claimed that place strategies should be dug out of the place’s culture, history and its society, as

*[w]e are never dealing with a blank canvas, on which it is possible to paint at will: this is a canvas that’s already painted, which has been hanging in someone else’s home for generations, which they have grown rather attached to (Anholt, 2007, p. 75).*

### 3. Conceptual framework

The following chapters are narrowed down to the essence of the current studies, namely the usage of place identities within place branding. Thus, selecting the most needed theories and models, the conceptual framework was created. According to Adom and his colleagues the conceptual framework can be understood as “[...] a structure which the researcher believes can best explain the natural progression of the phenomenon to be studied” (Adom et al., 2018, p. 439). The conceptual framework involves important concepts, empirical evidences, as well as needed theories for investigating the studied subject. Basically, “(i)t is the researcher’s explanation of how the research problem would be explored” (Adom et al., 2018, p. 439).

#### 3.1. Place identity: a process-based and co-creative approach

From the reviewed literature, it can be tracked that a distinct trend within branding literature has developed, namely the idea of *participatory branding and marketing* (e.g. Kavaratzis & Hatch, 2013; Zenker & Beckmann, 2013; Kavaratzis, 2012). The participatory approach contradicts the prevailing understanding that “marketing is what marketers do to customers when they take what the company makes and represent it” (Ind & Bjerke, 2007, p. 86). Also, the participatory approach emphasizes the importance of internal audiences of a place, and perceive branding as a co-creative process (Kavaratzis & Hatch, 2013). By summing up the literature, researcher stated that “[...] brands are not formed through traditional communications but are co-created by a multitude of people who encounter and appropriate them” (Kavaratzis & Hatch, 2013, p. 72). The present thesis endorses and supports the participatory approach.

Moving on from this, it is argued that by establishing links to a place's identities, an extraordinary approach to place branding can be revealed (Kavaratzis & Hatch, 2013). It was discussed above (see chpt. 2.3.1.) that, within the context of the current studies, place identity is understood as a dynamic phenomenon. Therefore, internal audiences of a place are perceived as identity-holders, what by-turn resonates with the participatory approach. Another striking demonstration of the insiders' significance to place identity is based on the fact that place identity is understood "as a substructure of self-identity, consisting of cognitions about the physical world" (Kavaratzis & Hatch, 2013, p. 75).

In an effort to understand place branding and its interplay with place identity, the model of organizational identity was adapted (Hatch & Schultz, 2002; Kavaratzis & Hatch, 2013). Thus, Kavaratzis and Hatch presented the identity-based model in relation to place branding:

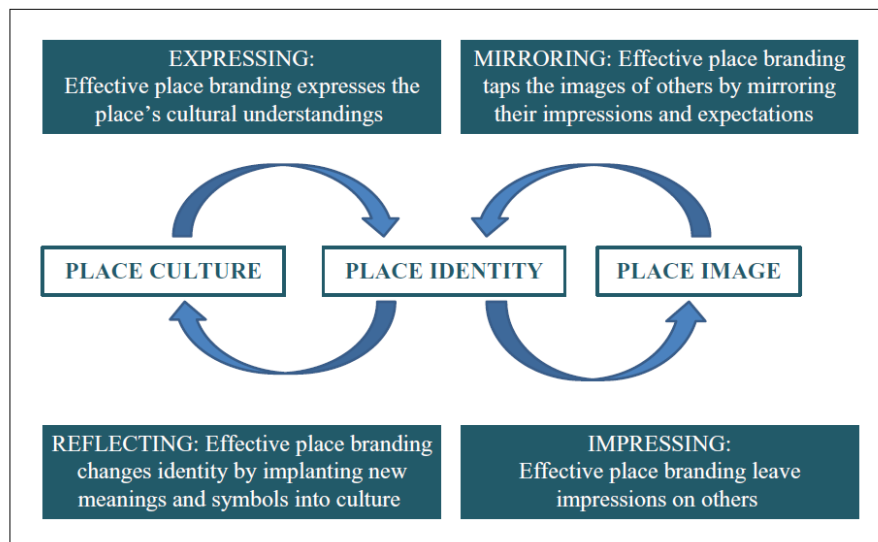


Figure 6: The identity-based approach in relation to place branding (adapted from Kavaratzis & Hatch, 2013, p. 80)

The presented model displays place identity as a dynamic process, and as a core element along with place image and place culture. Concisely, the showed continuous interaction of the three main elements disprove the prevailing thinking that place identity (and identity in general) is purely internal phenomenon. Hatch and Shultz explained that "culture is the context of internal definitions of identity, [meanwhile] image is the site of external definitions of identity" (Hatch and Schultz as cited in Kavaratzis and Hatch, 2013, p. 77) and the mutual interplay of these two elements could be defined as the process of identity. In addition, according to authors of the model, the three main elements are linked to each other through four sub-processes, namely: expressing, mirroring, impressing and reflecting.

By-turn, in order to adopt the model to place branding, Kavaratzis and Hatch perceived branding “as a facilitator of the identity process” (Kavaratzis & Hatch, 2013, p. 79), thus giving place branding a crucial role within all four sub-activities. In a nutshell, authors argue that through the process of *expressing*, place branding should give possibilities to locals *express* their cultural aspects, as culture “makes itself known through identity claims” (Hatch & Schultz, 2002, p. 991). The second process relates to *impressing* by which “the expressed identity leaves impressions on others” (Hatch & Schultz, 2002, p. 991). It is claimed that impressions should be assessed carefully concerning their essence, trustworthiness and relevance (Kavaratzis & Hatch, 2013). In relation to place branding, the roles of communication, the landscape and infrastructure of a place, fall into the sub-process of *impressing* (Kavaratzis & Hatch, 2013). Next, through the process of *mirroring*, “[...] changes in external images will be mirrored in the brand” (Kavaratzis & Hatch, 2013, p. 80). Meanwhile through the process of *reflecting*, any modifications in external images of identity are *reflected* in the overall identity process, and consequently altered “identity is embedded in cultural understanding” (Hatch & Schultz, 2002, p. 991; Kavaratzis & Hatch, 2013). Importantly, all four sub-processes are happening simultaneously and in a chaotic manner.

Prior to further discussion of place identities and the implemented identity-driven place brand model, it should be mentioned that the current studies are focusing exclusively on the internal audiences of Riga. The author acknowledges the inseparability of sub-processes and impossibility to fragment the model for examination. Notwithstanding, the object of the current thesis is to explore Riga’s place identities for the further creation of the trustworthy place brand. Therefore, following the terminology of Kavaratzis and Hatch (2013), “[...] the objectives here is to *reflect* and *express* place identities in communications” (Kerr & Oliver, 2015, p. 69).

### 3.2. Towards a place brand orientation approach

The research of Baxter and her colleagues (2013) was taken as a basis for the conceptual framework as it provides practical guidelines, which could be implemented for the case of Riga. Considering the all above mentioned theories regarding place identity, it became obvious that the notion of identity is understood as a knotty cognitive construct, fluid and multilayered in its nature. Besides, a place involves multiple identities, what by-turn complicates a place brand communication. The latter state of affairs complicates matters even more, taking into account that the essence of “[...] place branding strategies is *the communication* of a competitive place identity, that is, the features or characteristics of a place which are unique and may provide a competitive advantage” (Anholt as cited in Baxter et al., 2013, p. 1082).

Therefore, researchers clearly identify the existing difference between *place identity* and *place brand identity*, explaining that “[...] the former being fluid and pluralistic, the latter being more rigid and unitary” (Baxter et al., 2013, p. 1082). The latter concept involves the notion of *a brand*, which is composed of “[...] the name, logos, symbols, spokespeople, jingles and packaging” (Baxter et al., 2013, p. 1082). Researchers argue that the combination of all mentioned elements create the *brand identity*, which transmits “how you aspire to be perceived” (Keller, 2008, p. 671). Putting it differently, place brand identity can be selected, designed and after that communicated (Kerr & Oliver, 2015). However, considering the already mentioned assumptions that place branding is not going to succeed unless it is based on place identities, researchers tried to create a link between numerous identities of a location and a singular place brand through place brand orientation (Baxter et al., 2013).

In their research, Baxter and her colleagues (2013) used the definition of Urde to explain that brand orientation can be understood as “an approach in which the processes of the organisation revolve around the creation, development, and protection of brand identity in an ongoing interaction with target customers with the aim of achieving lasting competitive advantages in the form of brands” (Urde, 1999, pp. 117-118). However, brand orientation has not been broadly investigated in relation to places. Notwithstanding, the researchers pointed out that the current strategic approach is also identity-driven and gives considerations to internal stakeholders (Baxter et al., 2013). Thus, it was highlighted that any place brand should be based on collection of a place’s features or identities. This collection of characteristics is named as *the identity-set*. Importantly, researchers argued that the first step in building the successful place brand strategy consists in revealing the place’s identity-set first, which is held by the place’s internal audiences. Consistent with clarifications provided above, the following model was presented:

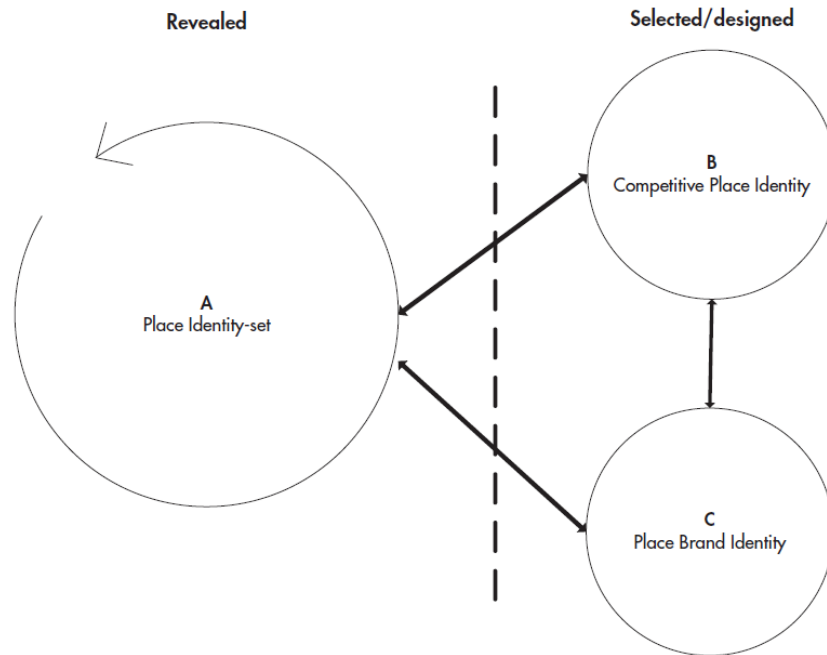


Figure 7: The interplay between the place identity-set, the competitive place identity, and the place brand identity (adapted from Baxter et al., 2013, p. 1085)

By the created model, Baxter and her colleagues (2013) argued that primarily the identity-set of a place (A) should be examined. The investigation on the identity-set might uncover similarities and differences within identities of a place. As it was already mentioned (see chpt. 2.3.1.), the identity-set might involve both laudatory and unpleasant identities. Moreover, the examination of the identity-set might expose distinctions or matches between actual place identities and the established competitive place identity (B), as well as the place brand identity (C). In turn, the last two concepts are used as the strategic tools, and designed by the officials. Baxter and her colleagues explained the competitive place identity (B) as “[...] the statement of identity often developed and delivered by senior management in corporate planning documents [...]” (Baxter et al., 2013, p. 1084), meanwhile the place brand identity (C) is “[...] used in formal communications for both internal and external place markets” (Baxter et al., 2013, p. 1084).

The researchers notified that place branding and marketing strategies stand little chance of success “[...] if the competitive place identity and the place brand identity are unknowingly far removed from the identities held by residents” (Baxter et al., 2013, p. 1085). However, researchers emphasized that there is a possibility to design the aspirational place brand strategy, what in-turn will lead to disagreements between place identities (A) and both the competitive place identity (B) and the place brand identity (C). In that case, the authorities and city managers should be aware of potential issues, which could be caused by the created identity-place brand gap.

Concluding, it should be stressed out that the primary object of the current thesis is to examine the identity-set (A) of Riga, which afterwards can help to design the competitive and reliable place brand identity for its further usage in place branding strategies.

## 4. Methodology

The current section defines philosophical stance and study process that have been utilized for the knowledge creation in order to answer the established research question: “How Riga’s locals perceive and see their city?”. The chosen research paradigm shapes the researcher’s worldview, and guides how to view the reality, as “[e]ach paradigm is accompanied with attendant methodologies (assumptions about knowledge, values, reality and logic [...])” (McGregor & Murnane, 2010, p. 419). In the same vein, Guba and Lincoln (1994) stressed out that the research paradigm explains *what*, *how* and *why* the study is conducted.

Within the context of the present research, the paradigm of constructivist approach was adopted as guiding philosophy. The current choice was made due to the need to understand people’s views and points of perception about the place for answering the research question. Therefore, relying on Guba’s and Lincoln’s (1994) analysis, it can be stated that ontology of the current research belongs to relativist approach, which means that epistemology takes subjectivist position. Consequently, methodology involves the hermeneutical aspects.

### 4.1. Philosophy of science

Researchers give preference to the constructivist approach when dealing with qualitative studies, where there is a need to identify multiple and diverse views and meanings (Creswell, 2014). The main ideas of the current approach is that “[...] the mental world – or the experienced reality – is actively constructed or “brought forward,” and that the observer plays a major role in any theory” (Riegler, 2011, p. 237). Therefore, a researcher, who sticks to the paradigm of constructivist approach, should heavily rely on the participants’ viewpoints of the examined situation (Creswell, 2014). Further, relying on Guba’s (1990), and Guba’s and Lincoln’s (1994) analysis, the ontological, epistemological and methodological questions are discussed, referencing to the current studies.

Ontology is trying to cognize the nature of reality, questioning “how things really are” (Guba & Lincoln, 1994, p. 108) and “(w)hat is there that can be known” (Lincoln & Guba, 2013, p. 37). Guba and Lincoln (2013) emphasized that, within the constructivist paradigm, any entity does not ‘really’ exist, as everything is constructed in humans’ mind. Thus, social reality depends on the involved individuals and the context,

in which they interact. By changing the individual, the reality is going to be altered as well. The same applies to the context, meaning that by changing the context there will be a change in the reality. Therefore, constructivists admit that there is no universal truth, as there are multiple realities existing in people's mind (Guba, 1990). Consequently, researchers concur that a position of relativism, which is perceived as "the basic ontological presupposition of constructivism" (Lincoln & Guba, 2013, p. 39) should be taken in order to make a research. In case of the present study, it can be seen that participants of the focus groups and the questionnaire have their own perceptions of the city's image, vivid features, problems, and its identity.

Epistemologically, researchers, who stick to the paradigm of constructivist approaches, select a subjectivist position (Guba, 1990) or transactional subjectivist position (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). Epistemology tends to understand "the nature of the relationship between the knower and the knowable" (Lincoln & Guba, 2013, p. 37). By accepting the above-described ontological stance, this relationship between the researcher and the investigated object is going to be depended on the individual's specifics, the context and the researcher's indicators (Lincoln & Guba, 2013). Importantly, by applying the subjectivist approach, the knowledge or "findings" are *literally created* during the transaction between the investigator and the object of investigation (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). Thus, the created knowledge/ 'truth' /findings are highly subjective. Besides, the created knowledge "exists only in the time/space framework in which it is generated" (Lincoln & Guba, 2013, p. 40). Nevertheless, despite that, objectivity is impossible in a constructive research, there is still a need to approach findings objectively in order to find commonalities (Guba, 1990; Gray, 2014). Therefore, regarding the current studies, the transcribed interview, the focus groups' transcripts, as well as open questions from the conducted questionnaire were examined multiple times for distilling the patterns among participants.

Lastly, the methodology tends to understand "how does one go about acquiring knowledge?" (Lincoln & Guba, 2013, p. 37). Importantly, it should be done in concordance with the adopted ontological and epistemological stances. Thus, within the context of the present thesis, a hermeneutic approach is utilized, which is considered as "[...] the basic methodological presupposition of constructivism" (Lincoln & Guba, 2013, p. 40). A hermeneutic approach (and more precisely a hermeneutic spiral) displays the process of knowledge formation for the answering the established research question, whereby the author was attempting to understand "the whole through grasping its parts, and comprehending the meaning of the parts divining the whole" (Crotty, 1998, p. 92). Basically, it means that the author of the study was

frequently and cyclically moving back and forth between the parts of investigated subject for getting better understanding of the phenomenon.

## 5. Methods

Guba and Lincoln (1994) clearly asserted that the described above methodological question cannot be narrowed down solely to a question of methods. Nevertheless, within the academy the terms ‘methodology’ and ‘methods’ are often used interchangeably, what by-turn is completely wrong (McGregor & Murnane, 2010). While the former belongs to philosophy, the latter can be understood as “[...] the techniques and procedures followed to conduct research” (McGregor & Murnane, 2010, p. 420). Therefore, the next chapters present the techniques, which were utilized within the present study for the purpose of answering the research question.

### 5.1. Research design

In order to investigate on the established research problem, the qualitative method was utilized, primarily because the author was interested in “[...] people’s belief, experience and meaning systems from the perspective of the people” (Brink, 1993, p. 35). Besides, the research was heavily relied on the textual data, which is a specific character of the qualitative research (Creswell, 2014). Despite that, the questionnaire was included for data gathering, which is seen as a quantitative technique, the broad survey was conducted first for receiving general results, which afterward were explained in detail by qualitative techniques such as an interview and focus groups. In the same vein, Adams and Cox (2008) combined the questionnaire and interviews, where firstly the answers from the open-ended questions were used for identifying themes, and subsequently the follow-on interviews exposed the essence of the identified themes. Moreover, the inductive approach was applied for answering the research question, where the researcher produces the meaning from the collected data (Creswell, 2014). The following figure displays the knowledge construction processes of the current thesis for answering the research problem:



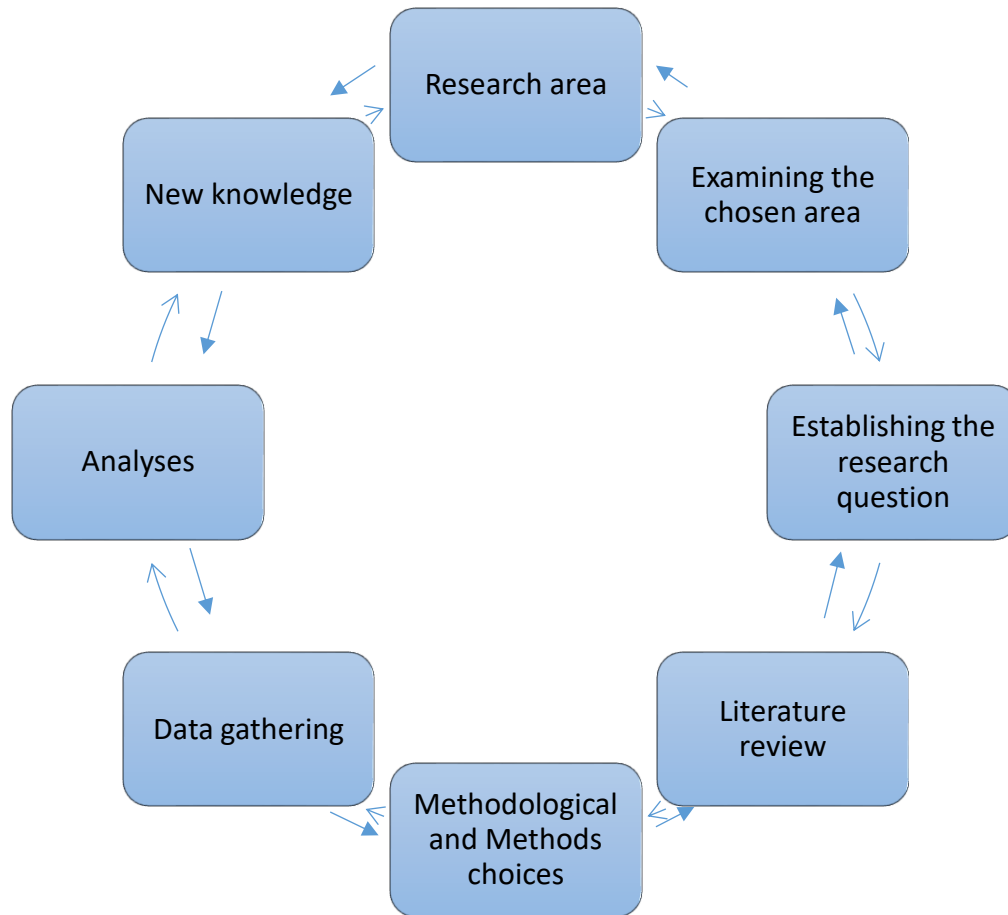


Figure 8: The circle of knowledge construction (self-created)

Considering the chosen constructivist stance, the figure above represents the hermeneutical circle, where the author tried to visually demonstrate cyclical moves back and forth between different parts during the writing process. In a nutshell, the author's personal interest in the topic, as well as her background, served as the basis for the problem area. In other words, the research area was based on the author's pre-understanding of place branding, and locals' engagement is place branding processes. Further, to narrow down the problem area, the investigation on Riga's place branding was done, as well as some literature was revised, what in turn resulted in the formulation of the research question. Next, for understanding the examined field, the existing literature was scrutinized. In turn, that helped with clarifying the methodological and methods questions. As the next step, data gathering was done, which firstly included the conduction of the online questionnaire and the semi-structured interview, and afterward, two focus groups. As the last step, the analyses were made, which led to the creation of new knowledge. It should be repeated that the writing process was not linear, and sometimes several processes could be done

simultaneously. Besides, a gradual growing understanding of the object favored the frequent moves between different parts for alterations.

## 5.2. Secondary research

Secondary analysis tends to revise the pre-existing literature “for the purposes of investigating new questions or verifying previous studies” (Heaton, 2004, p. 14). It is argued that every writing process should be started from secondary analysis (Driscoll, 2011). By conducting secondary research, it is not possible to create new knowledge; however, it gives the researcher a better understanding of the examined topic and possibility to narrow down the research question (Driscoll, 2011). Within the current research, the secondary data in the form of articles and available online books on place branding and place identity were utilized. Moreover, for investigating the current situation of Riga’s place branding, the published official reports and statistics, as well as news articles from the various Latvian Internet news portals and blogs were used.

## 5.3. Primary research and its ethics

Opposed to secondary research, primary research is used when the original data should be collected (Driscoll, 2011). As Driscoll (2011) pointed out, primary research is especially useful when there is a lack of needed data on the investigated question, as well as the current practice is in a particular use when a local problem is studied. In the current project’s case, there was a considerable lack of Riga’s place identity information; therefore, several techniques for primary data collecting were utilized. Before describing them, the ethics of primary research should be mentioned.

Driscoll (2011) mentioned three main factors, which should be followed for keeping primary research ethical. Going forward, it should be highlighted that within the scope of this study, all three clauses are considered. The first factor stands for *voluntary participation*, meaning that participants of a conducted interview or questionnaire should engage at their own will. Secondary, *confidentiality and anonymity* should be provided. Driscoll explained that during the discussion participants might express “[...] embarrassing or potentially damaging information such as racist comments or unconventional behavior” (Driscoll, 2011, p. 156). Thus, it is better to use pseudonyms. The third factor covers *researcher bias*. Driscoll pointed out that preconceptions are well discernible “[...] in the way you ask questions, the way you take notes, or the conclusions you draw from the data you collect” (Driscoll, 2011, p. 156). Thus, it requires the researcher to eliminate personal preconceived opinions towards participants’ answers and the investigated object.

In the case of the current thesis, all informants were participating at their own will, as well as their real names are not mentioned in the transcripts, while their work titles are broadened. The researcher tried to eliminate her prejudices by translating and writing down the words of participants as precise as it could be. However, it should be remembered that a transcription cannot be an exact copy of the discussion, and that “[n]o matter how thoroughly the transcript is done, “translation” has to be done with unavoidable inaccuracies, mistakes and interpretations” (Fink, 2000, para. 42). Moreover, taking into account that sensible questions were covered during the discussions, the researcher never interrupted a participant and always gave the possibility to express his/her opinion without saying her own views.

Last but not least, the researcher’s role should be taken into consideration as it might limit the research. It is claimed that qualitative data is closely linked to the researcher as “[...] the qualitative researcher must be expected to feel very personally involved in every step of the research process” (Fink, 2000, para. 36). Therefore, the feeling of empathy to the respondents, the desire to preserve the received data, as well as qualitative interpretation of the data leads to the subjectivity increase (Fink, 2000). Therefore, the author acknowledges the possibility of interpreting data as she saw it.

#### 5.3.1. The in-depth Interview

It is argued that interviews as a technique for primary data collecting are useful in case of a need to gather detailed information regarding the researched phenomenon (Adams & Cox, 2008). Besides, it is a useful tool if an expert’s opinion is required (Driscoll, 2011). Precisely because of the latter, the semi-structured interview was applied within the current study. Prior to the further description of the conducted interview, it should be stated that preferences were given to the semi-structured interview due to its better flexibility and ability to increase the chance for revealing relevant issues (Adams & Cox, 2008). Importantly, the expert’s opinion was asked for understanding the current state of Riga’s place branding situation due to the lack of precise information, as well as gaining the managerial point of view on the matter. Therefore, the interview was conducted with the Senior Project manager of a Destination Management Company, which tightly co-operates with the Riga Tourism Development Bureau (or DMO).

The interview was held in a quiet coffee shop and took around one hour. The interview guide was prepared and included ten possible questions. Prior to the discussion, the topic of the interview was presented, as well as the author’s motivation for it. Unfortunately, the interview was not recorded due to the probable sensitivity of the information. However, the interviewee offered to put down the discussed information in writing by herself. Therefore, relying on the passed conversation, 11 questions were distilled and sent to the interviewee. Despite that the interview was conducted in Latvian, the manager

answered the received questions in English. Unfortunately, such controllability of information significantly limits the answers and their interpretation in the future. However, the general understanding regarding Riga's place branding and its place brand from the managerial perspective was gained. The questions and answers can be found in Appendix 1.

### 5.3.2. Questionnaire

Surveys are considered as a quantitative technique in data gathering (Creswell, 2014). It is claimed that questionnaires are tend to gather “[...] small amounts of information from a wider selection of people in the hopes of making a general claim” (Driscoll, 2011, p. 163). Within the scope of the current project, the questionnaire (along with the in-depth interview) was used for gaining the general understanding, but from the locals' point of view regarding their perception of Riga. The survey consisted from 14 questions, where three of them were open-ended questions (see Appendix 2). The latter questions provided the researcher with the extensive textual data, and therefore open-ended questions were used the most for the analysis.

The survey was available in three languages: Russian, Latvian and English. Nevertheless, the English version was mainly created for its subsequent inclusion into Appendix. For getting answers from various generations of Riga, it was important to translate the questionnaire. For avoiding misleading, the survey was firstly created in Russian (as it is native language of the research's author), and afterwards, it was translated to Latvian by a native speaker. Importantly, before distributing the questionnaire, it was sent out to Russian- and Latvian-speakers in order to check if questions are understandable and interpreted correctly.

The survey was distributed online, mainly through the personal network and Facebook. Various Latvian Facebook pages were approached, asking the permission to post the survey, what significantly helped with data gathering. The author of this project set herself the task of collecting nearly equal amount of answers from ethnic Latvians and the Russian-speaking minority, what by-turn was achieved, as 53% of respondents were ethnic Latvians, while 42% of participators – Russians-speakers. In addition, the demographics of the survey turned to be diverse, including various generations. As a result, 418 participants took part in the survey. The questions and answers could be found in the chapter 'Results of the Questionnaire' or in Appendix 2.

### 5.3.3. Focus Groups

It is argued that a focus group and an interview are similar; therefore, the interview guidelines can be also applied to focus groups (Adams & Cox, 2008). Moreover, it is said that a focus group should not involve more than eight people, and at minimum should consist from three participants (Adams & Cox, 2008). Importantly, that it is better to have homogenous groups, as in that case people will express their opinions more openly (Adams & Cox, 2008). In the case of this study, two focus groups were conducted, and each involved four participants. It was also decided to divide groups according to participants' ethnicity, meaning that the first focus group involved people representing the Russian-speaking minority, while the second group was composed of ethnic Latvians. The division of participants was also made for avoiding latent conflicts, as according to the literature "[t]he articulation of differences and confrontation between stakeholders may deepen disagreement and make conflicts manifest" (Braun et al., 2018, p. 24). Besides, the usage of native language, gave participants complete freedom to express their thoughts and ideas. The following tables display gender, ethnicity, as well as working fields of participants:

<b>FOCUS GROUP WITH THE RUSSIAN-SPEAKING MINORITY</b>				
<b>Interviewee</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Ethnicity</b>	<b>Other characteristics</b>
<b>Participant 1</b>	Female	30	Russian	Web Designer
<b>Participant 2</b>	Female	28	Armenian	School teacher
<b>Participant 3</b>	Female	25	Half ethnic Latvian, half Belarusian	HR manager
<b>Participant 4</b>	Female	28	Russian	Make-up artist

Figure 9: The focus group with the Russian-speaking minority

<b>FOCUS GROUP WITH ETHNIC LATVIANS</b>				
<b>Interviewee</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Ethnicity</b>	<b>Other characteristics</b>
<b>Participant 5</b>	Female	27	Ethnic Latvian	Leading advisor in the public institution
<b>Participant 6</b>	Female	31	Ethnic Latvian	Administrative adviser in the public institution
<b>Participant 7</b>	Female	29	Ethnic Latvian	Consultant in the public institution
<b>Participant 8</b>	Female	25	Ethnic Latvian	Student of law

Figure 10: The focus group with ethnic Latvians

According to researchers, there is the functional link between language and identity (Baxter et al., 2013); therefore, both groups were conducted in their native languages. The author got permissions for recoding discussions, what by-turn simplified the processes of transcribing. The both translated transcripts involve the most useful parts of conversations for the current studies (see Appendix 4 & 5). The first focus group

took around two hours, while the second lasted for approximately one hour and a half. However, as it can be seen from the tables, all participants were females, as well as belonged to more or less similar age group. Consequently, this might limit the understanding of the investigated phenomenon to the particular generation.

The role of the researcher was to facilitate the discussion, make sure that everyone expressed their opinions, as well as reflect back on the groups' views (Adams & Cox, 2008). The number of chosen topics for facilitating the discussions were taken from the examined results of the conducted questionnaire and the interview. In that case, the researcher was able to gain better understanding of the found patterns, as well as clarify some incomprehension (e.g. when the same aspects of the city was mentioned in both negative and positive veins).

#### 5.4. Thematic analysis

For analyzing the received data, thematic analyses were utilized in order to find the narratives within the focus groups, as well as patterns from the open questions of the questionnaire. Thematic analyses imply the need to categorize and find themes (patterns) that would represent an overall data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). In other words, "[...] a theme is a red thread of underlying meanings, within which similar pieces of data can be tied together [...]" (Vaismoradi & Snelgrove, 2019, para. 3). Researchers stressed out that themes are more related to implicit and meanings of findings, while categories are generally used for explicit and superficial aspects of data (Vaismoradi & Snelgrove, 2019).

Importantly, this type of analysis is considered to be theoretically-flexible, which means that it matches with the current theoretical framework (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Besides, it is argued that thematic analyses do not organize; neither describe data in depth (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Nevertheless, being one of a kind, the current project is aimed at identifying the central and commonplace identities of the city of Riga; therefore, thematic analyses are seen as suitable.

The closed questions of the survey were examined and visualized in figures for better digestibility (see chpt. 6 and Appendix 2), while the comments from the open questions were printed out and thoroughly scrutinized for forming categories. For doing that, it was decided to highlight each comment with a particular color that represents a specific category (see the example in Appendix 3). Sometimes one comment could imply several categories.

After revealing categories, the attempts were made for uncovering implicit themes that could represent the place identities of Riga. Therefore, the transcripts of the focus groups were carefully examined and

re-read, as well as audios were listened several times in order to identify discovered categories, and get deeper explanations of them. The conducted in-depth interview was useful as well for explaining some aspects from the managerial point of view. Besides, the revised theory and literature were used for enhancing coincidences, or contrary, highlighting the divergence between participants' opinions and the literature.

### 5.5. Validity and reliability

Undoubtedly, validity and reliability play crucial role in all researchers, as exactly these key aspects identify credibility and trustworthiness of a research's findings (Brink, 1993). However, both validity and reliability have an extra significant importance in the qualitative research, where the findings are often called in question by academia due to the researcher's subjectivity (Brink, 1993).

To start with, validity tends to evaluate trustworthiness and accuracy of findings within the research, thus measuring its quality (Brink, 1993). Creswell (2014) noted that by implementing accurate procedures and techniques during the research's process, the researcher would end up with accurate findings. In the same vein, Leung (2015, p. 325) marked that validity "[...] means "appropriateness" of the tools, processes, and data". For enhancing validity within the present project, the triangulation of resources and theories were utilized, meaning that multiple data sources and data gathering methods were implemented, while the focus groups' discussions were recorded and documented. However, the mentioned-above inability to record the in-depth interview with the project manager, as well as incomplete transcripts of focus groups and untranslated comments of the open-ended questions of the survey might cast doubt on data and findings validity.

It is argued that "[...] reliability is a consequence of the validity in a study" (Golafshani, 2003, p. 602). It is considered that the concept of reliability within qualitative research is concerned with consistency (Leung, 2015). In other words, reliability "[...] refers to the ability of a research method to yield consistently the same results over repeated testing periods" (Brink, 1993, p. 35). For ensuring reliability in qualitative research, the examined data should be trustworthy (Golafshani, 2003). Moreover, reliability of the research greatly depends on explicitly described procedures and techniques that were undertaken (Kirk & Miller, 1985). Thus, for enhancing reliability within the current project, the author tried to clarify the made choices concerning selected approaches in order to answer the established research question.

## 6. Results of the questionnaire

The present chapter presents the examined results of the conducted questionnaire. As it was mentioned above, the survey was conducted for gathering the generic view of locals regarding how they see the city. Overall, 418 participants took part in the survey. However, 299 of them filled up the survey in full and have submitted it, while 120 of participants filled out it partly. These uncompleted surveys were reviewed in order to disqualify those participants that gave minimal information that was useless for the analyses. Besides, participants that have filled up the survey extremely quickly were disqualified as well. In total, 18 surveys were dismissed from the analyses. All visualizations of the survey's results can be found in Appendix 2. Besides, two open questions (# 10 and #14) are presented here briefly, as these questions are further analyzed in detail.

### 6.1. Questions #1 - #4

The first four questions, which can be characterized as demographic, revealed participators' gender, age, ethnicity, and their status in Riga. Thereby, it was found out that 78% of participators were women, while only 22% of respondents were men. Further, it was found out that the percentage of participants under age 18 was 25%, while 22% of respondents fell into the age group 18 to 25. The age group 26 to 35 appeared to be the biggest one, as 26% of respondents related to it. The percentage of participators of the age group 36 to 46 made up 12%; meanwhile, 10% of respondents fell into the age group 46 to 55. Lastly, just 4% of participators, which related to the age group 56 to 65, took part in the survey, meantime only 1% of respondents were older than 65 years.

The next question was aiming at revealing the participants' ethnicity. As it was stated earlier, Latvian society is significantly divided and falls into two groups: ethnic Latvians and Russian-speaking minorities. According to the statistics for 2018, there are 37% of Russians living in Riga, as well as 4% of Belarusians and 3% of Ukrainians (The City Development Department, 2018). Thereby, there are at least 43% of Russian-speaking residents living in Riga. That, by-turn, made it essential to ask for ethnicity in the survey for gathering the more or less equal amount of responses from two groups in order to receive common and realistic picture of the investigated phenomenon. The results have shown that 53% of respondents were ethnic Latvians, while 42% of participators marked themselves as Russians. Besides, 1% of Ukrainians, 1% of Belarusians, and 1% of Poles also participated in the survey. Knowing that the just mentioned minorities filled out the Russian survey form, it makes it possible to conclude that overall, 45% of Russian-speaking participators took part in the questionnaire. Lastly, 2% of respondents chose the 'other' group without specifying their ethnicity.



The last demographic question was aiming at revealing the respondents' localness towards Riga. The same as the latter question, the current question was included more for the controlling purposes, as the notion of 'being local' is fuzzy and greatly depends on personal identification with the city, rather than with a precise geographical location (as, e.g., residential status). Notwithstanding, it was found out that 324 participators live in the city or its surrounding area. Eight respondents marked that they are studying in Riga; however, they live outside the city. In the same vein, 28 participants specified that they are working in the city but live outside Riga. Moreover, interestingly, 55 participators in total fell into two indefinite groups – 'Just visiting Riga' and 'Other.' Despite that, the questionnaires from the mentioned groups were not disqualified, as after looking through them, it was figured out that surveys were completed on Russian and Latvian languages, showing good familiarity with the city, as well as the majority of respondents, specified their choices (e.g. "Lived in Riga for 30 years, but moved to another country"; "lived in Riga, but currently studying abroad"; "living in the city on weekdays", etc.).

## 6.2. Questions #5 - #7

The next questions intended for revealing participants' familiarity with the previous city's logo and slogan. As a result, it was figured out that only 20% of respondents have seen the logo of Riga as opposed to the other 80%. Speaking about the city's slogan "Riga - here people meet" (Latvian: "Rīga – šeit cilvēki satiekas"), the result turned out to be the same deplorable as with the city's logo – 81% of respondents were not familiar with the slogan. Moreover, 44% of participators answered that they do not get the meaning of the slogan either.

## 6.3. Questions #8 & #9

Question #8 was aiming at revealing participants' favorite characteristics about Riga, which they experience daily and value the most. Hereby, the results are as follows:

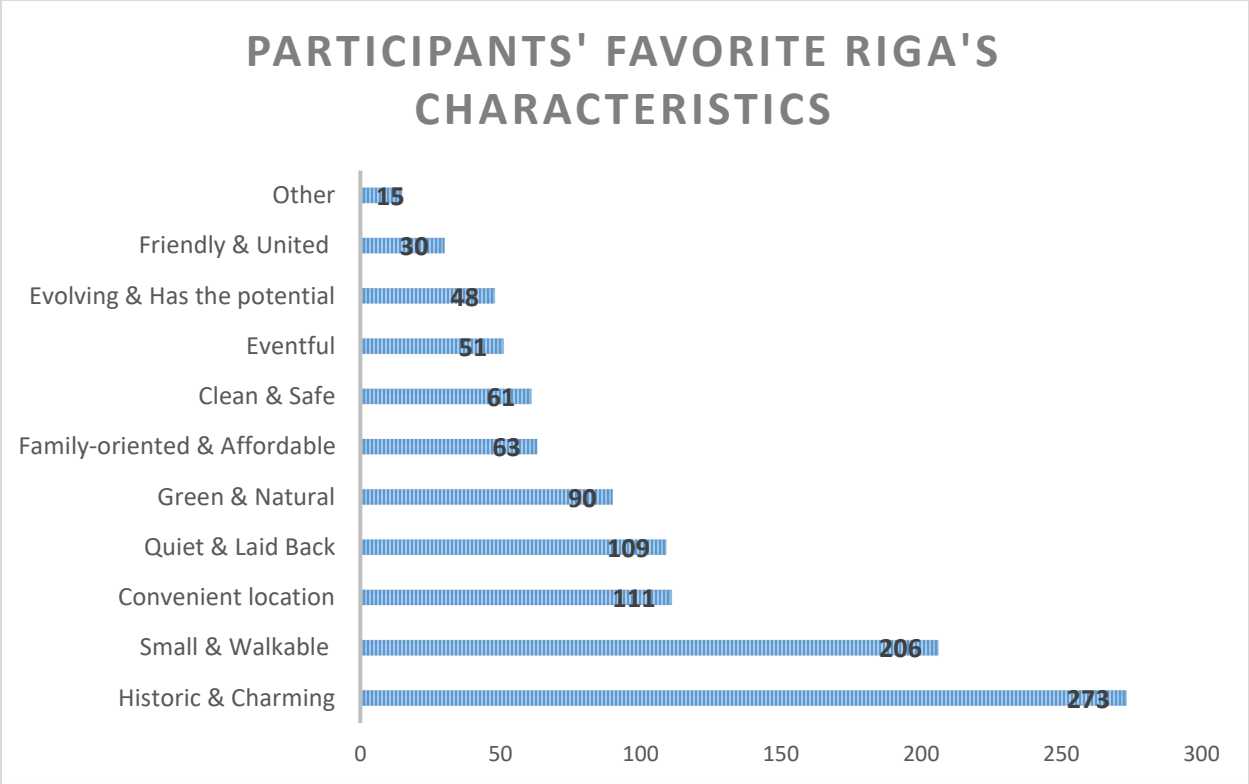


Figure 11: Participants' favorite Riga experiences (self-created)

As can be seen from the diagram, the majority of respondents appreciate Riga the most for being a historic, walkable, and small. The convenient location of the city, as well as its tranquility and natural surroundings, are also crucial for respondents. An almost equal amount of participants marked cleanliness and safety of the city, as well as its affordability and family-friendliness as being their favorite characteristics of Riga. However, going forward, it should be highlighted that the last-mentioned peculiarities of the city received contradictory responses, as not all respondents mention them in a positive vein. That can be seen from the comments that were left for the current question (see in Appendix 2), as well as in the upcoming results of other questions. The same criticism applies for other less voted characteristics, namely Riga being energetic and entertaining, evolving, and friendly with sensible community spirit. Lastly, 15 respondents gave comments about their experiences in Riga, which mostly are written in a negative vein, and instead are directed at unfavorable characteristics of the city. Thus, participants mentioned uncleanliness of the city, uncomfortable infrastructure and dirty public transport, unfriendly service and people in general.

Question #9 required from participants to describe the individuality of the city. Twelve answer choices of various personality traits were given, including space for a comment. Thus, the vast majority of respondents endowed Riga with a historic and traditional individuality. Also, looking through the given

comments, it was found out that some participants perceive Riga as nervous and loud, as well as infantile. The full results look as follows:

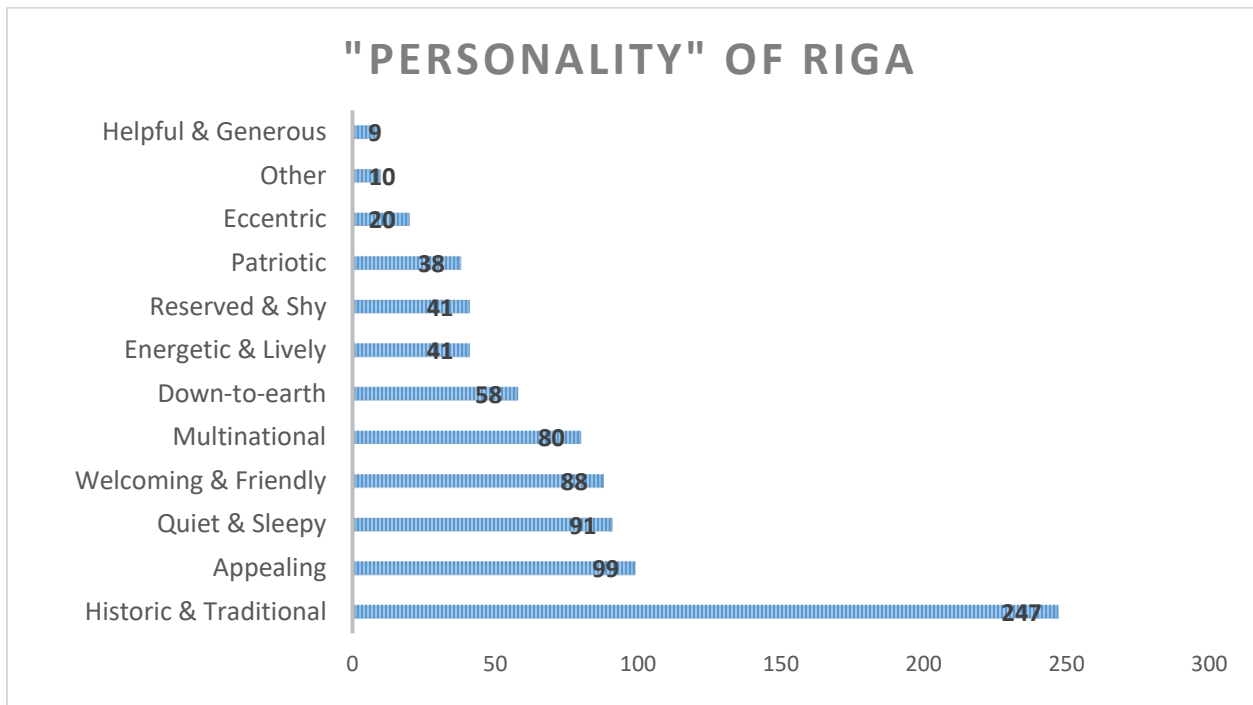


Figure 12: The Riga's "individuality" according to participants (self-created)

#### 6.4. Question #10

Answering the open question #10, which asked participants to describe what in their opinions distinguishes Riga from other places, participants gave diverse and sometimes contradictory responses. Overall, the current question received 321 unique responses. After combining all responses from three survey versions together and carefully studying them, the most continual and resembling features were grouped, forming categories. Here are presented the ten revealed categories:

- Sensations of the city
- Capitalness of the city
- Infrastructure
- Size and Location
- History and Culture
- Architecture
- Population density and People
- Nature
- Food

➤ Cleanness of the city

In the analysis, (see chpt. 7 or Appendix 2) it is shown how these categories appeared.

### 6.5. Question #11

The open question #11 required participants to write a famous person, whose “personality” associates with Riga. Overall, 315 participators answered the current question. However, after looking through the surveys, it was figured out that 132 participators answered “No” to the question, meaning that they do not have any particular recognizable person in mind for associating him/her with Riga. Other participators gave diverse answers, naming various Latvian musicians, scientists, writers and novelists, athletes, and political figures.

For visualizing the received data, all names of the mentioned people were written down in the table and counted. The most continual names that are associated with Riga are presented below in the diagram. Only names that were repeated five and more times are displayed. The full list of mentioned persons can be found in Appendix 2.

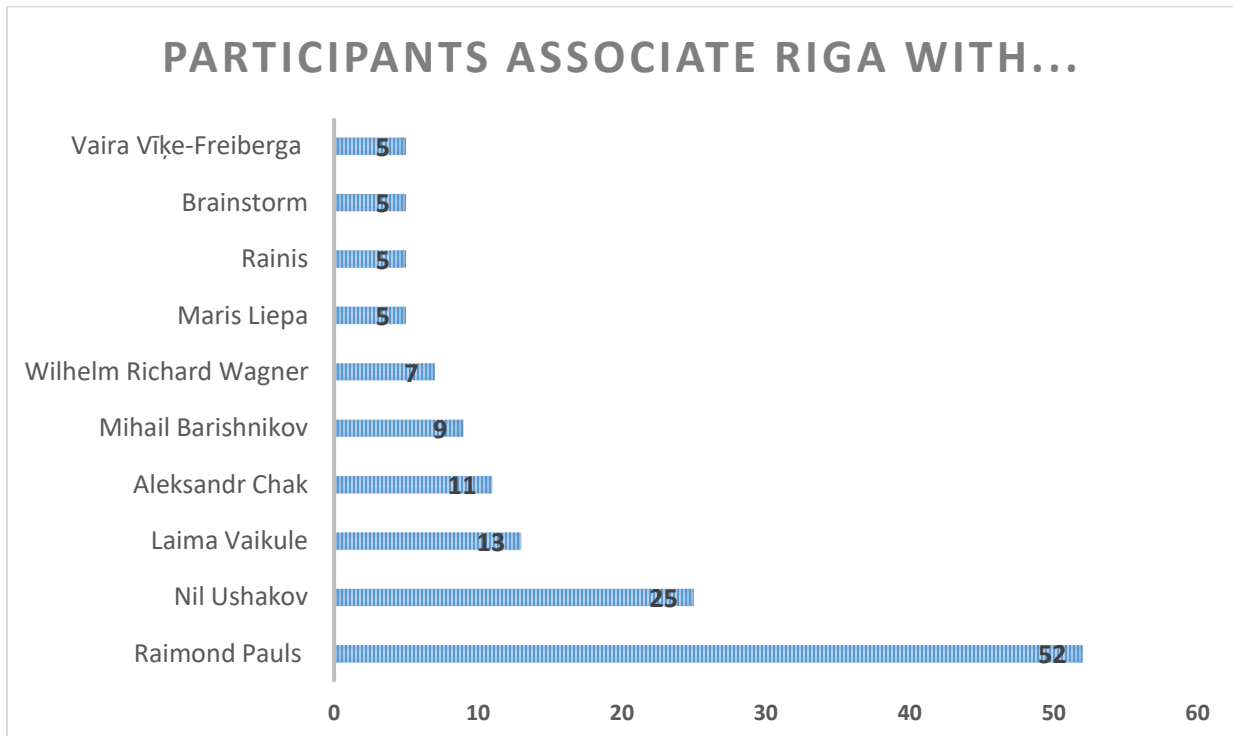


Figure 13: People that are associated with Riga (self-created)

Thereby, as it can be seen from the diagram, participators associate Riga with the ex-president of the Republic of Latvia - Vaira Vike-Freiberga; with the famous Latvian band - Brainstorm (Latvian: Prāta Vētra);

with a Latvian poet – Rainis; as well as with a Latvian ballet dancer – Maris Liepa. All of the above listed people were mentioned five times each by different participators. Next, some respondents stated that a German composer Wilhelm Wagner associates for them with the city, while others mentioned a well-known ballet dancer and choreographer Mihail Barishnikov. In turn, a Latvian poet and writer Aleksandr Chak (Latvian: Aleksandrs Čaks) forms an association with Riga for eleven participators. The next one is a Latvian singer Laima Vaikule, who brings up an association with Riga for thirteen respondents. The two most mentioned figures are the ex-mayor of the City of Riga – Nil Ushakov, and a Latvian composer – Raimond Pauls.

6.6. Questions #12 & #13

Question #12 asked participators to identify the greatest asset of the city of Riga. The results showed that respondents perceive the Old City of Riga, architectural heritage, and cultural centers as the most significant assets of the city. The full results are displayed below:

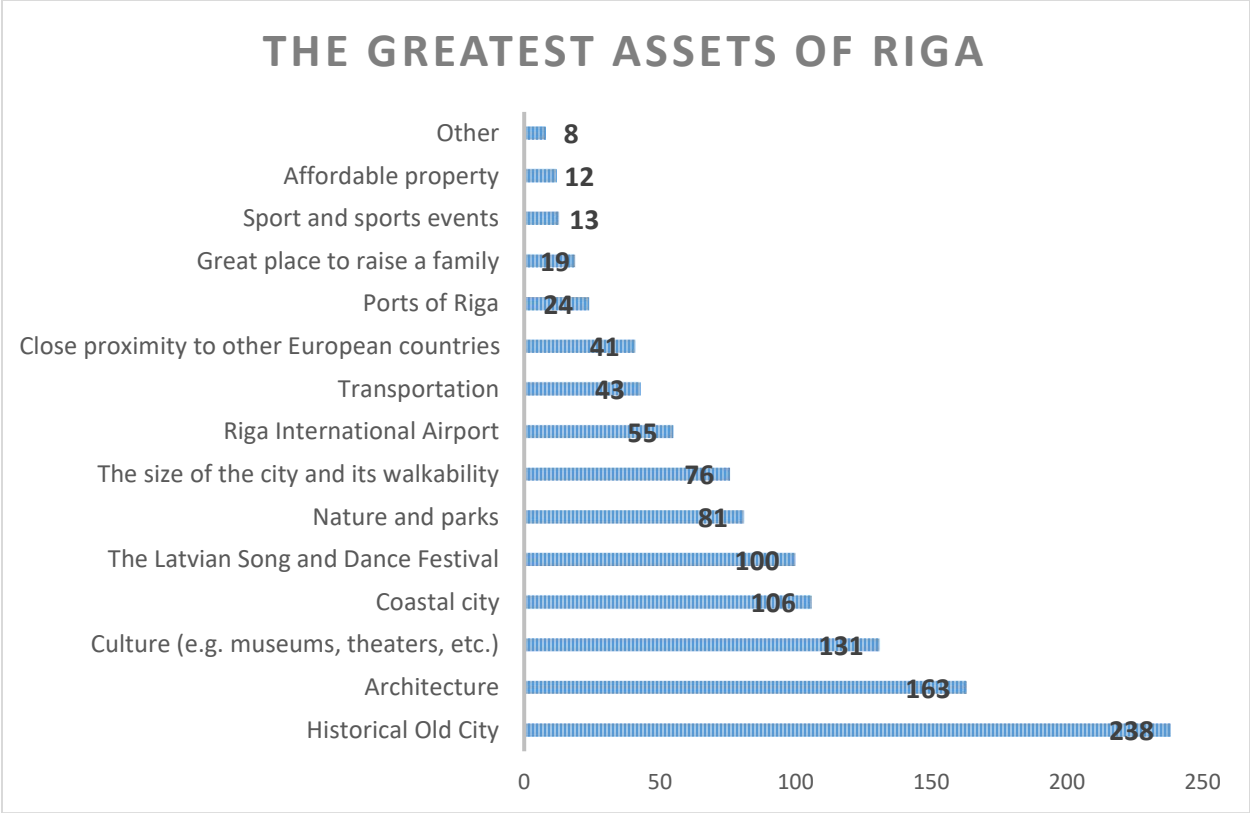


Figure 14: The greatest assets of Riga (self-created)

Question #13 was aiming at finding out what emotional state respondents usually experience while being in Riga. The top three choices show that participators feel themselves in Riga comfortable and cosy, as well as like being home; however, they also feel boredom. Besides, 39 respondents left their comments

for the current questions, which specified that people feel nostalgic, melancholic (in the positive vein), inspirational, and progressive in the city. On the other hand, there were mentions regarding stress, unsafety, a feeling of hopelessness, and tiredness. The diagram below displays the complete results of the question:

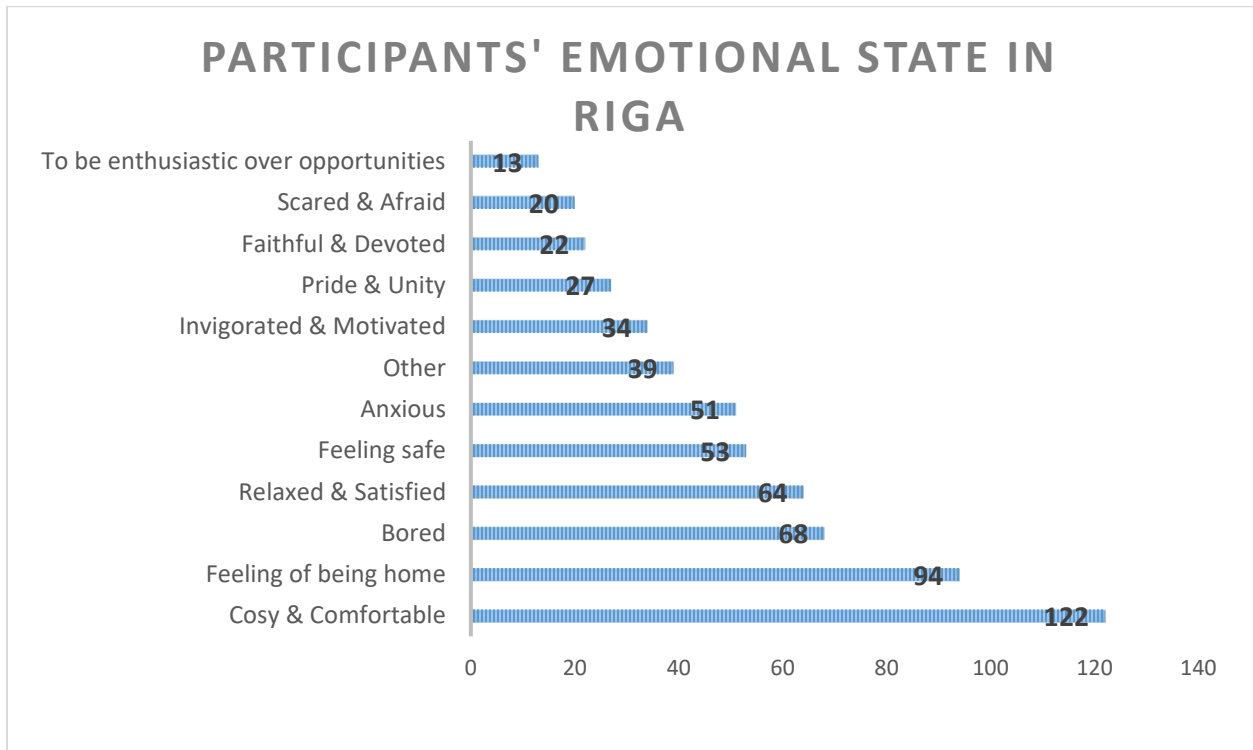


Figure 15: Participants' emotional state in Riga (self-created)

### 6.7. Question #14

The survey contained one more open question #14, which asked participants to write their suggestions and ideas for making the city of Riga a greater place. The question was intentionally unspecified regarding the sphere of improvement; so that respondents would not initially limiting their focus to a named sphere (e.g., What suggestions or ideas do you have for making Riga a greater place for traveling/ living/ working, etc.). Therefore, the question encouraged participants to give their primary thoughts about the city's improvement. Overall, the question was answered by 308 respondents, but only 273 answers were applicable for the analyses.

After looking through the answers, it became apparent that ideas and suggestions of participants could be grouped into three categories:

- Urban and Infrastructure suggestions;

- Entertainment and Places suggestions;
- Economic suggestions.

In the analysis (see cpht. 7) the deeper explanation is given how the mentioned categories, and their sub-categories were formed.

## 7. Analysis

The analysis are divided into three parts. The first sub-chapter (7.1.) examines the local DMO's (or 'Live Riga') activities from the managerial and locals' perspectives. Within the chapter 7.2 the above described results of the conducted questionnaire are thoroughly scrutinized for tracing the common patters within participants' choices and answers for developing the generalized categories. Later, in the chapter 7.3, the identified categories are going to be examined more carefully in order to drill down to their bedrock. In turn, that will be done by combining analyzed survey results with data from focus groups, the conducted in-depth interview, as well as revised literature. Hopefully, as a result the researcher will be able to distill multiple place identities. To mention, the current research is not aimed at focusing solely on positive place identities, but rather reveal a trustworthy place identity-set, which might include both complimentary and non-complimentary identities (Baxter et al., 2013).

### 7.1. The DMO's actions through managerial and local lenses

To start with, it was decided to compare the above-investigated place branding state of Riga with the managerial view. Thus, by conducting an interview with the manager of a DMC (Destination Management Company), it was confirmed that the city of Riga does not have united place brand, and that it is still flexible regarding its formation:

**Project Manager** (hereinafter **[PM]**): The Riga Tourism Development Bureau Foundation (LIVE RIGA) actively works to make Riga visible, but in my opinion, Riga does not have one united place brand, which is recognized by locals and our foreign guests. [...] I actually could say that currently Riga is flexible to "wear" various brands due to its diverse tourism possibilities, and because the city has not yet gained considerable recognition by specific values, like Romantic Paris with its Eifel tower or Vibrant New York city with its huge networking and business possibilities.

The current view resonates with the presented above author's thought that the present situation can be considered as a good chance to create a strong and trustworthy place brand, considering that overall Riga possesses positive image (Anholt, 2008). Nevertheless, the manager also highlighted:

**[PM]:** The hardest part is to convince the client to visit us because we are unknown and almost all have little or no impression of how our country looks like.

The latter statement can be supplemented with the manager's utterances regarding the historical events, namely that Latvia gained its independence only 28 years ago, what in turn affects the willingness to become international. Thus, she stressed out that:

**[PM]:** I somehow would agree that we are still focused inwards than outwards towards an international image.

The manager also emphasized that Latvia still holds the image of being in the 'Soviet time', or even that it belongs to the Russian Federation. That greatly coincides with the reviewed literature on Riga as the re-emerging city that still struggles with historical impacts (Rozite & Klepers, 2011) (see chpt. 2.4.1.). Proceeding the interview, the manager specified that, in her opinion, the united place brand could help to stabilize Riga's name locally, as well as the place brand could help to identify Riga's essence outside the country's borders:

**[PM]:** Yes, Riga is the capital of Latvia – busiest and biggest city of the country, but what is the story behind it? I think most of Latvians have not thought about Riga from a brand perspective.

Tracing back to the literature, the manager's assumptions were correct regarding the benefits of the Riga's name enhancement among locals. However, it is feasible in case if initially the place brand is co-created with locals, so that people could relate and support the place branding actions (Zenker & Seigis, 2012; Zenker & Erfgen, 2014; Braun & Zenker, 2010). The same applies to the identification of Riga's essence abroad. Due to cooperation with a place's inhabitants, and the following construction of the place brand strategies relying on place identities, the created place image that is aimed at external audiences will be displaying Riga's essences abroad (Baxter et al., 2013; Kavartzis & Hatch, 2013).

Moreover, the interviewee agreed that the marketing activities of the officials are confusing, as the transmitted messages of the city are excessively diverse. The latter statement greatly resonates with the author's findings of Riga's place branding state (see chpt. 2.4.3.). Besides, the manager's affirmation reaffirms the necessity of place branding implementation, as according to the literature it might serve as a beacon for the officials, preventing misconceptions (see chpt. 2.1.4.).



Speaking about the locals' perception of DMO's actions, it should be said that the both groups concurred that the organization portray Riga as the one-sided city, namely focusing greatly on the area of the Old Town. Interestingly, that only two participators out of eight knew the activities of 'Live Riga' at greater length, while other were unfamiliar. These two participators shared their thoughts:

**Participant 5** (hereinafter **[P5]**): Being a local of Riga, I have not really noticed any grandiose activities from the side of the city's brand to make Riga a better place or something like that.

**[P6]**: I personally perceive the brand 'Live Riga' more like a trademark, rather than a place brand. [...] For me, they [Live Riga] are not really connected to the city as such. The same as Participant 5, I do not notice the brand on the streets, as well as its activity.

Further, in order to examine how locals see their city, it was decided to discuss how the officials, namely the DMO (or 'Live Riga'), portray Riga. For doing that, the recent promotional videos 'Insider's guide to Riga' were chosen due to their perspective. It is claimed that the current promotional videos display a completely different, witty sight on the city, thanks to which tourists will be able to see Riga through the locals' eyes as it is, and how it is not shown in a traditional guide-book (Riga.lv, 2019). Prior to that, the DMO was contacted and it was specified that no researches were done on the locals' perception of the city. Thus, it can be concluded that, despite the claims, the new promotional videos 'Insider's guide to Riga' still present the managerial view of Riga. As a result, from the conducted focus groups, it became clear that in general participators do not agree that the chosen lens in the videos reflect the real city and trustworthy locals' perception of it. The following statements of some participators display their main thoughts:

**[P1]**: [...] If the main goal was to display locals, their mindset, and behavior, as well as how they look – they came to grief. [...] Otherwise, Latvians are not like those shown people at all! So, my point is that it is a pack of lies to call these videos "Insider's Guide to Riga," considering that shown characters are entirely made-up and do not contain features of real locals!

**[P7]**: I like these campaigns, however I feel that there is a bit too much of an antique vibe. It seems like an old Latvian movie. That is not really, how the city feels today. It is a sweet idea, yet I would like to show more of an actual view of wonderful opportunities around the city of how they are today.

**[P2]**: The lens in the videos is not truthful. There is a definite feeling that they are promotional and nothing else! The most beautiful yards and touristic spots are chosen, nothing new is shown.

[...] They (characters in the campaign) are cool, they are curious and charming, but those are not Riga's locals. The idea is understandable - to show another perspective of the city, but because "insiders" are not real, they still transmit the old and hard-pressed angle that once was created by the tourism bureau.

**[P6]:** I felt that these videos are ridiculing residents. [...], if to look from the local perspective, then there is a mismatch. I personally, as a local, do not want the city to be portrayed in that way...

**[P5]:** It is not about Riga and its residents. I have never seen such taxi drivers here, as well as teachers.

Basically, participators concurred that the videos are still tend to show the most touristic places of the city, what by-turn coincides with the findings of Rozite and Klepers (2012), who emphasized that a Riga's tourist district "[...] encompasses the entire Old Town, part of the city center, and an area on the left bank of the Daugava River" (Rozite & Klepers, 2011, p. 70). The presented disagreements and the absence of the research on locals' perception resonate with the reviewed literature on the frequent residents' exclusion from the branding processes (Zenker & Erfgen, 2014; Marzano, 2015; Ločmele & Mousten, 2016). Even though that participators agreed that the Old City of Riga carries the great importance to the city's image, they have also emphasized that there is much more places to show, which actually hold the spirit of locals. The presented-above thoughts of participators regarding the videos might signal about the presence of a potential latent conflict between the locals' and officials' perceptions of the city that might eventually lead to the open conflict in case if people's identities were encroached (see chpt. 2.3.2.). In support of the latter claim, the interviewed project manager's statement is cited:

**[PM]:** Once a strategy is created, locals and residents should be asked to express their opinion about Riga and its current brand, and also how they feel the city, what they think about the tourism and what would be those aspects we could show to our foreign guests. It is also important to know that inhabitants merge with the created brand, because word of mouth is one of the most powerful tools to boost and sell the image.

## 7.2. The analysis of the questionnaire results

To mention, initially the current questionnaire was created when the present thesis was focused solely on place branding. However, in accordance with the hermeneutic spiral, with the lapse of time a deeper understanding on the topic was gained, and consequently the focal point of the study turned to be place

identity. Nevertheless, it is argued that the survey could be useful for understanding the common opinions of the masses, and supplement the data of the in-depth interview and focus groups.

Thus, for extracting and forming categories, the questions #8 - #14 were chosen due to data, which they provide. Despite that only questions #10, #11 and #14 are open questions, other closed questions are also seen as valuable, which are able to enhance data from the open questions. To start with, the open questions are going to be analyzed first.

The question #10 was aimed at finding distinguishing features of Riga from the locals' point of view. Thus, all given answers were thoroughly examined in order to find patterns, and afterward categories were formed, which are presented below. As it was stated above, categories involve explicit and superficial aspects of data (Vaismoradi & Snelgrove, 2019). For better explanation, the most continual words or phrases were translated are presented as well, so the reader could gain better understanding of what the category implies, and its meaning. Sometimes the same category can involve both positive and negative aspects that contradict each other.

CATEGORY	THE CONTEXT
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>SENSE OF THE CITY</b></p>	<p><i>In a positive vein:</i> Uniqueness; authentic aura; specific vibes and style of the city; coziness; there is rhythm in the city; feeling of big aspirations; Riga evokes nostalgic and melancholic feelings (in a good vein); there are feelings of somnolence and coziness; salience; aesthetics; beloved; "here is my home"; homely atmosphere; "This is MY city"</p> <p><i>Tangible aspects that were aimed at describing atmosphere of the city:</i> tramlines; warm coffee shops; street musicians; cobble-stones in the Old Town and its narrow streets</p>
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>CAPITALNESS OF THE CITY</b></p>	<p><i>In a positive vein:</i> A lot of possibilities; opportunities for work/studies; the main events and festivals; urbanism</p> <p><i>In a negative vein:</i> Not enough events</p>
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>INFRASTRUCTURE</b></p>	<p><i>In a positive vein:</i> Good and convenient public transport; close proximity to the international airport; ability to orient easily in the city; accurately organized public transport</p> <p><i>In a negative vein:</i> Bad condition of roads; no signs for tourists outside the Old City; a backwardness in infrastructure development; unfriendly infrastructure</p>

<b>SIZE AND LOCATION</b>	Riga has convenient location - “just golden mean”; walkable; not too big, not too small;
<b>HISTORY &amp; CULTURE</b>	Museums; Theatres; The National Opera; events and festivals; Historical heritages; Old city center; various legends; Riga’s significance in the history; the Silent Centre
<b>ARCHITECTURE</b>	<p><i>In a positive vein:</i> Old and beautiful buildings from various centuries; famous Art Nouveau buildings; churches; monuments</p> <p><i>In a negative vein:</i> A lot of buildings are not maintained properly and look neglected; a lot of half-done constructions</p>
<b>POPULATION DENSITY &amp; PEOPLE</b>	<p><i>In a positive vein:</i> It is lively and there are a lot of people; At the same time some participants mentioned that it is calm and tranquil due to small amount of residents; openness and friendliness; multinationalism</p> <p><i>In a negative vein:</i> Way too chaotic due to high population density; pandemonium; At the same time there are responses that the city is empty of people and looks abandoned; nationalism and overall unfriendliness;</p>
<b>NATURE</b>	Parks; sea; the city canal; the river of Daugava; woods
<b>FOOD</b>	Unique dishes; a lot of nice places to eat; delicious food and affordable prices; restaurants
<b>CLEANNESSTHE CITY</b>	<p><i>In a positive vein:</i> Some participants highlighted that Riga is a well-kept and tidy city</p> <p><i>In a negative vein:</i> There were responses saying that Riga is dirty and stinky, as well as has unpleasant contingent of people in particular places</p>

Thus, from the analysis of the question #10, 10 generic categories were distilled, from which later more exact themes are going to be extracted. The first category ‘Sense of the city’ includes statements and words, which were used for describing emotional and sensory perceptions of the city. Despite, some participants used tangible units (e.g. tramlines) for passing the Riga’s atmosphere. The second category is named ‘Capitalness of the city’. A word ‘capitalness’ is derivative from a noun ‘capital’ and means “the quality or state of being” (The Merriam-Webster.com Dictionary, n.d.). Thus, the current category includes

aspects that participants ascribed to Riga because it is the capital (e.g. better opportunities; work and study possibilities etc.). The third category that was formed is 'Infrastructure', and implies the physical systems of the city, namely the city's organization, roads, and public communication. The next category, which is self-explanatory, is 'Size and Location' of Riga. By turn, this category does not involve any negative statements, the same as the next category – 'History & Culture'. This category was formed from continual reiterations of the city's historical and cultural aspects. The category 'Architecture' was single out from the latter mentioned group due to multiple mentions, and involves both negative and positive aspects regarding Riga's buildings and their states. Further, the category 'Population Density and People' was revealed, which covers statements concerning residents of the city, their mindsets and displays, as well as sensations regarding the amount of people within the city. The previous category involves contradictory statements as well. The last self-explanatory categories involve 'Nature', 'Food' and 'Cleanliness of the city'.

The next analyzed question is #14, which asked participants to share their suggestions and ideas for making the city of Riga a greater place. The current question was included for two reasons: (1) firstly, the author assumes that by asking locals' suggestions, people will write issues that bother them the most; thus, their hidden needs might be revealed, which might compose place identities; (2) before posting the questionnaire, the author had misgivings that participants could give obscure answers and comments to the other questions, when emotional undertone of the answer will not be clear. For example, in the latter question #10, where participants were asked to write the distinguishing features of Riga, some people gave curt answers, like 'people', 'roads', 'pace of life' etc. Thus, it is challenging to label such answers as complimentary or non-complimentary. Besides, some of such answers could be sarcastic (e.g. 'roads'). Therefore, by asking locals' to share their suggestions and ideas, the research hoped to get better clarification of negativities. However, in reality, the majority of answers were definite. All comments were thoroughly scrutinized and the most continual suggestions were grouped:

#### URBAN AND INFRASTRUCTURE SUGGESTIONS

IDEAS/SUGGESTIONS	Context
<b>MAKE THE CITY GREENER</b>	"Take care of woods and parks"; "the city is way to gray - make it more attractive and greener"; "arrangement of green spaces in parks and yards"; "increase sustainability - forbid plastic"; "If you cut down a tree – plant a new one!"
<b>CLEAN UP THE CITY</b>	"City is quiet dirty"; "get rid of trash"; "clean up the shores"; "adopt trash sorting"; "solve the problem with homeless people and Gipsies"; "air control";

<b>IMPROVE PUBLIC TRANSPORT</b>	“Increase amount of roads for cycling”; “make twenty-four-hour public transport”; “create more lines for public transport”; “change or improve the payment system for public transport”; “make public transport cleaner and more organized”
<b>FIX THE ROADS AND BUILDINGS</b>	“Roads are in bad conditions - fix them”; “fix buildings in the center and near it”; “renew old buildings”; “there is a need to fix roads fastly and qualitatively”; “dismantle useless and inapplicable buildings”
<b>EQUALIZE URBAN DEVELOPMENT</b>	“City center is more or less nice, but 3-5km away and you see terrible blocks”; “bringing more activities and life to the residential areas”; “build new residential districts”; “all interesting and entertaining places should NOT be located only in the city center”; “invest into urban districts - make it a part of the city”; “make more excursions around the whole city (not only the Old Town) “
<b>DEVELOP BETTER INFRASTRUCTURE</b>	“More guides for tourists”; “translate signs to English”; “better infrastructure for visitors”; “relieve roads from cars - increase walkability of the city”; “create more parking lots”

#### **ENTERTAINMENT AND PLACES SUGGESTIONS**

<b>CREATE MORE ACTIVITIES AND EVENTS</b>	“Conduct more free events as shows, music festivals, master classes, conferences etc.”; “create more events”; “more discos”; “put more decorations on the streets”; “more outdoor events”; “get top singers/specialists/artists involved into Latvian events”
<b>CREATE NEW PLACES</b>	“Create more places for youngsters as social clubs”; “create spaces where people could spend their time in case of bad weather (besides coffee shops and restaurants)”; “create more entertaining centers”; “build an amusement park”;

#### **ECONOMICAL SUGGESTIONS**

<b>DEVELOP BUSINESS ENVIRONMENT</b>	“Create available and affordable conditions for international businesses”; “support small and medium enterprises”; “attract international investments”; “attract new international companies”
<b>CREATE MORE OPPORTUNITIES REGARDING WORK PLACES</b>	“There are not enough possibilities for skilled professionals”; “develop new sectors, such as gaming industry or film industry etc.”
<b>INCREASE QUALITY OF LIFE</b>	“Increase wages”; “Make the property more affordable, especially for young families”; “Increase safety”

It should be mentioned that a few responses touched upon political suggestions; however, they were not included in the categories due to a conflict of interests between ethnic Latvians and the Russian-speaking

minority of Riga. Therefore, they cannot be considered as mutual suggestions — the only common ideas among both sides regarding politics applied to the necessity to change the government.

Further, by repeatedly reading comments regarding suggestions, it became possible to distil hidden peculiarities of the place, and form new categories. These are displayed below, as well as context from which they arose:

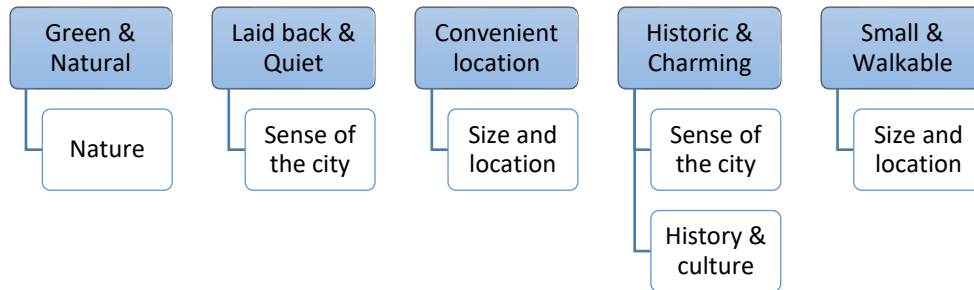
NEW CATEGORIES	CONTEXT
<b>ECOLOGY</b>	“Increase sustainability - forbid plastic”; “If you cut down a tree – plant a new one!”; “clean up the shores”; “no littering on streets”; “clean up after your dog”; “adopt trash sorting”
<b>UNSAFETY</b>	“Increase safety”; “increase safety in residential areas”; “tourists feel here unsafe, because they can be tricked”; “I do not feel myself always safe”

Afterwards, the open question #11 was analyzed, which asked participants to write a famous person, whose “personality” associates with the city of Riga. Initially, the question regarding place-personality associations were of interest due to widespread practices to use celebrity endorsement (or celebrity branding) in place branding (Ashworth & Kavaratzis, 2010). It is argued that “[...] if someone we know and recognize, if not respect, for achievement in some field, endorses the place then we are likely to feel encouraged to do likewise” (Ashworth & Kavaratzis, 2010, p. 227). However, it should be noted that the usage of celebrity is not adding value to the place (Ashworth & Kavaratzis, 2010). Nevertheless, it is argued that the famous individual might increase place recognition, as well as reveal a regional identity (Ashworth & Kavaratzis, 2010). Considering the main topic of the present study, namely place identities of Riga, the inclusion of the appropriate celebrity might help with the latter benefit. Taking into account that Riga as a city does not have a single defined celebrity involved into the city’s marketing strategy, it was exciting to find out whom locals’ associate Riga with, so that, by using the inside out approach, a regional identity could be marked out. The top three persons, whom participators voted for, are a Latvian singer Laima Vaikule (13 votes), the ex-mayor of the City of Riga – Nil Ushakov (25 votes), and a Latvian composer – Raimond Pauls (52 votes). Importantly, in multiple cases the ex-mayor of Riga (who was receiving support from the Russian-speaking minority) was mentioned due to negative associations among ethnic Latvians. Therefore, it would not be suggested to involve the current individual into the marketing and branding strategies. In turn, the current finding in combination with some answers from the previous questions, vividly displays the potential place identity, namely *disunity* of residents.

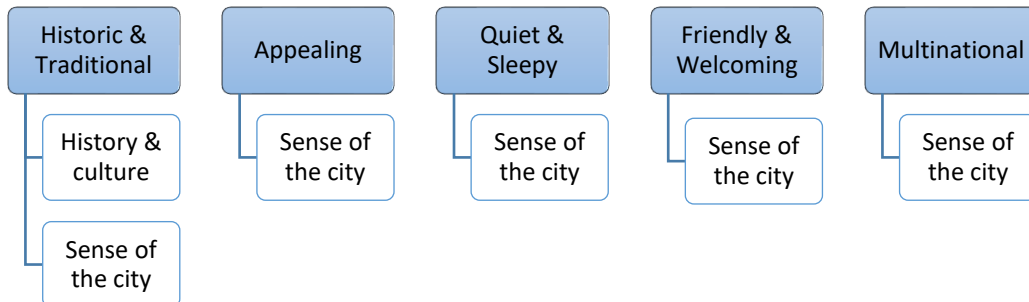
Notwithstanding, a famous Latvian composer, namely Raimond Pauls, could be considered as a perfect candidate due to deriving mutual encouragement from both groups. Meanwhile, looking at all answers for the current question, it can be concluded that Riga is mainly associated with cultural figures (e.g. singers and poets), as well as men of science. Thus, the findings enhance the already established category of ‘Culture and History’.

By examining all other closed questions, it was concluded that the most voted answers enhance the already existing categories. It was decided to consider top four (in some cases five) answers in each closed question for considering the opinions of the majority. The following schemes show the top voted answers’ distribution to categories, where the top answers are marked in blue, while the categories – in white.

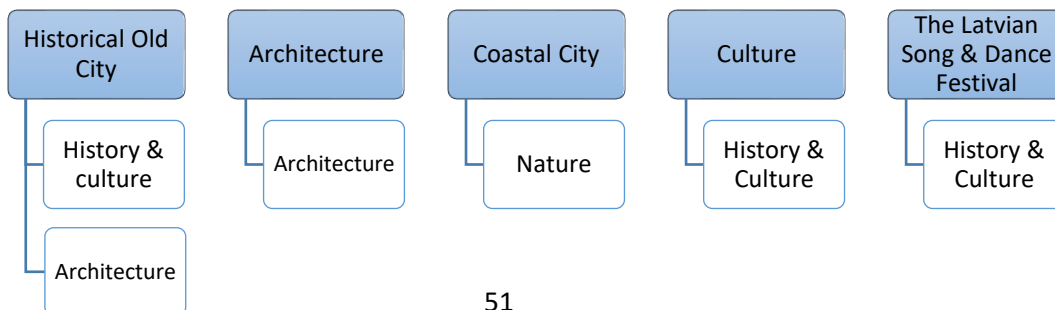
**Question #8: What descriptions immediately pop up in your mind, thinking about your favorite Riga’s characteristics?**



**Question #9: How would you describe the “personality” of Riga?**

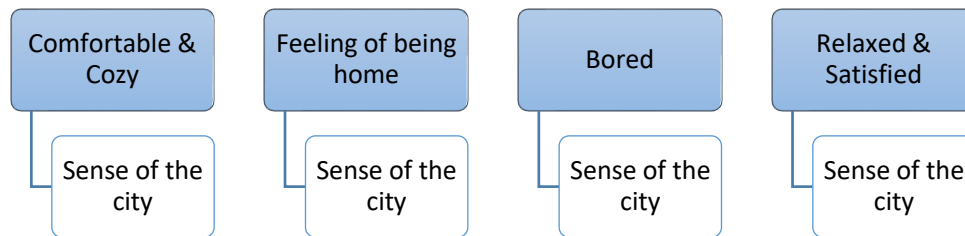


**Question #12: What, in your opinion, is the greatest asset of The City of Riga?**





**Question #13: How would you describe your emotional state that you most frequently experience in Riga?**



Concluding, 12 categories were formed from the questionnaire data, as well as a place identity – *disunity*.

### 7.3. Extracting place identities of Riga

As the next step, for revealing multiple place identities of the city of Riga, the formed categories are going to be examined in combination with the data from the interview and focus groups.

According to researchers, the most important aspects of the city for locals are its cleanliness and safety, work and study possibilities, qualitative social services as infrastructure, culture, health and social care, shopping and recreation facilities (Grizāns & Vanags, 2010). Interestingly, participators of the focus groups and the questionnaire often referred to the aforementioned aspects. To start with, the most strongly pronounced categories are going to be analyzed first.

#### **Infrastructure**

Speaking about infrastructure, participators referred to roads, the public transport, as well as cycling roads and bridges. Therefore, considering the complexity of the term, the participants were speaking about hard infrastructure, meaning the physical systems of the city (Chappelow, 2019). Already from the questionnaire results the category 'Infrastructure' was formed due to multiple mentions. The questionnaire respondents marked out the neglected state of roads and bridges, lack of cycling roads and unorganized public transport. Nevertheless, on the contrary several respondents mentioned the city's public transport in the positive vein. Thus, the focus groups helped to clear up confusions regarding the hard infrastructure of Riga.

Unfortunately, both groups mentioned the need to improve the state of roads within the city as they are in a sorry plight, as well as the lack of cycling roads and the public communication were mentioned in the negative vein:

[P6]: Also, thinking about residents and tourists, there is a need to develop infrastructure and public transport facilities in general. Besides, it would be great to add more cycling roads, as the need for them is increasing among locals.

[P8]: I also want to express my view towards the biking I do hope that this will improve throughout the years, but at the moment the city is still very bike-unfriendly.

[P7]: Public transport facilities and infrastructure are, in general, a sore point. It would be nice to better them: make transport evenly accessible, cheaper, and precise.

Notwithstanding, it was revealed that the public communication within the center is running adequately, but farther from it – poorer:

[P1]: We were just speaking about the city center and that everything is concentrated there, and unfortunately, it applies to the development of the infrastructure. The further is the residential district; so much the worse is the availability of public transport.

[P3]: I have experience in living in different parts of the city: in the city center and the residential districts. That is true that the further you are - the worse is the communication.

Therefore, considering that place identities are communicated through both tangible and intangible place components (Baxter et al., 2013), the vast amount of comments on the ‘infrastructure’ category could not be neglected; therefore, the non-complementary identity was distilled, namely the *backward hard infrastructure*.

### ***Architecture***

After reviewing transcripts and open comments, it became clear that participants divide the category ‘Architecture’ into two groups: (1) architectural heritages and (2) generic buildings. Thus, the first group tinged with positivity, while the second group is usually mentioned in a negative tone. Speaking about architectural heritages, people mentioned churches and various monuments, as well as famous Art Nouveau, which is highly common in Riga’s architecture:

[PM]: Of course, the Art Nouveau architecture in Riga is a “wow” for many guests.

[P3]: The tourism bureau is doing right presenting old-age architecture and buildings – it is Riga, and it is a right angle! Maybe not the only one, but a vivid one.

Some of participants mentioned the omitted wooden architecture in the remoted from the center districts that, in their opinions, add value to Riga's authenticity. However, the only contradictory statements regarding architectural heritage concern the Soviet architecture:

**[Open Comment]** (hereinafter [OC]): There is a need to get rid of the awful Soviet buildings and monuments.

**[OC]**: The Soviet architecture should not be annihilated, as it bears historical meaning, as well as presents huge interest from tourists' side.

Despite the conflicting opinions, the Soviet architecture still applies equally to physical communication of the city along with others architectural styles. Besides, the diversity of the place's architecture and its significance to locals can be linked to Riga's place identities by being *architectural*.

Proceeding with the second group, namely ordinary buildings and constructions of the city, it should be said that the current group was mainly mentioned with negative implications. The multiple open comments highlight the presence of numerous buildings in a desolate condition around the city, and the necessity of their renovation. The participants of the focus groups agreed on that:

**[P7]**: It would be great to arrange a general view of the city nicely, including facades of buildings.

**[P4]**: [...] everything is old and not maintained. At least, it would be nice to renew old buildings; it would change the appearance of the city.

Thus, considering the amount of mentions concerning the state of buildings, another non-complimentary place identity of Riga was extracted, namely *shabby*. In addition, by reviewing all additional comments to closed questions ('Other'), as well as answers to the open questions, it was marked out that numerous times participators mentioned that the city is *neglected* in various terms, including buildings, roads, parks, and senses (e.g. feels to be neglected, abandoned). Therefore, the distilled identity covers various negative aspects of the city.

### ***Sense of the city***

Speaking about the category 'Sense of the city', the author faced difficulties to extract one and only place identity that would describe the city in terms of feelings, as each person had unique sensations of Riga. Nevertheless, some commonalities were found. Firstly, several respondents of the questionnaire, as well as participators of the focus groups mentioned that Riga has its own *charm*:

**[P5]:** The first word that pops up in my mind is the 'charm'. Riga is charm!

**[P3]:** [...] it is beautiful, cozy, has its own charm.

**[P2]:** [...] for me, Riga's charm means aesthetics – the city is pleasant for your eyes and ears.

Through the discussions, it became clear that under the notion 'charm' participants also meant the magic atmosphere and special spirit of the city, aesthetics, and its beauty. Thus, another place identity was identified, namely that the city of Riga is *charming*.

Proceeding, another continual sense for describing Riga was found, namely sense of *coziness*. The distilled word also comprises such pleasant sensations and senses as being warm and home, sweet, native and authentic.

**[P5]:** In my case, it is probably melancholic coziness. I have a picture in my head that I am sitting on a windowsill, drinking tea, and looking outside. It is calm and peaceful. Or, when I am walking in the Old Town, I feel some kind of sweet feeling... Riga is sweet.

**[P2]:** [...] Riga is 'lampovaya' [a slang word]. Riga is as mild and warm lightning from an abat-jour lamp! There is something authentic, something personal and native.

The next distilled sense is *melancholy*, but in a good vein. People highlighted that Riga is unhurried, and possess the sense of nostalgia, phlegm and aesthetic sadness:

**[P2]:** Well, Riga is not sunny and is melancholic, but it is not bad! Some people love that! Here is some nostalgia in the air.

**[P7]:** For me, it is rather sad and melancholic.

**[OC]:** There is aesthetic of sadness and sorrow (in the finest sense of the words).

**[P4]:** Riga, for me, is enigmatic, as well as phlegmatic. And also reserved, but not in a bad way. To genuinely understand the city, you need some time and maybe even an effort to be able to see Riga's gems. And again, it is not bad! Riga's locals and in general, Latvians are like that, and the city is reflecting that.

Nevertheless, sufficient amount of people marked out that they feel boredom in Riga. The latter statement found its ground in the lack of events, spaces for pastime and relaxation:

[P2]: In that context, Riga for me is boring. If you want to get out, you basically have just a few options: the Old City with its coffee shops and restaurants, and shopping centers. Only consumer activities! It would be great to have an amusement or theme park.

[OC]: Create some spaces (besides coffee shops and restaurants) for activities in case of the bad weather.

Thus, the forth place identity within the current category was distilled, namely that the city of Riga is *boring*.

### ***Nature and Ecology***

Another strongly pronounced category that brought up lively discussion concerning nature. Already from the questionnaire, it became understandable that locals value the proximity of nature to the city and its environmental surroundings, willing to make Riga even greener. Thus, the focus groups supported the findings by highlighting that nature is the city's asset. Participants were mentioning woods, the proximity to the sea, numerous nature trails and parks.

However, interestingly, that the theme of eco-friendliness arose as well, confirming the revealed category 'Ecology' above:

[P5]: Riga is an environmentally friendly and VERY cultural capital. [...] Recently a new zero waste shop was opened and it commands popularity from locals.

[P7]: People are aspiring to bio- and eco- life.

[P6]: In general, Riga (and Latvia) has great potential regarding sustainable tourism.

The presented statements resonate with the interviewed manager's claim that guests often come to Riga pursuing sustainable and eco-friendly stay. In-turn, it can be argued that the found link of the mutual interest between locals and guests might be used by the officials for the further development of successful place branding strategies. Concluding, two place identities were revealed from the current category, namely *natural* and *eco-friendliness*.

### ***History & Culture***

Next in significance goes the category concerning the city's history and culture. The current category attracted intent attention, and clearly marked the link between historical-cultural aspects and people's identities. Thus, the statement of Anholt (2007) that place strategies should be dug out of the place's

culture, history and its society was empirically confirmed. Participants were not mentioning historical events in a perfunctory manner, but rather connect them with their personal feelings:

**[P8]:** The history should be highlighted more! How proud we are to live in a free country today. That many people fought for Riga to be the city it is today.

**[P7]:** I feel the power! Riga is strong and powerful because of its history. I would say that there are even some feelings of roughness.

Even though that the aim of the present study is to focus on commonalities between two ethnic groups (ethnic Latvians and the Russian-speaking minority), ostensible differences should not be disregarded. Thus, it was observed that the close link between historical events and personal identities was more peculiar to the ethnic Latvian focus group, as well as respondents of Latvian version survey. Meanwhile, participators that belonged to the Russian-speaking minority mostly mentioned history as a state of affairs or accomplished facts:

**[P2]:** Taking the history, Latvia was always under somebody's control – Sweden, Germany, and Russia – and there were infringements of Latvian traditions, culture, and language.

Moreover, by reviewing answers for open questions from the Russian version survey, it was found out that most frequently participators referred to physical displays of history, implying historical heritages and events, ancient architecture, age-old buildings, and famous people. Thus, it might be assumed that groups possess different emotional bond towards the place, meaning that place attachment of ethnic Latvians differ from the Russian-speaking minority. Nevertheless, despite discrepancies, both groups admitted the presence of *rich history* in one way, or the other.

Speaking about culture, participators were constant in their opinions. Both focus groups stressed out rich and versatile cultural life of the city, which seems not to be disclosed enough to external audiences:

**[P7]:** Culture – that what should be portrayed, and not superficially by just quickly showing the National Opera House, but much more comprehensive. We have Baltā Nakts [translate: The White Night, an yearly event when all Riga's museums are free and open until late hours], Baznīcu nakts [translate: The Church Night, when all churches are open for visitors and have prepared cultural programs], Staro Rīga [a yearly light festival], Skaņu Mežs [a yearly musical festival] and so much more. [...] Recently we had an amazing performance from the group of artists that covered social problems [...]. At a pinch, it is a crucial part of Riga's local culture.

Participants were mentioning open-air concerts, various closed events around the city, locals markets and sport activities, cinema nights and frequent comings of different theatre groups. Thus, one more distilled place identity reads as follows: *versatile cultural life*.

### ***Population density & People***

The current category got quiet contradictory answers in the survey, saying that Riga is calm and tranquil due to small amount of residents, even seems to be abandoned here and there. At the same time people stated that, the city is lively and chaotic due to high population density. Unfortunately, the focus groups did not clear up the situation, as opinions differed and were rather laconic. Some stated that they do not feel that population density in Riga is high; however, marked out that during rush hours it can be felt. Others claimed that there is considerable number of people in the city, although not critical. Thus, considering that no more or less mutual characteristic was found, it was concluded that there is no place identity rooted in population density of Riga.

However, participators actively discussed locals of the city. Thus, it was found out that participators see Riga's locals as being innovative, as well as from the open comments it was distilled that locals have spirit of enterprise:

**[P5]:** We are innovative! There are regular hackathons, and TechHubs happen, which are covered by foreign media as well. In general, we have a well-developed IT sector.

**[P3]:** Riga is truly the place of meeting for creative people, thanks to whom a lot of innovative concepts and projects are created, but not many people – foreigners and locals – know about that. To some extent, Riga can be demonstrated as a city of innovation!

**[P2]:** There are many fields in which Riga (and Latvia as a whole) is succeeding and making significant advancements, but just a few people know about that. Let us take pharmaceuticals, engineering, IT developments - Latvia makes a valuable contribution to these spheres, but somehow it is not known and shared within the society!

**[OC]:** Create available and affordable conditions for international businesses; support small and medium enterprises; attract new international companies.

Several participators marked out that Riga indeed possess multinational environment as it was highlighted in the survey due to historical events, as well as multi-language environment:

**[P6]:** Riga's residents, as all Latvians, initially are growing up and living in a pretty international environment. Thus, nobody is disturbed by other languages.

**[P3]:** For me, Riga is creative and innovative, as well as multinational, [...]. We have a great mix of cultures and ethnicities in here.

Moreover, participants highlighted that Riga's locals are creative:

**[P4]:** Latvians are creative and stand out with their vivid style of dress.

**[P7]:** We have a significant number of young designers and artists, and the same amount comes to Riga for participating in exhibitions.

**[P2]:** We DO have creative and innovative people, but what we do not have – the necessary economic support.

Speaking further, it was figured out that Riga could be perceived as an active city, while locals as sporty and mobile. The latter is especially noticeable in people's desires to make the city more active-oriented:

**[P7]:** We are fitness-minded. We are sporty! We have various big marathons and activities.

**[OC]:** Increase amount of roads for cycling; bring more activities and life to the residential areas; increase walkability of the city; suggestions to create more spaces and places; create more activities for physically active people; create more sports events

During the discussions, the topic of globalization was brought up, and participants expressed their opinions saying that due to historical events, as well as economical state of the country, the Riga's locals proceed to be inward-concentrated and local, as well as reserved:

**[PM]:** I somehow would agree that we are still focused inwards than outwards towards an international image.

**[P6]:** We cannot sit in the box, so we need to develop and globalize in order to be in line with the other world. However, what I can see, is that any attempts for globalization are taken aggressively from the residents' side because usually, the flagship projects aimed at globalization cost an insane amount of money... And people do not like, consequently do not support it.

**[P5]:** Unfortunately, it feels that theoretically, we would like to be global; however, we are not ready for that.



The presented statement resonates with Anholt's (2008) claim that Latvians are not willing to become international (global), but rather stay local. Thus, the following place identities were extracted: *innovative, multinational, creative, sporty* and *reserved*.

### ***Capitalness of the city***

From the questionnaire's answers, it became evident that Riga is a priori distinctive because of being the capital. People marked out the wider work and study possibilities in the city. During the discussions, the mentioned aspects were confirmed; however, it became clear that these features are not perceived as competitive identities and go without saying. Besides, participators stressed out other aspects as well:

**[P6]:** Well, I would (compare Riga with) 'Big Apple' (laughing). The same as New York in the USA is called 'Big Apple', I would name like that Riga in the context of Latvia. People from all over the country flock here... It is not meant to be wrong! However, every apple can have its worms (laughing). What I mean by that is, being originally from a small town, I was dreaming of moving to Riga for studies and a prestige work, but then you just meet the reality.

Throughout the discussion, participants were mentioning poor economical state of the country in general, what in turn influences on multiple other aspects, as well as the need to move to Riga. Difficulties for some people to find jobs in particular fields were mentioned as well.

**[P2]:** Because here is, still no thriving and favorable environment, as well as needed support. We DO have creative and innovative people, but what we do not have – the necessary economic support. People are limited in their manifestations because there might be no needed assets for them, as well as the majority of businesses are not making it even to the end of their first year of existence... way too harsh taxes.

In addition, participators mentioned the problems with omnipresent corruption, taking as an example domestic policy and the recent scandal with 'Live Riga'. Thus, another place identity was extracted, namely *poor economic conditions*.

### ***Size and location***

In the discussion, it was decided unanimously that Riga is a small city, what consequently leads to its walkability. The latter feature was highlighted by the survey's respondents as well, stating that they appreciate Riga for being a walkable, and small city.

**[P8]:** For me it is good, because in that case it does not lose its coziness.

**[P5]:** I would say that Riga is perfect in its size: not too big, not too small. The most important that it is walkable, you can reach different places even being on feet. It is not like Moscow or New York, and, in my opinion, it is Riga's advantage.

Nevertheless, the city's size can be also seen as a disadvantage for some residents. Thus, the interviewed project manager assumed:

**[PM]:** For younger inhabitants I believe the city seems to be too small for big dreams, so they tend to choose studies and life abroad.

Covering the city's location, the participators were laconic in their answers, admitting that Riga (alike Latvia) indeed has convenient geographical location within Europe, giving greater possibilities for travelling. The same was highlighted by the several questionnaire's respondents:

**[OC]:** Riga has convenient location - "just golden mean".

**[PM]:** Top highlights and reasons for clients to visit us are: [...], easy logistics from the airport to Riga and vice versa, city logistics are also easy with water boarders for the Old town, creative/unique approach to transfers from A to B, Riga is close to the Baltic sea.

Therefore, considering the all above mentioned, three place identities were revealed, namely that Riga is *small*, *walkable* and has great *accessibility*, meaning convenient geographical location.

### ***Cleanliness of the city***

The present category received variegated answers both from the survey's respondents and from the focus groups' participators. Thus, some respondents claimed that Riga is a clean and well-kept capital; meanwhile, others mentioned that the city is untidy. During the conversations, the thoughts of participators were polar:

**[P3]:** Proceeding the topic about the attitude of people to the shared space, I think the significant difference is seen when you compare Riga with other foreign cities. In other countries, locals are not polluting and taking care of their spaces.

**[P2]:** Are you kidding? Riga is a very tidy city if you compare it to other counties. I had a lot of talks with foreigners, where people were openly saying to me how clean Riga is. Comparing it to Paris

or Madrid ... (sigh) There is an incredible difference! And, by the way, Riga is ranked as a top city regarding tidiness.

Indeed, the officials claim that Riga is notable by its cleanliness, as well as, according to the statistics, 81% of Riga's residents are satisfied with the city's cleanness (The City Development Department, 2018; Eurostat, 2018). Moreover, the latter quotation coincides with the statement of the project manager:

**[PM]:** I was very surprised to hear that we have a very clean capital city compared to the middle and south Europe until I had seen it myself. We really do!

Nevertheless, the utterances concerning untidiness of Riga cannot be disregarded. Thus, the comments were checked once again. It was revealed that some comments were aimed at particular places (such as the Central Station and Central Market), where, according to respondents, unpleasant contingent of people can be met. Besides, a few comments were generic and aimed at the overall appearance of the city. However, there were still answers that would claim that the city is untidy. Therefore, the following quote cleared up a possible reason of polar views:

**[P1]:** I should say that the neatness of Riga is also relative within the city itself. Speaking about new ready-built parts, modern districts, or the city center – yes, they are clean. However, considering the old city parts or places with pandemonium – unfortunately, they are dirty for me, and sometimes even filthy.

Thus, considering strong opinions of both sides, it was decided to extract two mutually exclusive place identities, namely that Riga is *clean* and *untidy* simultaneously. According to Baxter and her colleagues (2013), it is acceptable to have contradictory place identities within the identity-set.

### **Food**

Interestingly, that the 'Food' category was not been in great favor, meaning that nor the survey's respondents nor participants were referring to it frequently. Only one participant of the focus groups out of eight mentioned national food as a distinctive feature of Riga. Others were referring to street food events, and restaurants more in terms of local places and events. This runs counter to the project manager's statement that local food is a competitive advantage of Riga:

**[PM]:** Top highlights and reasons for clients to visit us are delicious local food.

Thus, not finding the corroboration of manager's words in locals' statements, it was decided not to include food as one of place identities of Riga.

### ***Unsafety***

The last and most least referred to category concerning safety within the city. The current category was formed from suggestions of respondents for making the city better place. Nevertheless, participators of the focus groups did not mention problems with safety on streets and any crime issues. The only statement regarding safety was linked to infrastructure problems:

**[P6]:** Even from the point of safety, there are so many cars around the houses, that it is difficult for a fire truck or an ambulance to park near in case of need.

Otherwise, by asking participants directly regarding their safety feelings, the author got short and laconic answers that they feel themselves quiet safe on the streets. In turn, that confirms the statistics concerning low crime rate in Riga (The City Development Department, 2018). Nevertheless, participators did not deny possibilities to be pickpocketed in some places. Therefore, it was decided not to distil any identities from the current category due to the fact that participators left the subject out from the discussions, as well as because just a few desires were mentioned regarding the city safety.

Concluding, from analyzing the received primary data, the author distilled 23 place identities of Riga, which include both complimentary, non-complimentary, as well as incongruous identities. In the next chapter, the discussion of the Riga's identity-set is presented.

## 8. Discussion: the application of the identity-set

By analyzing the primary data, 23 place identities of Riga were extracted. The author tried to extract pure and one-sided identities; however, as Baxter and her colleagues (2013) highlighted in their work, it is acceptable to have identities that are constructed both on negative and positive associations. Following the model of researchers, the identity-set that is held by Riga's locals looks as follows:

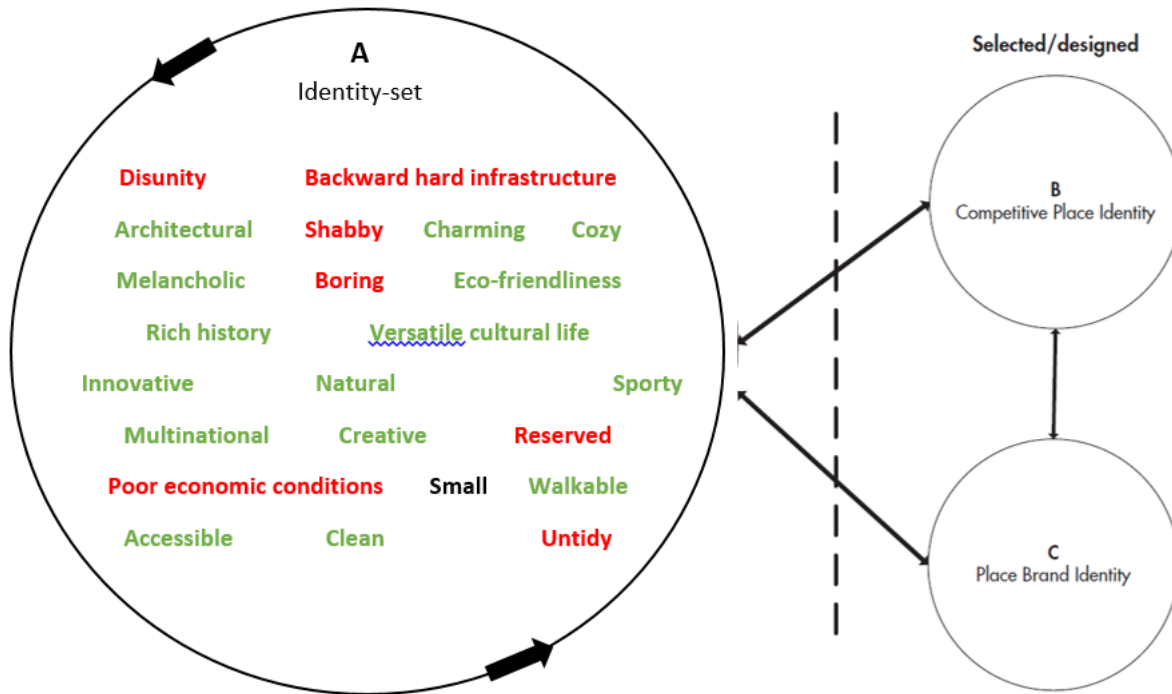


Figure 16: Riga's identity-set, and its relation to competitive identity and brand identity (adapted from Baxter et al., 2013, p. 1085 and partly self-made)

For easier orientation place identities were marked with green color in case if positive associations were prevailing; with red color – if negative associations were predominating, and with black – in case of the neutral emotional undertone of the associations. Importantly, the circle's 'A' contours are marked with the arrow signs, showing that “[...] place identity is not fixed but fluid, and dynamic” (Baxter et al., 2013, p. 1084). Thus, being consistent with the reviewed literature and the statement above, the Riga's identity-set might alter with the lapse of time under the external and internal influences. Thus, Kalandides (2011) with Kerr and Oliver (2015) claimed that due to fluidity of place identities there is a need for constant monitoring of changes.

According to the researchers, in order to avoid risks, the officials should select the competitive place identity ('B') and design the place brand identity ('C') as approximative to the identity-set as possible (Baxter et al., 2013). Unfortunately, considering that Riga as a city does not possess the concrete place branding strategy at the moment, as well as that the DMO transmits diverse messages, it is challenging to examine relationships between the identity set ('A') and both the competitive identity ('B') and the brand identity ('C') due to fact that they are still not selected and designed. Nevertheless, for applying the full model, it was decided to utilize the determined motto of Riga, that is written down in the Sustainable

Development Strategy of the city until 2030 (The City Development Department, 2014), and that reads as follows: Riga — the city of opportunities. In the report, it is explained that the current motto implies:

*that the municipality creates diverse opportunities for those who are living, working, learning, studying here or who have come here to spend holidays or on business to attain endless growth by building one's own dreams and ideas and making them come true without contradicting the interests of society* (The City Development Department, 2014, p. 11).

Thus, by following the example of Baxter and her colleagues (2013), in this case the both competitive identity ('B') and the place brand identity ('C') of Riga would stand for 'City of Opportunities'. In that case, taking into account the explanation of motto, a gap between the identity-set and the both competitive identity ('B') and the place brand identity ('C') can be demonstrated. Firstly, locals do not hold such associations towards the city as 'Potential' or 'Opportunity' for the time being. Secondly, splitting up the motto's explanation and focusing on working and business opportunities, such place identities as 'poor economic conditions', 'reserved' and 'backward hard infrastructure' would contradict with hypothetical competitive and brand identities. Besides, the discussed above residents' associations that the city is still unglobalized and can be perceived as being local, as well as rough rules concerning new businesses, would enhance the gap between the identity set and both competitive identity and the place brand identity. The overall diversification of the local economy runs counter to the conjectural identities. On the other hand, such associations as 'innovative', 'accessible' and 'multinational' play into the hands of the officials, and the designed motto. Speaking about living and studying opportunities, it should be considered that the survey's respondents marked the affordability of the city's property, as well as its fit for raising a family as least distinctive. However, a few comments were indeed saying that Riga gives possibilities for studies. Nevertheless, there were no specific mentions regarding living or studying topics during the focus groups. Yet, such revealed associations as 'accessible', 'small', 'walkable', 'cozy' and 'eco-friendly' might enhance and be in line with the conjectural competitive and brand identities.

The described above hypothetical situation shows the importance of revealing the identity-set before establishing the place brand strategy, considering the mentioned power of a place's locals. However, as researchers pointed out, the competitive and brand identities might be aspirational, what means that there will be initial mismatch with the identity-set (Baxter et al., 2013). Thus, to be critical, it should be stressed out that in the current conjectural case, there is a shortcoming, as the locals were not initially influenced by any strategic approaches. Considering that views of identity holders are also shaped by

strategic choices (Baxter et al., 2013), in reality the identity-set could differ from the current one, which by-turn would coincide with the hypothetical competitive and brand identities.

Despite that the current thesis focuses only on internal identities of the city, it should be acknowledged that for the creation of the comprehensive place brand a market analysis needs to be conducted too, as “[...] there needs to be alignment with internal resources and capabilities so that unconditional responses are not confusing for both the place and the market” (Baxter et al., 2013, p. 1086; Urde, 1999).

## 9. Conclusion

The general topic of the current thesis is place branding and a place’s stakeholders, namely locals of the place. After reviewing the literature, it became obvious that internal audiences of a place should play a crucial role in the creation of the place branding strategies (Vallaster et al., 2018). Nevertheless, according to researches, the officials and municipalities are still proceeding to focus more on the external audiences (e.g. tourists), omitting the role of a place’s residents (Braun et al., 2013; Vallaster et al., 2018; Jørgensen, 2015). Thus, the author got curious in understanding how Riga’s locals and residents see and perceive their city, as being an insider and having the pre-understanding of the matter, the author had an initial assumption that the role of Riga’s locals within the city’s branding is neglected. Later, after scrutinizing the topic, the supposition was confirmed. Therefore, the laconic research question was established, namely *‘How Riga’s locals perceive and see their city?’*.

Further, examining the literature, the concept of identity was found that is concerned with “the qualities which make an individual, or place, capable of being specified or singled out, which make it unique and separate” (Erickson & Roberts, 1997, p. 36). Meanwhile, this greatly coincides with the main reason of the place branding strategies adoption, namely to become notable and distinguish oneself on the market (Zenker & Beckmann, 2013). Importantly, the concept of identity is applicable to places, in-turn coining the concept of place identity, where it is considered that the identity-holders are locals of the place (Kerr & Oliver, 2015). Moreover, after studying the literature on place branding, it became clear that the starting point of a successful place brand has to be rooted in the place’s identities (Baxter et al., 2013; Ločmele & Moustien, 2016). Thus, the initial author’s interests in place branding and the involvement of locals in its processes, merged into the concept of place identity.

For structuring the current studies, the conceptual framework was implemented that included the researches and the model regarding place identities (Baxter et al., 2013; Kavartzis & Hatch, 2013; Kerr & Oliver, 2015), which were greatly used for the present case. According to mentioned researchers, a place

possess many various place identities simultaneously that can be both complimentary, non-complimentary, and even contradictory, forming the identity-set. Thus, by studying the secondary data, and gathering the primary data through the in-depth interview, the online questionnaire and two focus groups, the identity-set of Riga was discovered, as well as the knowledge regarding Riga's place branding was gained. The answer to established research question and the main findings were found to consist of several aspects.

First and foremost, after examining the current state of the city's place branding, it was concluded that it is still in its infancy, and undergoing the process of formation. Despite the perceptible attempts to link the city's image to internal audiences (e.g. the award-winning promotional videos "Insider's Guide to Riga"), the officials proceed to omit the direct involvement of insiders into the processes. Thus, notwithstanding the small number of participants, it was revealed that seven out of eight Riga's locals do not perceive the new promotional campaign as a trustworthy, considering the protestation that videos are showing the city from the insiders' angle. The current reaction can be explained by the lack of regarding the real locals' perception of their city. Therefore, the promotional videos are still based on managerial opinions and show the city through the officials' lens.

After analyzing the received data and combining data from different sources, the identity-set of Riga happened to consist of 23 place identities, which include contradictory, and both positive and negative identities. So, relying on the gained primary data, the following identities were extracted, which show how Riga's locals see and perceive the city:

Thus, the locals perceive Riga as a *charming, melancholic* and *cozy* place, where people are *innovative, sporty* and *creative*. The great importance was given to the natural surroundings of the city, making Riga a *natural* and *eco-friendly* place. All participants highlighted *rich history, versatile cultural life* and distinguishing *architecture* of Riga as being assets of the place. Due to *small* size of the city, Riga is *walkable*, as well as due to its geographical location - *accessible*. Other complementary identities include the city's *cleanliness* and being *multinational*. Unfortunately, Riga possess such identity as *disunity* of the society due to historical events. Also, the *poor economic conditions* were mentioned, as well as *backward hard infrastructure*. All participants mentioned *shabby* appearance of the city. In addition, it was revealed that Riga's locals are *reserved*, as well as the city can be seen as *untidy* in particular places.

To conclude, the author acknowledges that the current research is not comprehensive enough for providing generalizable data. Thus, it is required to undertake a more complex and broader research,



including more participants in order to completely understand Riga's place identities for their further usage in place branding strategies.

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## Appendix

### Appendix 1. The in-depth interview

The interviewee:  
Senior Project Manager  
Destination Management Company  
Works within incoming MICE (Meetings, Incentives, Conferences, Exhibitions) tourism

*1. Can you please share your thoughts and opinions concerning a place brand of Riga?*

The Riga Tourism Development Bureau Foundation (LIVE RIGA) actively works to make Riga visible, but in my opinion Riga does not have one united place brand which is recognized by locals and our foreign guests. I look at Riga`s current brand differently, more from a foreign guest`s point of view through various reasons of visit. I actually could say that currently Riga is flexible to “wear” various brands due to its diverse tourism possibilities and because the city has not yet gained considerable recognition by specific values, like Romantic Paris with its Eifel tower or Vibrant New York city with its huge networking and business possibilities.

*2. Can you share your ideas and thoughts regarding place branding in general?*

Often clients ask me – “What is Riga known for?” It is a very tough question to which it is impossible to answer in one sentence or few words. Often I say, that Riga has awesome mix of diverse architecture styles, it`s clean and very green, location of the airport is very close, good value for money and city has high-class restaurants and variety of business and luxury hotels.

I believe one created place brand for Riga would really help to stabilize its name locally and through us locals and the brand identify Riga`s essence outside country`s borders. It is important for those who visit us, but more importantly it is for ourselves, inhabitants of Latvia. Yes, Riga is the capital of Latvia – busiest and biggest city of the country, but what is the story behind it? I think most of Latvians have not thought about Riga from a brand perspective.

*3. What do you know about marketing/branding strategy for the city of Riga and how do you assess it?*

Honestly, I do not know much about the branding strategy of the city. There are various activities made by the tourism department of Latvia but for me it seems that they are not linked with each other to gain one specific brand.

The company I work for cooperates with MEET RIGA and LIAA. MEET RIGA specializes into conferences, events and business travel development via various activities. It is the official convention bureau of Riga city and a department of Riga Tourism Development. Likewise, we work with the Investment and Development Agency of Latvia (LIAA).



In a cooperation with both of them, we organize FAM trips once in a few months – it is free or low cost trip for travel agents or consultants to Latvia in order to introduce them with our possibilities for MICE market.

4. *Can you share what usually your customers say about Riga? What kind of expectations they have before coming here? And do they actually meet their expectations?*

Most of the times our clients assume that Latvia is still in the “Soviet time”. Therefore almost in every event we can experience surprised clients whose expectations we have exceeded with our own culture, delicious food and the development of the country since we regained our independence. I was very surprised to hear that we have a very clean capital city compared to the middle and south Europe till I had seen it myself. We really do! Often we receive comments about having the city life next to the nature – a lot of trees, wide river and the sea is close also.

And of course the Art Nouveau architecture in Riga is a “wow” for many guests.

5. *In general, do you think that Riga is underestimated as a destination? Do you believe that there is still hidden tourism potential?*

Yes, of course I believe that we have a potential to become a very known and recognized tourism destination. I think, now the charm of Riga is that it is still unknown, therefore it is exciting to reveal its secrets. Moreover, Riga and Latvia are on guests’ radar, who are interested in sustainable and eco-friendly tourism. Working in this field has shown me that Latvia overall has many awesome qualities that could be turned into a successful tourism product or service, we just need to work on that.

6. *Do you think that it is essential to include locals and residents of a place in branding processes?*

I believe that once a strategy is created, locals and residents should be asked to express their opinion about Riga and its current brand, and also how they feel the city, what they think about the tourism and what would be those aspects we could show to our foreign guests. It is important to also know that inhabitants merge with the created brand, because word of mouth is one of the most powerful tools to boost and sell the image.

7. *What do you think about locals’ perceptions on Riga?*

I feel it is really based of the work sphere, inner emotions and life experience. Also I think age takes a great part of the perception of the city too. From what I have experienced, those people working in the service sector (restaurants, hotels, different kind of activities) are more enthusiastic about Riga as a destination and its possibilities. Mostly is because they all work to welcome tourists, so it’s part of their work and in their interests to keep Riga known. Locals who does not have a direct linkage with foreign guests are perceiving Riga as a vibrant capital – the biggest city in Latvia with the highest possibility to get a job and develop further a carrier, do shopping, find connections, travel to other destinations because of the airport, etc. For younger inhabitants I believe the city seems to be too small for big dreams, so they tend to choose studies and life abroad. Those who had lived here since birth or moved to Riga, I think they are used to the city and don’t really think about it that deep – what is the city’s image or brand... its more about their everyday life.

- 8.** *In the academic literature it is written that “residents often rely on the unique characteristics of their cities to highlight points of superiority over other cities” (Kemp, Childers, & Williams, 2012). Being simultaneously a resident of Riga and a member of DMC, do you think that the current place branding of the city fully communicate these unique characteristics of Riga? Or is there still a room to grow?*

I think that many unique characteristics (white sand sea nearby, value for money compared to mid Europe, awesome local food, architecture, accessibility, etc.), are being used to set the place branding via various activities and events, however, there is still a room to develop. Perhaps a research group could help to define strongest competitive advantages and the most unique highlights.

- 9.** *As a local and a manager from DMC, do you think that there is a match (or not) between your perception of Riga and how it is trying to be branded?*

Sometimes I get confused by marketing activities meant to boost the image of Riga. Messages are diverse, like about culture, parties, nature, history, adrenaline, food... From one hand it is great, than we can provide variety of these concepts within in the city, from the other hand, perhaps it is confusing for outsiders of Riga to clearly read a common image behind all these “faces” of the city.

However, my job requires to offer various concepts for programs which might adapt the image depending on our client’s needs (more sportive, culture-oriented or gastronomy seekers, etc.). So I would say that I actually can’t state what would be the brand of Riga, because I have created several options myself.

Most of highlights which are used for marketing activities match my perception of Riga, but overall I do not sense a strategy with a long term goal behind their creation.

- 10.** *In 2008, the famous branding specialist – Anholt Simon made a profile of Riga and Latvia, where it was stated that Latvians are not willing to become international (global), but rather stay local. That, of course, can be explained by historical events. However, do you think that after 11 years situation is the same? In your opinion, is Latvian society still reserved?*

We are a reserved culture with a tendency to keep our own space, but once we open up, we are very friendly and welcoming. It takes time tough. My generation and younger people are far more open than our parents and grandparents. We were the ones who actively started to study and travel abroad to reach new experiences. Historically, in 1991 we regained our country’s independence, so it is just 28 years ago, when our country started to think and act like an independent society once again. We are only 2 million inhabitants here and I somehow would agree that we are still focused inwards than outwards towards an international image. Nevertheless, European Union has a considerable impact on various Latvia’s activities too, so we have to some extend become international. Time and tendencies change many routines, I believe with the next generation we will become more open to step outside and open doors to new things.

- 11.** *In case if the customer is not requesting a standardized/common tour/ services, how are you trying to show/introduce Riga? (If there is no such an example, try to image that you are getting freedom of action from the customer, what would you highlight for them?)*

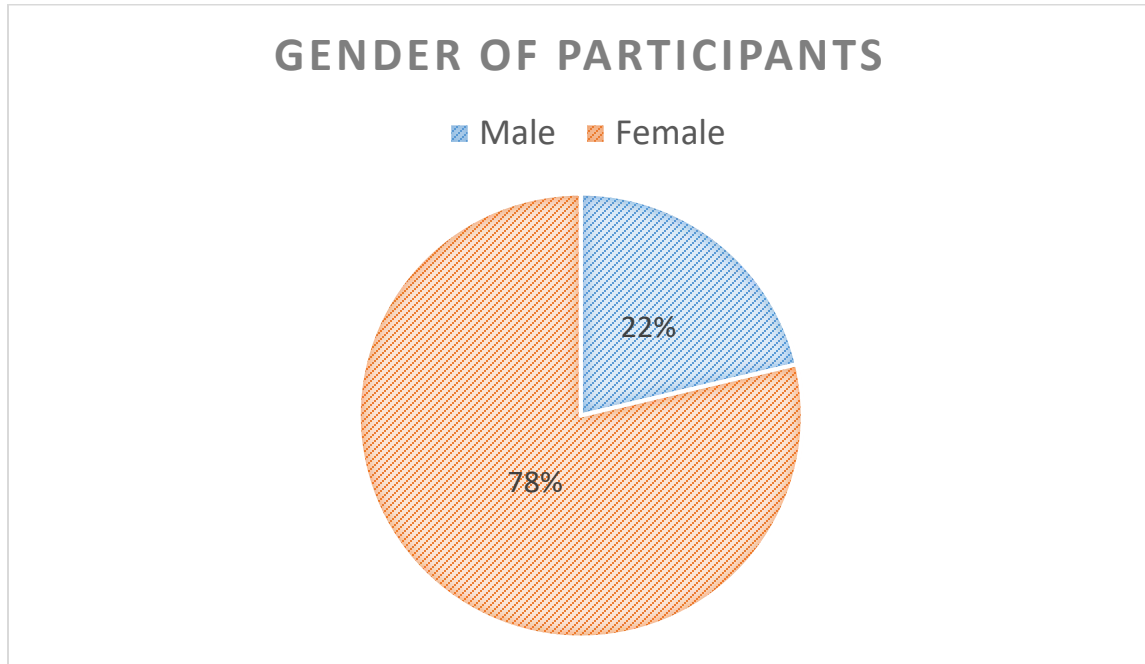
Honestly, I am working a lot on showing Riga and surroundings outside common standards. But is because many clients are asking to have something “wow, unseen, something that guests cannot organize

themselves...”, so often it takes creativity to pull out highlights that differ us from other destinations. A question that we often ask ourselves and our partners who provide services is “Why should they come to Latvia – how it is more tempting, interesting, unique destination compared to others, like Malta, Norway, Spain, etc....?”. Top highlights & reasons for clients to visit us are delicious local food, easy logistics from the airport to Riga and vice versa, city logistics are also easy with water boarders for the Old town, creative/unique approach to transfers from A to B, Riga is close to the Baltic sea, value for money compared to Scandinavia and mid/south Europe. We often need to change an opinion of Latvia as still being a Soviet Union country. I was surprised how many European guests still think that we are a part of the Russian Federation. The hardest part is to convince the client to visit us because we are unknown and almost all have little or no impression of how our country looks like. Once we get them here, they are impressed by our developments in various society`s aspects and how awesome (thus small) we are.

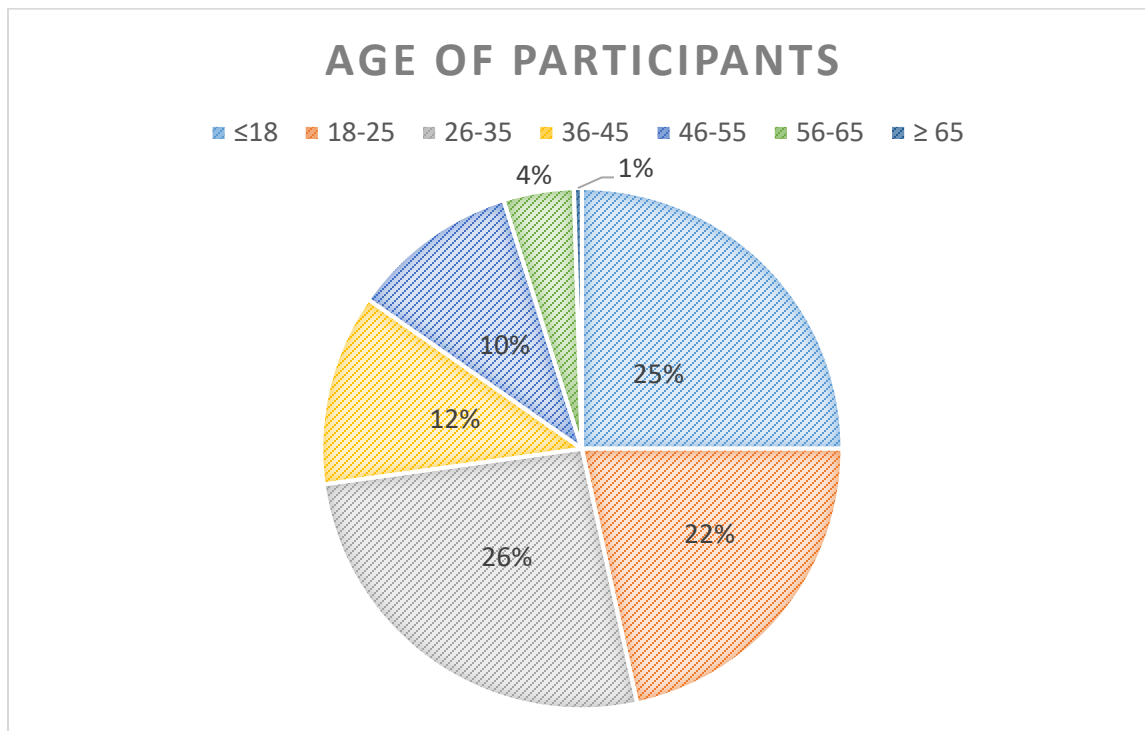
It’s hard to point out few specific highlights, because what really matters is how these highlights are carried out and the high level of service that comes within. Flexibility and creativity are buttons I need to constantly keep active to grab their attention.

## Appendix 2. Results of the survey

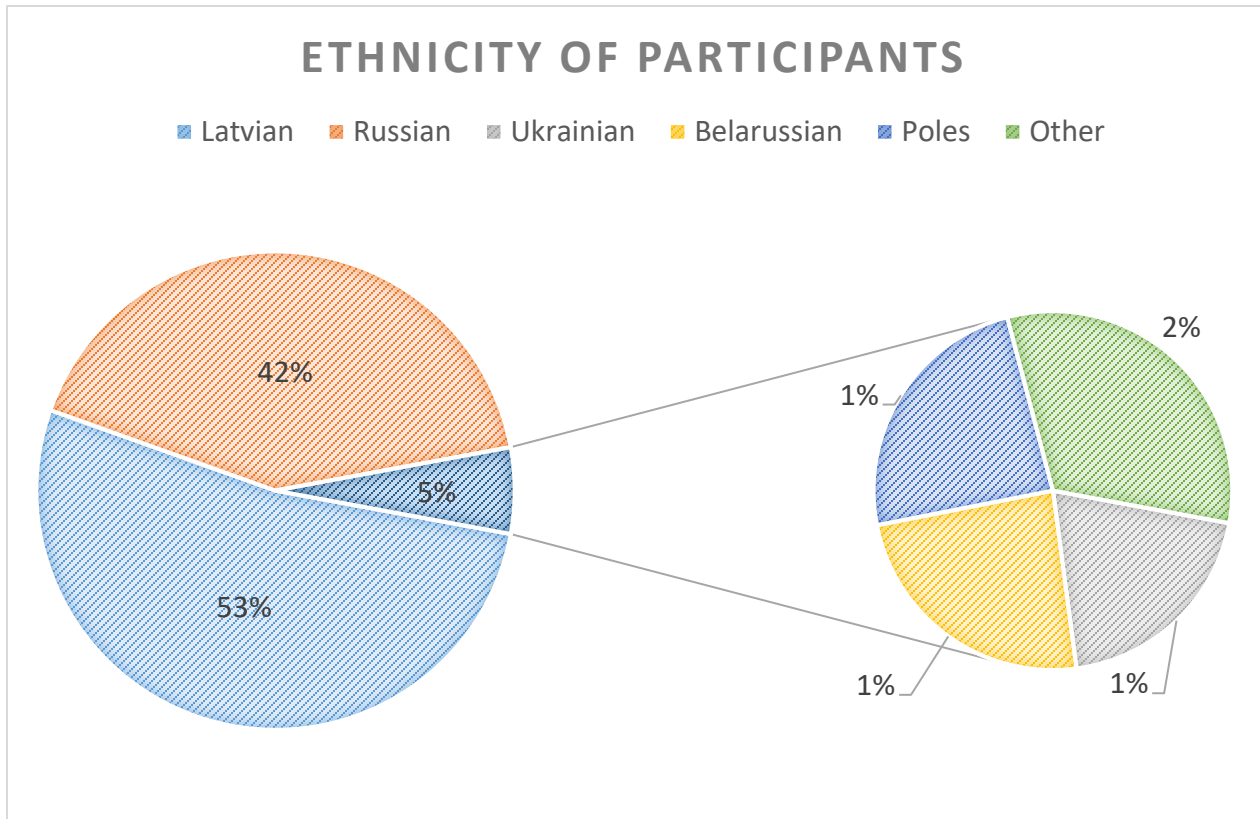
Question 1: Please, identify your gender:



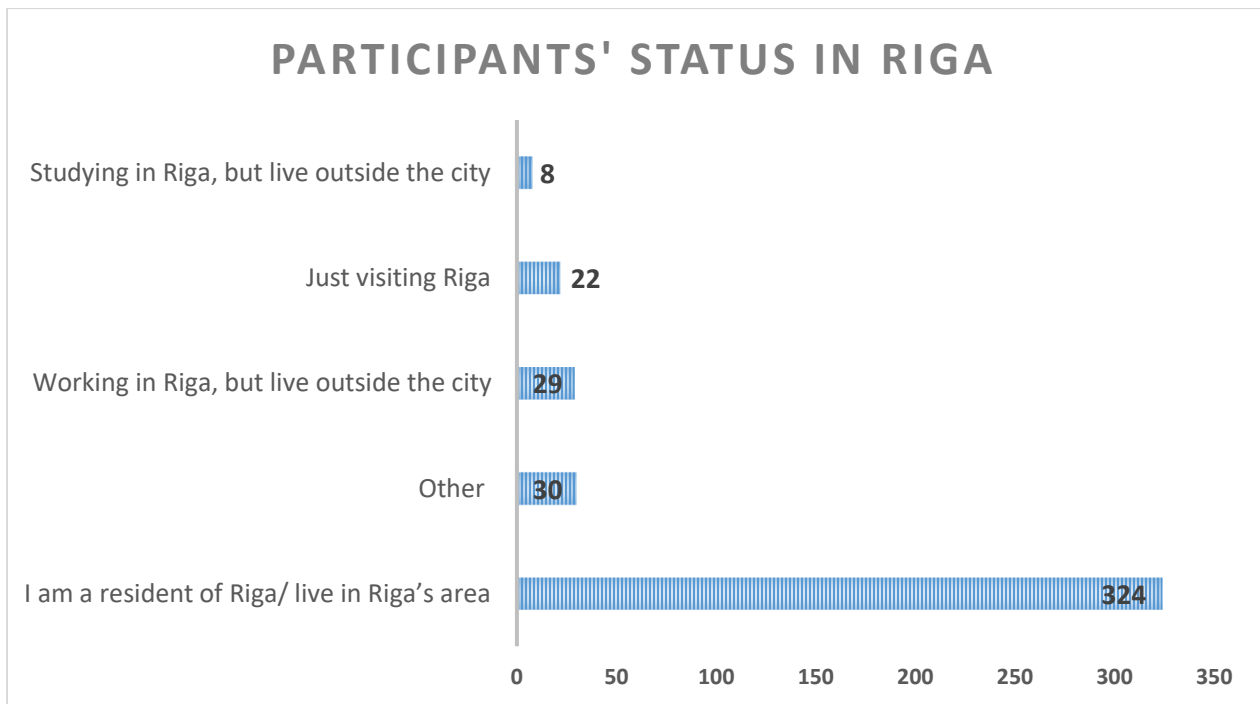
Question 2: Please, indicate your age



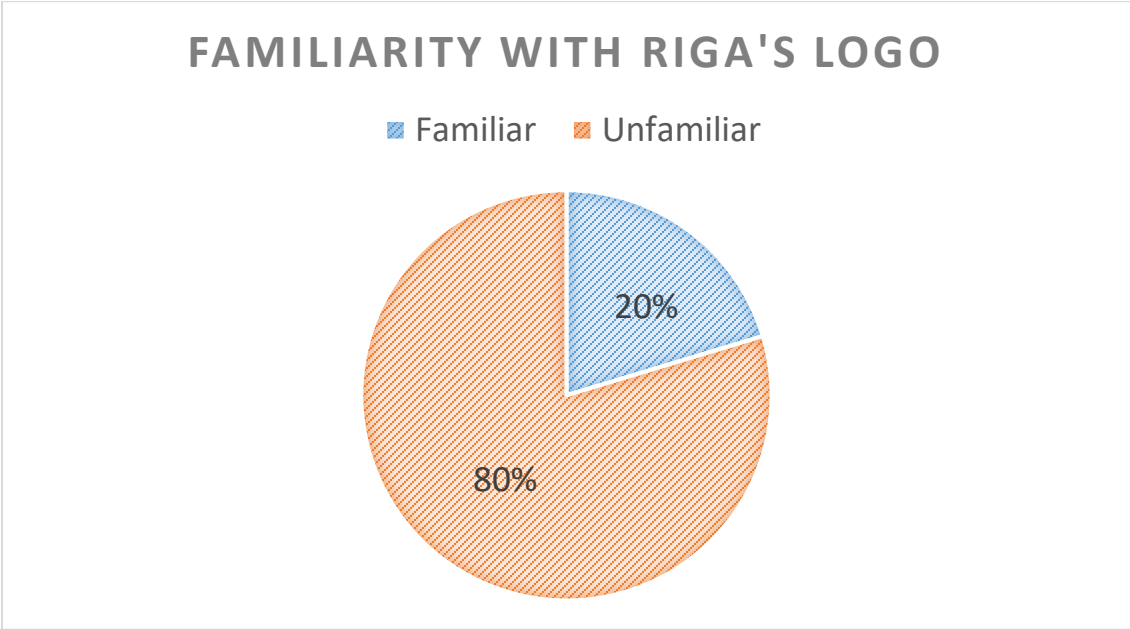
**Question 3: Please, indicate your ethnicity**



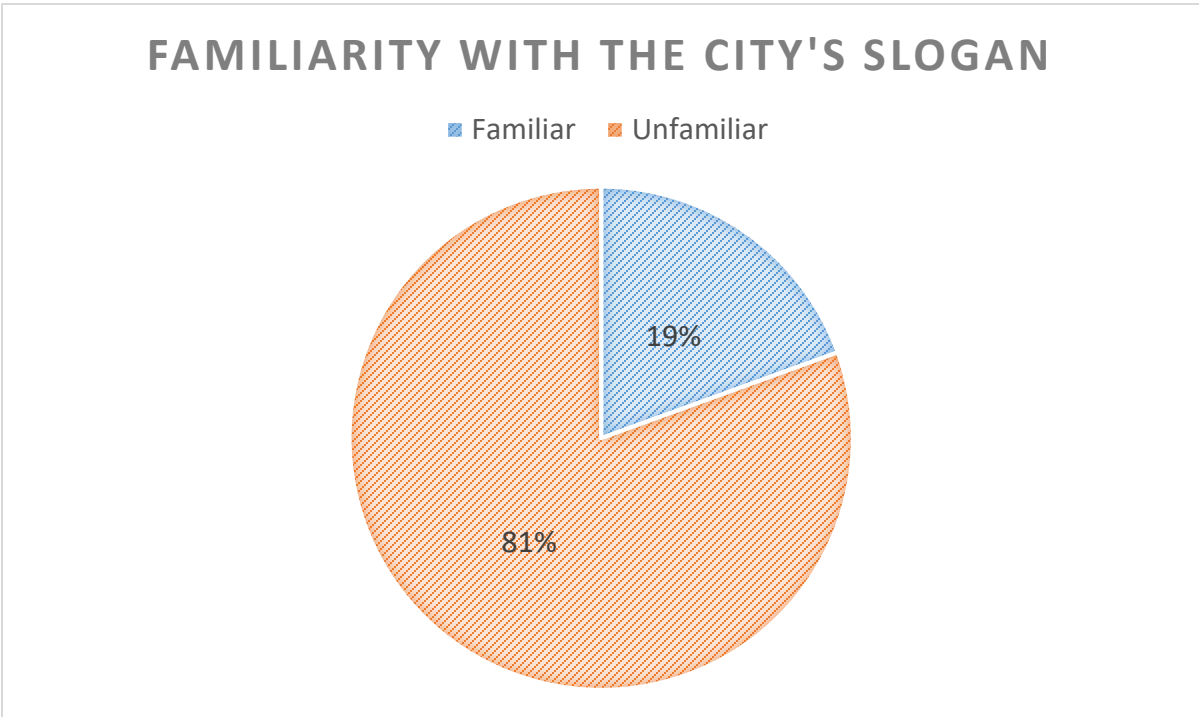
**Question 4: Which of the following best describes you?**



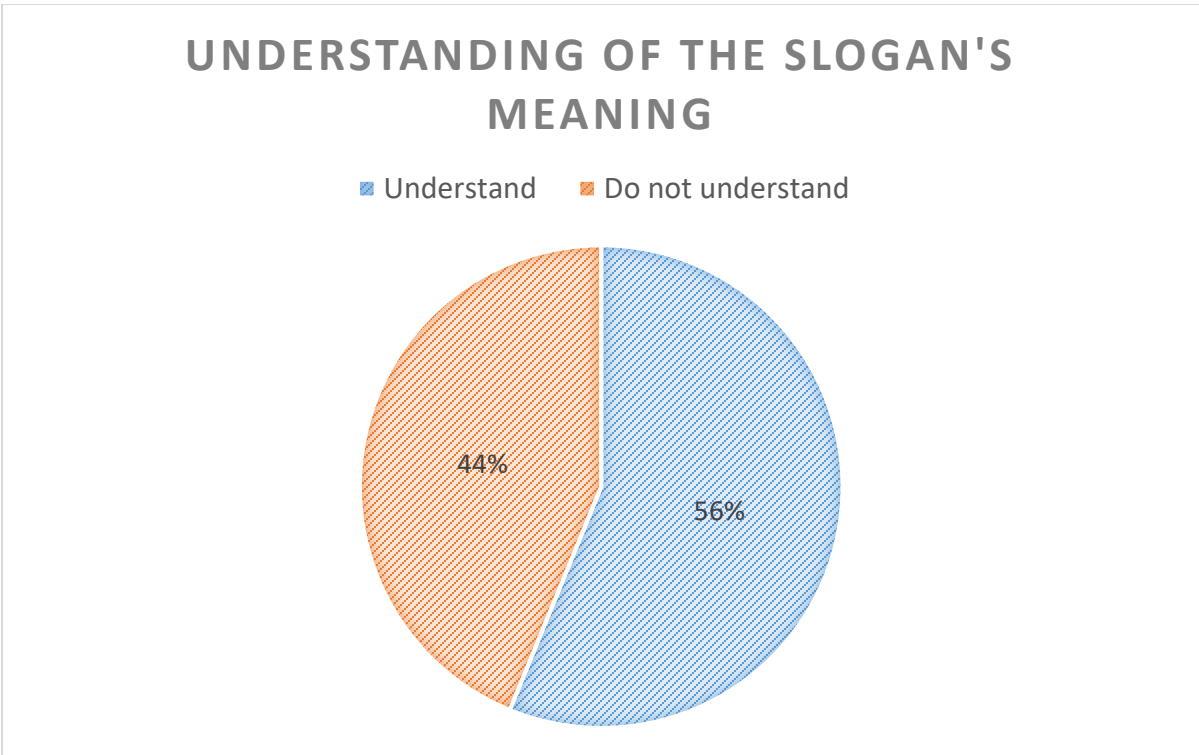
Question 5: Are you familiar with the image of the previous logo of the city of Riga? (below)



Question 6: Are you familiar with the previous slogan "Riga - here people meet"?



Question 7: Do you understand the meaning of the previous city's slogan "Riga - here people meet"?



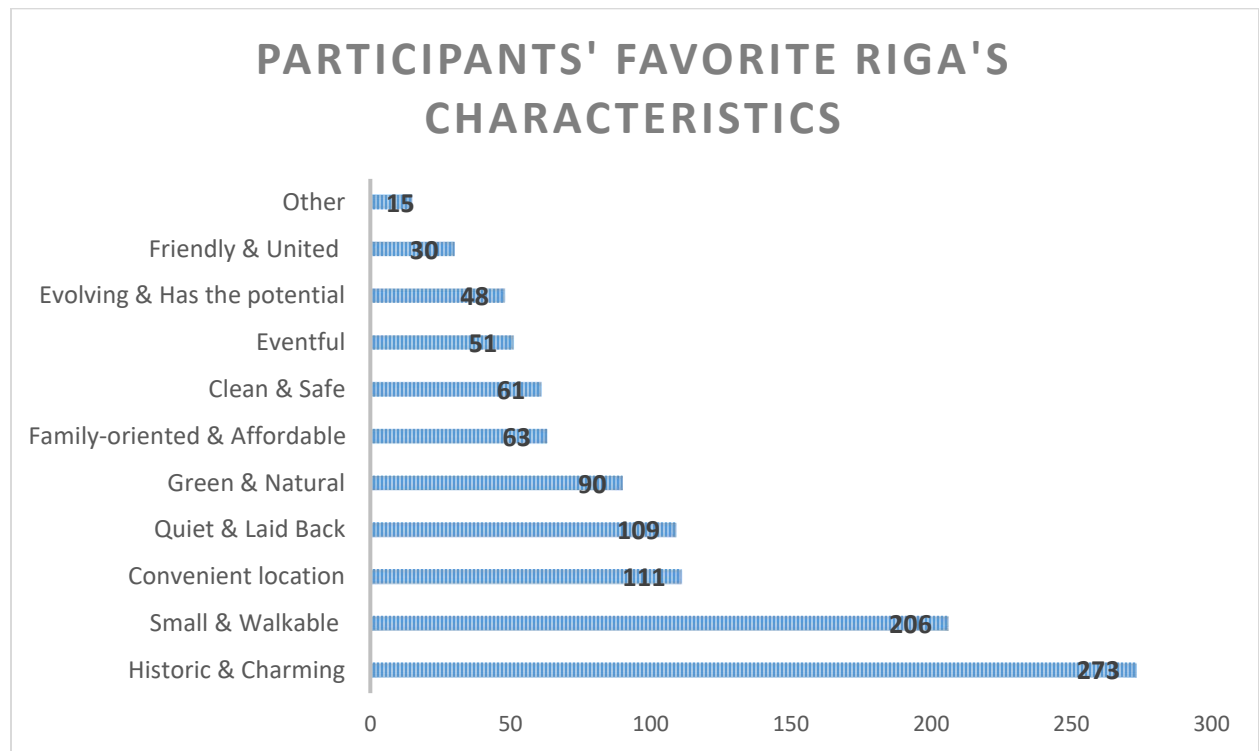
**Question 8: What descriptions immediately pop up in your mind, thinking about your favorite Riga's characteristics? (Multiple selection)**

**Comments from "Other"**

"Ethnic discrimination against Russians been born and so called authoritarian fascist Latvia" | "Leisure-friendly; financially affordable" | "Terrible city with terrible governing body and terrible layout" | "All listed characteristics, but in negative vein. Except the location – in the center of Latvia, near the sea." | "Riga is my city. My roots can be traced back to 1751." | "Bad infrastructure, grey, poor" | "City is neglected, governing body doesn't care about city development and making city comfortable for its inhabitants." | "Hurried, dirty" | "Fast-paced, unfinished, forever surrounded with construction works, dirty, unsuitable for the people with disabilities, and for mothers with infants" | "Rush, anxiety, activities" | "Unkempt, dirty, unsafe, and sometimes even stinky. The city center is one huge disappointment." | "Very big potential for development" |

"In my opinion Riga became so much stressful recently, because you can barely find a free parking spot in the city. The public transport system is also confusing, and it's hard to navigate through it whenever you have to travel to the near cities by bus. You can also see lack of service-minded people in shops and cafes. Unfortunately, it can be seen that Soviet mindset still remains. Riga is beautiful and pretty clean, no doubt about that. However, I wish Riga was more like, e.g. Berlin or Barcelona, in terms of everyday experiences. For example, just cities are more suitable for families with children: the increased amount of changing tables and family WCs (with different toilet sizes for both children and adults. I wish there were more public playgrounds in Riga too." |

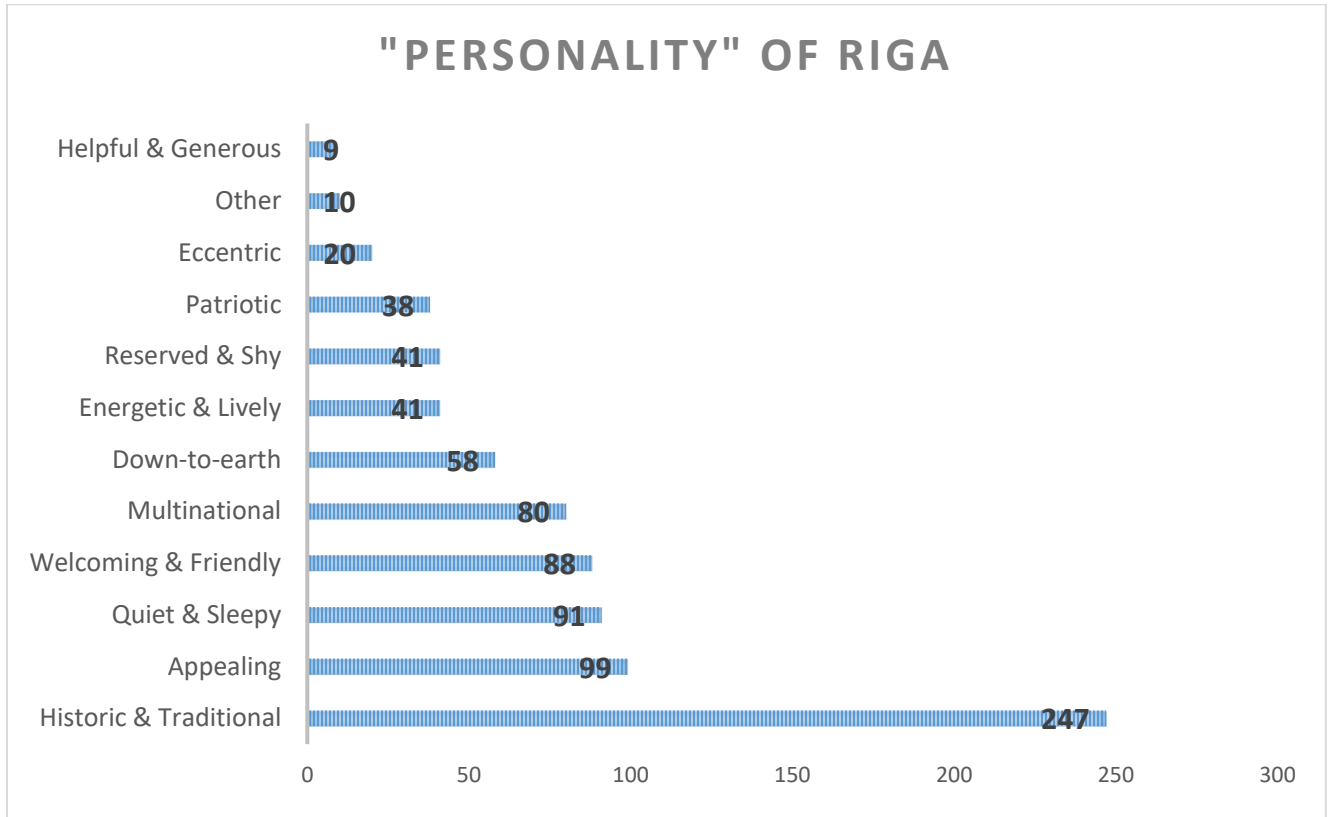
"The city is completely not friendly-minded for the pedestrians, very rich with the corruption and bribe schemes, the officials do not tend to keep their promises, with super expensive and so much uncomfortable public transport system, the ruined main streets in terms of quality of the carriageway, , empty city with even no shopping street." | "dirty" |





**Question 9: How would you describe the “personality” of Riga? (Please check all that apply)**

**Comments to “Other”**  
“Ethnic discrimination” | “Scary” | “Infantile” | “Loved and personal” | “waiting for the right person to take over, who cares” | “Reachable” | “Russians might like it” | “Neglected” | “Nervous, loud, unkempt in many places, non-friendly, inhospitable” | “Nervous / Loud / Sleepy”



**Question 10: What, in your opinion, distinguish Riga from other places? (Open question)**

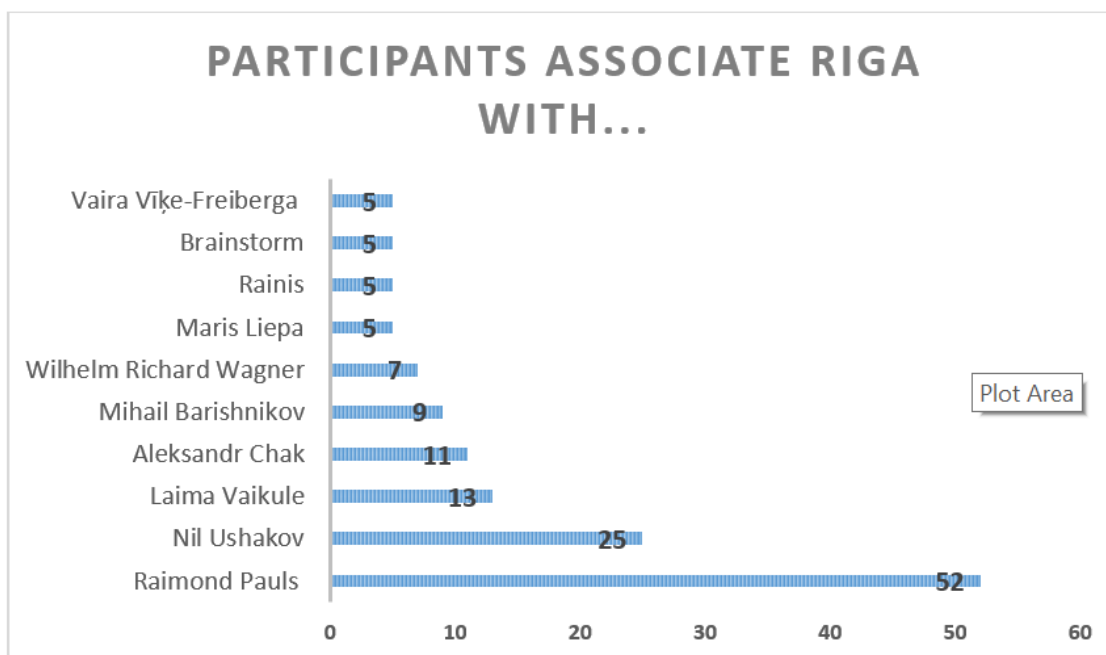
The table is taken from the 'Analysis' chapter, and comprises the already grouped answers of the open-ended question.

CATEGORY	THE CONTEXT
<b>SENSE OF THE CITY</b>	<p><i>In a positive vein:</i> Uniqueness; authentic aura; specific vibes and style of the city; coziness; there is rhythm in the city; feeling of big aspirations; Riga evokes nostalgic and melancholic feelings (in a good vein); there are feelings of somnolence and coziness; salience; aesthetics; beloved; "here is my home"; homely atmosphere; "This is MY city"</p> <p><i>Tangible aspects that were aimed at describing atmosphere of the city:</i> tramlines; warm coffee shops; street musicians; cobble-stones in the Old Town and its narrow streets</p>
<b>CAPITALNESS OF THE CITY</b>	<p><i>In a positive vein:</i> A lot of possibilities; opportunities for work/studies; the main events and festivals; urbanism</p> <p><i>In a negative vein:</i> Not enough events</p>
<b>INFRASTRUCTURE</b>	<p><i>In a positive vein:</i> Good and convenient public transport; close proximity to the international airport; ability to orient easily in the city; accurately organized public transport</p> <p><i>In a negative vein:</i> Bad condition of roads; no signs for tourists outside the Old City; a backwardness in infrastructure development; unfriendly infrastructure</p>
<b>SIZE AND LOCATION</b>	<p>Riga has convenient location - "just golden mean"; walkable; not too big, not too small;</p>
<b>HISTORY &amp; CULTURE</b>	<p>Museums; Theatres; The National Opera; events and festivals; Historical heritages; Old city center; various legends; Riga's significance in the history; the Silent Centre</p>
<b>ARCHITECTURE</b>	<p><i>In a positive vein:</i> Old and beautiful buildings from various centuries; famous Art Nouveau buildings; churches; monuments</p> <p><i>In a negative vein:</i> A lot of buildings are not maintained properly and look neglected; a lot of half-done constructions</p>

<p><b>POPULATION DENSITY &amp; PEOPLE</b></p>	<p><i>In a positive vein:</i> It is lively and there are a lot of people; At the same time some participators mentioned that it is calm and tranquil due to small amount of residents; openness and friendliness; multinationalism</p> <p><i>In a negative vein:</i> Way too chaotic due to high population density; pandemonium; At the same time there are responses that the city it empty of people and looks abandoned; nationalism and overall unfriendliness;</p>
<p><b>NATURE</b></p>	<p>Parks; sea; the city canal; the river of Daugava; woods</p>
<p><b>FOOD</b></p>	<p>Unique dishes; a lot of nice places to eat; delicious food and affordable prices; restaurants</p>
<p><b>CLEANNES THE CITY</b></p>	<p><i>In a positive vein:</i> Some participators highlighted that Riga is a well-kept and tidy city</p> <p><i>In a negative vein:</i> There were responses saying that Riga is dirty and stinky, as well as has unpleasant contingent of people in particular places</p>

**Question 11: Is there a famous person, whose “personality” associates, for you, with The City of Riga?**  
(Open question)

The diagram below displays answers that were reiterated by participants *five or more times*:



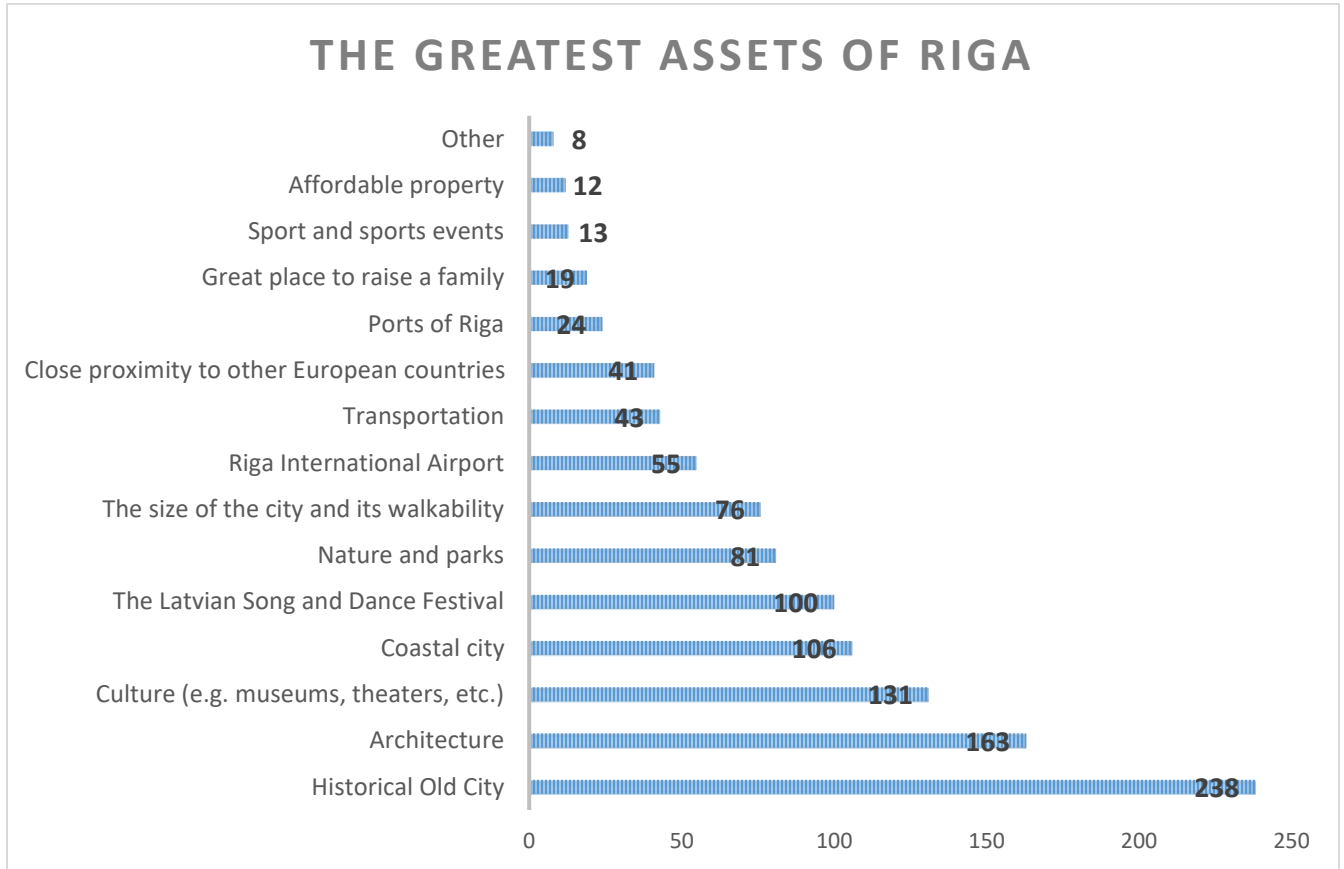
Participants also have mentioned the following persons:

Person	# of mentions	Person	# of mentions
Nick Offerman	1	Deniss Pashkevich	1
Krishjanis Valdemars	1	Georg Zander	1
Intars Busulis	4	Mihails Zadornovs	4
Peter the Great (Peter I)	1	Albert von Buxthoeven	3
Jelena Ostapenko	1	Karlis Baumanis	1
Stas Davydov	2	Imants Ziedonis	1
Kristaps Porzingis	1	Krishjanis Barons	3
Lachplesis	2	Aminata	1
Elina Garanča	4	Mihails Tals	3
Viktor Coi	1	Valentin Savvich Pikul	1
Arkadij Rajkin	1	Jesaja Berlins	1
Marija Naumova	1	Max Schmeling	1
George Armitstead	1	Pails Valdēns	1
Vilis Lacis	1	Sergei Eisenstein	1
Alexander S. Pushkin	1	Martiņš Saulespurns	1
Band "Olas"	1	Band "Bermudu divsturis"	1
Martins Ritins	1	Renars Zeltins	1
Zigfrids Anna Meierovics	1	Vija Artmane	1
Lilīta Ozoliņa	1	Andrejs Zagars	1
Mara Upmane-Holsteina	1	Helmuts Balderis	1
Lauris Reiniks	1	Vilhelms Karlis Purvītis	1

**Question 12: What, in your opinion, are the greatest assets of The City of Riga? (Please limit to three selections)**

**Comments to "Other"**

“Close vicinity to mother land, Russia” | “The visual component: the design of the small stores, malls and cultural centers, the city is well-groomed;the city’s appearance and decorations during the winter/around Christmas time” | “Nothing” | “Bubble Tea” | “The green places around the city” | “People” | “Working places”



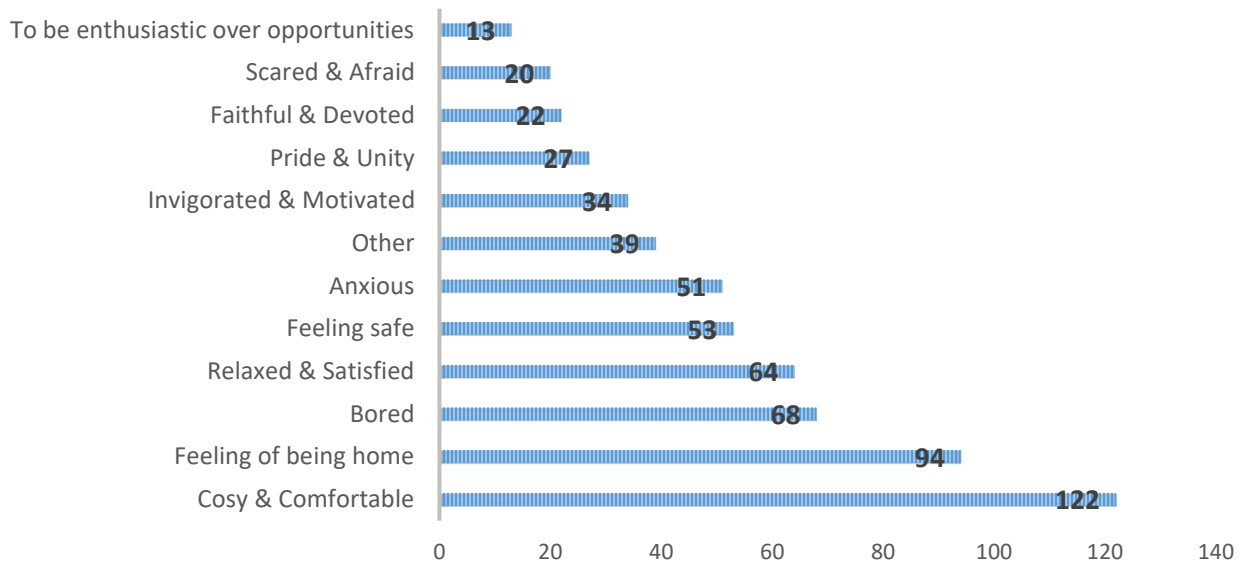
**Question 13: How would you describe your emotional state that you most frequently experience in Riga? (Please, check all that apply)**

**Comments to “Other”**

“Discrimination, mobbing, ethnic racism” | “Sadness, inspiration, comfort” | “I do not always feel safe” | “A feeling that I’m not where I’m supposed to be.” | “Motivation to leave for good” |

“Hopelessness and absence of any prospect” | “The lack of community spirit within the city; estrangement” | “nostalgia” | “A wish to rediscover it again” | “The beauty of the city” | “Rush and stress, but at the same time also passion” | “No specific emotions” | “Businesslike city” | “progressive feelings” | “Noise” | “My job, too much Russian-environment” | “The quality of the roads, constant traffic jams and awful driving culture combined tick me off” | “Neutral” | “Riga feels pretty safe in comparison to some other big cities, because here you don’t have a feeling, that you might get shot in the middle of the street or that there might be a terrorist attack. In this sense Riga feels really safe” | “Eternal feeling that time is “running away”” | “My job, my hometown, patriotism” | “Routine, annoying behavior, the Russians minority” | “No specific emotions about Riga” | “Greyness and empty streets” | “Indifferent feelings” | “Rush and anxiety” | “Discomfort” | “Nostalgia” | “The noise and tiredness of that” | “Negative feelings, because city center often stinks, especially if you come to Riga by bus – the first thing you meet is fish market and homeless people” | “I live in Riga, what kind of emotions do you expect me feel?” | “I’ve already mentioned that it’s disgusting to see how much Riga is neglected. And it really is a pity and shame! Hopefully in the future the governing body of the city will be changed, and perhaps Riga will once again gain the brilliance it deserves.” | “Stability” | “Unfortunately, no specific emotions. It’s an everyday life that doesn’t cause any.” |

## PARTICIPANTS' EMOTIONAL STATE IN RIGA



**Question 14: What suggestions do you have for making Riga a greater place? (Open question)**

URBAN AND INFRASTRUCTURE SUGGESTIONS	
Mentioned ideas/suggestions	Context
<b>Make the city greener</b>	“Take care of woods and parks”; “the city is way to gray - make it more attractive and greener”; “arrangement of green spaces in parks and yards”;

	“increase sustainability - forbid plastic”; “If you cut down a tree – plant a new one!”
<b>Clean up the city</b>	“City is quiet dirty”; “get rid of trash”; “clean up the shores”; “adopt trash sorting”; “solve the problem with homeless people and Gypsies”; “air control”; “public places should be more attractive to visitors”
<b>Improve public transport</b>	“Increase amount of roads for cycling”; “make twenty-four-hour public transport”; “create more lines for public transport”; “change or improve the payment system for public transport”; “make public transport cleaner and more organized”
<b>Fix the roads and buildings</b>	“Roads are in bad conditions - fix them”; “fix buildings in the center and near it”; “renew old buildings”; “there is a need to fix roads fastly and qualitatively”; “dismantle useless and inapplicable buildings”
<b>Equalize urban development</b>	“City center is more or less nice, but 3-5km away and you see terrible blocks”; “bringing more activities and life to the residential areas”; “build new residential districts”; “all interesting and entertaining places should NOT be located only in the city center”; “invest into urban districts - make it a part of the city”; “make more excursions around the whole city (not only the Old Town) “
<b>Develop better infrastructure</b>	“More guides for tourists”; “translate signs to English”; “better infrastructure for visitors”; “relieve roads from cars - increase walkability of the city”; “create more parking lots”
<b>ENTERTAINMENT AND PLACES SUGGESTIONS</b>	
<b>Create more activities and events</b>	“Conduct more free events as shows, music festivals, master classes, conferences etc.”; “create more events”; “more discos”; “put more decorations on the streets”; “more outdoor events”; “get top singers/specialists/artists involved into Latvian events”
<b>Create new places</b>	“Create more places for youngsters as social clubs”; “create spaces where people could spend their time in case of bad weather (besides coffee shops and restaurants)”; “create more entertaining centers”; “build an amusement park”;
<b>ECONOMICAL SUGGESTIONS</b>	
<b>Develop business environment</b>	“Create available and affordable conditions for international businesses”; “support small and medium enterprises”; “attract international investments”; “attract new international companies”
<b>Create more opportunities regarding work places</b>	“There are not enough possibilities for skilled professionals”; “develop new sectors, such as gaming industry or film industry etc.”
<b>Increase quality of life</b>	“Increase wages”; “Make the property more affordable, especially for young families”; “Increase safety”

### Appendix 3. The example of category formation

Answers
Klusums
Pieejamāka vide
Latvijā - iespējas: Starptautiskā mērogā - zaļums un kultūras pieejamība.
Kompakta
Plasās iespējas
Daudz cilvēki
Visi lielākie valsts notikumi un svētki seš reizes gadā katrā svētkā
metropoles ambīcijas
Lielā teritorijā, salīdzinoši maz cilvēku nav tādas burzmas kā Pēterburgā Parīzē daudz parku, ma patīkama skaistas ēkas muzeji precīzs sabiedriskais transports
Uz Latvijas fona - lielums.
Uz pasaules fona - vēsturiskais mantojums
Daudz darba vietu.
Arhitektūra
Centrāltirgus
Daudzu pilsetu galvaspilsetu centros dzīvo turgiskais sabiedrības slānis, tacu Rīga centra daudzi iespējams dzīve gan bagāti, gan nabadzīgi cilvēki.
Centrāltirgus
Izvietojums
Mierīgāka, nav daudz tūristu, daudzveidīga
Vēsture
Vēsture, labs ēdiens restorānos, daudz izklaides iespēju
Arhitektūra
Vēsturiskais mantojums
nezinu
Ļoti skaista vecpilsēta
šarms un haoss reizē

- Sensations
- Capitalness
- Infrastructure
- Size & Location
- History & Culture
- Architecture
- Population density & People
- Nature
- Food
- Cleaness

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## Appendix 4. Focus Group #1



<b>FOCUS GROUP WITH THE RUSSIAN-SPEAKING MINORITY</b>				
<b>Interviewee</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Ethnicity</b>	<b>Other characteristics</b>
<b>Participant 1</b>	Female	30	Russian	Web Designer
<b>Participant 2</b>	Female	28	Armenian	School teacher
<b>Participant 3</b>	Female	25	Half ethnic Latvian, half Belarusian	HR manager
<b>Participant 4</b>	Female	28	Russian	Make-up artist

**Researcher:** *Are all of you perceive yourself as locals in Riga?*

**All participants:** Yes.

**Researcher:** *Have you ever participated in questionnaires/researchers about the city of Riga?*

**All participants:** No, this is the first time.

**Research:** *Have you heard about Riga's brand 'Live Riga'? And what have you heard?*

**Participant 1:** Have never heard about that.

**Participant 2:** Actually, I thought that it is 'Riga Life,' no?

**Participant 3:** Yes, I know about them. Unfortunately, right now, they are involved in a big corruption scandal. Not the best reputation for them.

**Participant 4:** Yeah, I heard about the brand, as well.

**Participant 1:** How is it again? (repeating the brand's name) A strange combination of words, hard to understand the meaning. Can you write it down for me? (writing the brand's name) Oh, shouldn't it be read as [lav] Riga?

**Researcher:** *No, it supposed to be a verb.*

**Participant 1:** Well, definitely not the best combination as it might be ambiguous.

**Researcher:** *What you mean?*

**Participant 1:** Well, the pronunciation of the verb 'live' is similar to the verb 'leave,' meaning 'go away.' So, when you do not see the written brand, you can interpret the city's brand as 'Leave Riga' (laughing) Not the best strategy for the town!

**All participants agreeing**

**Researcher:** *Are you aware of how the Riga is presented by the Riga Tourism Development Bureau - 'Live Riga'?*

**Participant 4:** It is displayed as an age-old city, and basically, it is like that.

**Participant 3:** They [Live Riga] greatly emphasize the architecture of the city, Art Nouveau (*researcher's remark:* a style of architecture that was widespread in the 1890s), what of course is a right side of the city to show. They all show Riga as the city of development and that it contains a lot of working places – that's the positive aspects.

**Participant 2:** I would definitely call the abundance of working places in question...

**Participant 4:** Why? There are actually the statistics saying that we do have a lot of vacancies here; however, it also says that here is a lot of well-paid working places...

**Participant 1:** What we - as locals - know that it is just a pack of lies! (laughing)

**Participant 2:** Well, it is understandable that they [Live Riga] present the better version of Riga, creating more vivid and attractive pictures of the city for attracting tourists. Everything is a way to idealized and great! But of course, as locals, we see both sides of the coin. But... it is understandable WHY they are doing so – for tourists!

***Researcher:** But what about your perception – perception of locals? You have just acknowledged that there is a gap between the created image of the city and the reality. Nevertheless, does the created image still go in line with your sense of the city?*

**Participant 3:** Personally, I am always thinking about Riga as a place where I want to live. I had possibilities and opportunities to move to other countries, but I was still aware of my wish to BE in Riga. It is not just because of my family, but because of Riga – it is beautiful, small and cozy, has its own charm. And yes! The tourism bureau is doing right presenting old-age architecture and buildings – it is Riga, and it is a right angle! Maybe not the only one, but a vivid one.

***Researcher:** What do you mean saying that Riga 'has its charm'?*

**Participant 2:** Well, for me, Riga's charm means aesthetics – the city is pleasant for your eyes and ears. Of course, thinking about Riga, I imagine the Old City, its narrow streets and coziness, the street musicians and coffee shops. I am not thinking about residential districts like Plavnieki and Imanta.

**Participant 1:** Yeap, true! Of course, speaking about Riga's charm and atmosphere – the majority is covering the Old City and the city center, not residential parts of it.

**Participant 3:** Well, actually, there are some remote places from the city center and its old part, which are still bearing some authenticity. For example, speaking about Agenkalns or Avotu street, there are still buildings that are carrying the charm of old times.

***Researcher:** But would you like to see residential districts as being more urbanized?*

**Participant 1:** I would not like to have the same crowds in my neighborhood. There is a precise division of districts – and that is great! Residential areas are quiet and great for living, the city center – mainly for work, the old city – for work and tourism.

**Participant 2:** I do not need tourists in residential parts...

***Researcher:** Saying 'being more urbanized,' I meant equalizing urban development – stopping concentrate all places just in the city center and creating some exciting spaces in the residential parts as well.*

**Participant 4:** Oh, well. We [meaning the urban planners] do not know how to do that! If you remember, there was a very cool entertainment place in the residential part of Plavnieki – Go Planet that was closed in 2014. And what? The location of the building was not strategically thought out, as well as it was hard to reach it by public transport. It was not promoted well, and even though the concept was just AMAZING, the business went bankrupt. That is why everything is concentrated in the city center, because the needed

infrastructure is already there, as well as the crowd of people. Believe me, we do have a lot of cool places and events... we just don't know about them!

**Participant 3:** Overall, that would be nice to have more café shops in the residential districts or maybe working spaces for studying and working or just something.

**Researcher:** *Ok, but what do you think about infrastructure and public transport?*

**Participant 1:** OH! I do have what to say! (laughing) The payment system is just awful! [In Riga] you are paying for every used transport, what, in my opinion, is ridiculous. The lengths and time of your trip are not considered, so basically, in case if I need to use three different vehicles to reach my destination, I will pay three times equally for each of them. And it is just stupid! So, if you [the government] cannot make the infrastructure more comfortable, at least make the payment system more affordable!

#### **All other participants agreeing**

**Participant 1:** But actually, there is a need to think about the overall organization of the infrastructure. We were just speaking about the city center and that everything is concentrated there, and unfortunately, it also applies to the development of the infrastructure. The further is the residential district, so much the worse is the availability of public transport. And I think it is just not fair!

**Researcher:** *So, would you like to say that people who are living closer to the city center might be more satisfied with the organization of public transport than people living a bit further?*

**Participant 1:** I am not just saying, I am claiming that!

**Participant 3:** I would like to support [the participant's 1] statement. I have experience in living in different parts of the city: in the city center and the residential districts. That is true that the further you are - the worse is the communication...Plus, the state of the vehicle.

**Researcher:** *What do you mean by 'the state of the vehicle'?*

**Participant 3:** Its tidiness. In the city center, most of the time, public transport is very well kept, but these vehicles that run between residential districts might look or smell unpleasant.

**Participant 2:** I want to step in here! It does not mean that there is a problem with transport, because usually, the contingent of people who are using it causes the issue with the transport's tidiness or dirtiness....

**Participant 3:** That is true! Actually, in the majority of times, it is not even the government or Rigas Satiksme (*researcher's remark:* the public transportation and infrastructure company of Riga) who failed in providing competent services or spaces, but locals who do not take care of them.

**Participant 4:** Ok, I agree that people tend to pollute the place where they are living; however, I have an accusation of poorly designed routes during rush hours. I am utilizing quite often public transport in rush hours. Usually, I am observing the completely incorrect utilization of vehicles as using big busses during regular hours, and small - during rush hours. What is the point?

**Participant 3:** Proceeding the topic about the attitude of people to the shared space, I think the significant difference is seen when you compare Riga with other foreign cities. In other countries, locals are not polluting and taking care of their spaces.

**Participant 2:** Are you kidding? Riga is a very tidy city if you compare it to other countries. I had a lot of talks with foreigners, where people were openly saying to me how clean Riga is. Comparing it to Paris or Madrid ... (sigh) There is an incredible difference! And by the way, Riga is ranked as a top city regarding tidiness.

**Participant 1:** Well, I guess it's all relative. It depends on a country that you are taking for a comparison. If I would think about Scandinavia, I believe my vote would not be in favor of Riga. And I should say that the neatness of Riga is also relative within the city itself. Speaking about new ready-built parts, modern districts or the city center (in its majority) – yes, they are clean; however, considering the old city parts or places with pandemonium – unfortunately, they are dirty for me, and sometimes even filthy.

***Researcher:** Proceeding forward, what kind of important Riga's aspects, in your opinion, are kept in the shadow? We have covered the importance of The Old City and architectural heritage, but what about other aspects of the city?*

**Participant 3:** Thinking about Riga, I immediately think about the city in the context of business and innovation. Riga is truly the place of meeting for creative people, thanks to whom a lot of innovative concepts and projects are created, but not many people – foreigners and locals – know about that. To some extent, Riga can be demonstrated as a city of innovation!

**Participant 2:** Actually, yes! There are many fields in which Riga (and Latvia as a whole) is succeeding and making significant advancements, but just a few people know about that. Let us take pharmaceuticals, engineering, IT developments - Latvia makes a valuable contribution to these spheres, but somehow it is not known and shared within the society!

**Participant 3:** Exactly! And that's why I like the brand, which was created by the Investment and Development Agency of Latvia, namely Magnetic Latvia. This brand is trying to present Latvia through the lens of innovation.

**Participant 2:** But at the same time, you cannot say that Riga is a city of possibilities...yet!

**Participant 3:** Why?

**Participant 2:** Because here is, still no thriving and favorable environment, as well as needed support. We DO have creative and innovative people, but what we do not have – the necessary economic support. People are limited in their manifestations because there might be no needed assets for them, as well as the majority of businesses are not making it even to the end of their first year of existence... way too harsh taxes.

**Participant 4:** And speaking about Riga, there is no innovation in the city itself (meaning the appearance), despite newly build areas (like Spīķeri). Otherwise, everything is old and not maintained. At least, it would be nice to renew old buildings; it would change the appearance of the city.

**All participants are agreeing.**

***Researcher:** Speaking about all-round globalization, are you seeing Riga global or local?*

**Participant 2:** Analyzing the current state of affairs, I think Riga is more local; however, I would like to see it as global. Actually, here I think we might experience a conflict of interest with ethnic Latvians. It is evident that ethnic Latvians are willing to preserve Riga (and Latvia in general) and do not globalize it.

Meanwhile, Russians (*researcher's remark*: meant the Russian-speaking minority) would like to see Riga as more internationalized and globalized.

**Participant 4:** Agree!

**Participant 2:** That kind of their (*researcher's remark*: ethnic Latvians') mindset is understandable. Taking the history, Latvia was always under somebody's control – Sweden, Germany, and Russia – and there were infringements of Latvian traditions, culture, and language. Because of that nowadays there is no willingness to be open to others, but rather stay reserved even though the reasons for such behavior are understandable, in my opinion, that makes people narrow-minded. But the worst thing is that by being always oppressed by others, Latvians (*researcher's remark*: meant ethnic Latvians) have imbibed the mindset of a victim! And that's why a lot of cultural and political changes are perceived as an encroachment upon their identity! That brings the development of the city and country to a standstill... I think so.

**Participant 4:** Confirm! Plus, speaking about local features and traditions, there is nothing completely Latvian in Riga. Truly Latvian identity comes from rural areas, not from the city! Riga was established and build by Scandinavians and Germans, after - by Russians during the Soviet Union. So, where is the logic to “protect” Riga from globalization, considering that the city initially was international?

**Participant 2:** It is essential to protect your values and culture, but it can be done without coming to extremes!

**Researcher:** *Speaking as a local, are there enough various places and spaces for you?*

**Participant 2:** No! Definitely not! In that context, Riga for me is boring. If you want to get out, you basically have just a few options: the Old City with its coffee shops and restaurants, and shopping centers. Only consumer activities! It would be great to have an amusement or theme park...

**Participant 4:** It can be even done in some traditional Latvian veins!

**All participants agreeing**

**Participant 2:** But instead, we [the government] are building more and more shopping centers! A few months ago, the huge shopping center 'Akropole' was opened, and right now, there is another project running for building another shopping center that will be even bigger. Why?

**Participant 1:** Yeap. The ridiculous thing consists in that Riga does not have an image of being a fashion and shopping center of Europe. We do not have a massive amount of brands that are widespread abroad, so what is the point? Build something new, something that would not be aimed at consumerism!

**Researcher:** *Can you emphasize some intangible assets of Riga, unique features of it?*

**Participant 1:** For me, it is coziness and a little bit more.

**Researcher:** What do you mean by saying 'a little bit more'?

**Participant 1:** (smiling) Well, it is hard to explain, but for me, Riga is 'lampovaya' [a slang word]. Riga is as mild and warm lightning from an abat-jour lamp! There is something authentic, something personal and native.

**Participant 3:** Oh, I got you! (laughing)

**Participant 2:** Well, Riga is not sunny and is melancholic, but it is not bad! Some people love that! Here is some nostalgia in the air.

**Participant 3:** For me, Riga is creative and innovative, as well as multinational, despite that we were discussing here. We have a great mix of cultures and ethnicities in here. And if for some political and economic reasons these features are not well presented, it does not mean that they do not exist!

**Participant 4:** I would love to say – unity, but I cannot. Even national days are not uniting people. That's sad, but it is already a problem of mindsets. Otherwise, Riga, for me, is enigmatic, as well as phlegmatic. And also reserved, but not in a bad way. To genuinely understand the city, you need some time and maybe even an effort to be able to see Riga's gems. And again, it is not bad! Riga's locals and in general, Latvians are like that, and the city is reflecting that.

**Participant 3:** Also, the word 'change' associated for me with Riga, because I sincerely believe that the city is on the threshold of a new stage.

**Researcher:** *Participant 3, is there any foundation for your associations Riga being innovative?*

**Participant 3:** Well, as we were discussing earlier, there are many fields in which Riga and Latvia are prospering. But, of course, my image is greatly influenced by my working place – I am working with patents. I know that there are more than 100 patents, more than 3000 brands and 70 pieces of design registered annually! Where are they coming from then? How could they be registered if there is no development in the city? But just a few people know about that!

**Participant 4:** It could be shown more...

**Participant 3:** It could be, but it is not! Of course, media dramatically influences the image of the city, and not only for foreigners but also for locals! Not even speaking about the possibilities to attract more investments by broadcasting that information better, but we could also increase locals' pride of their city! But for some reason, there are convictions in the society that everything is terrible and rotting in here.

*AFTER DISCUSSION, THE PROMOTIONAL VIDEOS OF 'INSIDERS GUIDE TO RIGA' WERE WATCHED TO LEARN LOCALS' OPINIONS ABOUT THEM.*

**Participant 1:** So, assessing videos, it would be nice to know what 'Live Riga' actually pursued as the object. In case if the videos were aiming at showing Riga's best sides and places through uncommon ways and humor – they have achieved it. From the promotional side, the targeting is done precisely and clearly. However, if the main goal was to display locals, their mindset, and behavior, as well as how they look – they came to grief. To say the truth, while watching clips, I could not shrug off a feeling that I am watching something about Scandinavia, as I can imagine something like that there – people and their behavior, freedom of expression! Otherwise, Latvians are not like those shown people at all! So, my point is that it is a pack of lies to call these videos “Insiders Guide to Riga,” considering that shown characters are entirely made-up and do not contain features of real locals!

**Participant 2:** The lens in the videos is not truthful. There is a definite feeling that they are promotional and nothing else! The most beautiful yards and touristic spots are chosen, nothing new is shown. I do not

deny that all that beauty exists. Still, in reality, locals do face other sides of Riga as well (I am not even speaking here about negativities!). What I am not supporting at all - the funny and vivid characters that were invented for these videos! They are cool, they are curious and charming, but those are not Riga's locals. The idea is understandable - to show another perspective of the city, but because "insiders" are not real, they still transmit the old and hard-pressed angle that once was created by the tourism bureau.

**Participant 3:** I think that videos are nice and qualitative, for sure they are the eye-catcher. However, speaking about the trustworthiness of the so-called insiders perspective – there are some doubts. I support the opinion of [participant 2] – this is not a real 'Insiders Guide', as no real insiders were involved.

**Participant 4:** In my opinion, it is the way too apparent that there was no aim to show Riga's locals as they are. The Riga is shown here according to clearly defined segments: seniors, families, party-goers, etc. The only thing that resonates with me with real locals is the style – Latvians are creative and stand out with their vivid style of dress.

## Appendix 5. Focus Group #2

<i>FOCUS GROUP WITH ETHNIC LATVIANS</i>				
Interviewee	Gender	Age	Ethnicity	Other characteristics

<b>Participant 5</b>	Female	27	Ethnic Latvian	Leading advisor in the public institution
<b>Participant 6</b>	Female	31	Ethnic Latvian	Administrative adviser in the public institution
<b>Participant 7</b>	Female	29	Ethnic Latvian	Consultant in the public institution
<b>Participant 8</b>	Female	25	Ethnic Latvian	Student of law

**Researcher:** *Are all of you perceive yourself as locals in Riga?*

**All participants:** Yes.

**Researcher:** *Have you ever participated in questionnaires/researchers about the city of Riga?*

**All participants:** No, this is the first time.

**Researcher:** To start with, can you name words (nouns, verbs, adjectives etc.) that, in your opinion, would honestly and realistically describe the city?

**Participant 5:** The first word that pops up in my mind is the ‘charm’. Riga is charm! And also the word ‘capital’.

**Participant 6:** Well, I would say ‘Big Apple’ (laughing). The same as New York in the USA is called ‘Big Apple’, I would name like that Riga in the context of Latvia. People from all over the country flock here... It is not meant to be wrong! However, every apple can have its worms (laughing). What I mean by that is, being originally from a small town, I was dreaming of moving to Riga for studies and a prestige work, but then you just meet the reality.

**Participant 7:** For me, it is rather sad and melancholic.

**Participant 8:** Architecture, Old Town, river Daugava, people, churches, pavement, beautiful, party....Also, national foods and goods.

**Researcher:** *But, according to your feelings, Riga is a small or big city?*

**Participant 6:** Small

**All other participants are agreeing.**

**Researcher:** *Is it good or bad that Riga is a small city?*

**Participant 8:** For me it is good, because in that case it does not lose its coziness.

**Participant 5:** I would say that Riga is perfect in its size: not too big, not too small – “just golden mean”. The most important that it is walkable, you can reach different places even being on feet. It is not like Moscow or New York, and, in my opinion, it is Riga’s advantage.

**All other participants are agreeing.**

**Research:** *Have you heard about Riga's brand 'Live Riga'?*

**All participants are familiar with the brand.**



**Participant 6:** Well, it is the Destination Management Organization (DMO) of the city. What I know is that they are heavily trying to promote Riga to youngsters at the moment.

**Participant 8:** I have heard of it; however, I am not aware what 'Live Riga' does exactly. I assume that they do city related event planning for tourists and locals, and overall tourism in the city.

**Participant 5:** There was a considerable scandal recently involving the brand.

**Participant 7:** Exactly!

**Researcher:** *And what do you think about their activities?*

**Participant 5:** To say the truth, being a local of Riga, I have not really noticed any grandiose activities from the side of the city's brand to make Riga a better place or something like that. The only thing that comes to my mind, thinking about 'Live Riga', is the Riga City Festival, as it seems like the brand is taking part in the festivals' creation. Otherwise, I would not say that 'Live Riga' makes many publications, develop the city, or even promote it actively... Somehow, I do not see their image [Live Riga's image] very often.

**Participant 6:** I personally perceive the brand 'Live Riga' more like a trademark, rather than a place brand. Meaning, that I can see their logo a lot in tourism bureaus, the airport, in some tourism info centers; nevertheless, for me, they [Live Riga] are not really connected to the city as such. The same as Participant 5, I do not notice the brand on the streets, as well as its activity.

**Researcher:** *Does the image of Riga that is communicated by DMO and other tourism centers resonate with your personal perception of the city?*

**Participant 8:** Maybe at times they show only the bright and beautiful parts of the city, but I think every city that wants to attract tourists will do that. The old town is wonderful indeed, so I think that is a great part of the city to show off for potential visitors!

**Participant 5:** Well, of course, for tourists the city is trying to be shown as more appealing and matching. For example, I have seen new promotional videos of Riga [the participant speaks about "'Insider's Guide to Riga'"], and I did not like it. For me they [videos] felt artificial and false.

*AFTER OTHER PARTICIPANTS WERE INTERESTED IN SEEING THE MENTIONED PROMOTIONAL VIDEOS. THEREFORE, VIDEOS WERE SHOWN, WHICH SUPPOSED TO INTRODUCE RIGA FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF A LOCAL TAXI DRIVER AND A TEACHER.*

**Participant 7:** In the spirit of the Benny Hill Show (laughing)

**Participants 6:** Funny...

**Participant 8:** I like these campaigns, however I feel that there is a bit too much of an antique vibe. It seems like an old Latvian movie. That is not really, how the city feels today. It is a sweet idea, yet I would like to show more of an actual view of wonderful opportunities around the city of how they are today.

**Participant 5:** But it is not about Riga and its residents. I have never seen such taxi drivers here, as well as teachers.

**Participants 6:** Well, yes, but what I felt is that these videos are ridiculing residents. I mean, it is obvious that it was intended to make them [videos] fun and fresh for the auditorium, but somehow it is just too

much. Taking the clip with a teacher, it went to the extreme, in my opinion. Undoubtedly, teachers might have the image of being boring and dreary, and Live Riga tried to play around that, showing “the reality”. But, come on, it is not trustworthy.

**Researchers:** *So, do you agree with the communicated image regarding Riga and its residents, which is displayed in the seen videos?*

**Participants 6:** Here the perspective should be considered! As you told us, these videos won the award, and if to look at them from the external perspective, then it probably has that ‘WOW’ affect: funny, stylish, dynamic; videos show Riga’s attractions and sights! However, if to look from the local perspective, then there is a mismatch. I personally, as a local, do not want the city to be portrayed in that way...

### **All participants agreeing**

**Participant 5:** Hm, but how actually would you show the city?

**Participants 6:** Ok, if you [the officials] want to make the videos like that [“Insider’s Guide to Riga”], then do a research first about what locals WANT to show to tourists. In that case, the officials would get the list with real local places to promote. There are SO MANY local places to explore in Riga!

**Participant 7:** Agree! If you want to show the city through the lens of locals – ask for it. For example, make a competition among youngsters to send short videos about THEIR city, and how they see it. It can be a great inspiration for a promotional video, which would be based on reality.

**Researcher:** *Imagining that it is you, who is creating the next promotional video, what would you include in it? How would you show Riga?*

**Participant 8:** It would mainly be about the Old Town, Agenskalns, some of the newer buildings around the city and definitely, about the nature, which is so close no matter where in Riga you are. We are a small country, though our territory has so many great places both city and nature wise.

**Participant 7:** Woods, The Baltic Sea, nature, fresh air, various sports activities, that people are aspiring to bio- and eco- life...

**Participant 5:** Agree! Recently a new zero waste shop was opened and it commands popularity from locals. Locals also are biking a lot!

**Participants 6:** Nature trails – we have a lot of them around the city. In general, Riga (and Latvia) has great potential regarding sustainable tourism.

Why not show that side? Instead, the organizations limit the image of the city to the nightlife, the Old Town, and memorials. I am not saying that all these should be neglected, but there is a need to widen the image of Riga by widening touristic areas.

**Participant 7:** Agree. In general, everyone knows the Old Town. It is “must” in every European capital and the first thing that you are visiting after arrival. But, unfortunately, in the case of Riga, it seems that all tourist activities are limited to it [the Old City]. Thus, other noteworthy places that hold local identity, are omitted, and their value seems to be reduced.

**Participants 6:** Why not show Daugavgriva fortress, Mangaļsalas mols, and trails? There are places outside the Old Town! Or, for example, Ķišezers – a great place for adventure and active holidays. At a pinch,

Mežaparks can be shown more with its ZOO, woods, trails, and nature. If there is a need to show Riga from the locals' point of view, then it is not about the Old Town. During weekends and holidays, locals are trying to get out to the seaside, or go somewhere like Ķišezers, than to flock in the city center, in my opinion.

**Participant 5:** True. However, on the other hand, it is understandable why the officials concentrate their focus on the Old Town and the city center, as further there are residential areas with hruščovkas [the Soviet-type residential buildings]...

**Participants 6:** Yes, but speaking about residential areas, I believe that each of them has its own vivid features. For example, Ķengaraga promenade, Ušakova kepka...

**Participant 5:** Jaunā teika also...

**Participant 7:** Yeap, there are regularly conducted various authentic events, festivals, street food etc. Besides, Tallinas kvartāls and Jugla with its lake are very nice local places.

**Researcher:** *So, would you like to see residential districts as being more touristic?*

**Participant 7:** We are not talking here purely about residential areas, but rather about specific beautiful places that they can have, and that are more in use among locals.

**Participants 6:** Personally, I do not think that we in Riga severely distinct between a local and a tourist. Riga's residents, as all Latvians, initially are growing up and living in a pretty international environment. Thus, nobody is disturbed by other languages. Therefore, personally, I do not care if I see tourists in the Old Town, where they are more expected, or somewhere at Dzegužkalna.

On the contrary, I am always happy when tourists are visiting, for example, a remoted from the Old Town restaurant, helping to develop local business. I am living in Iļģuciems [one of Riga's districts], and there are many lovely and authentic restaurants, which I always recommend to visit to my friends. And, by the way, exactly in such local places tourists see and experience the real local spirit!

**Participant 5:** And that's what 'Live Riga' does not show!

**Researcher:** *And what about the urbanization of residential districts?*

**Participant 7:** Can we maybe start with repairing roads? (laughing)

**All other participants agreeing and mention the need to renovate buildings too.**

**Participants 6:** There is a need to improve lighting on the streets, especially in residential areas. Also, thinking about residents and tourists, there is a need to develop infrastructure and public transport facilities in general. Besides, it would be great to add more cycling roads, as the need for them is increasing among locals.

**Participant 8:** I also want to express my view towards the biking I do hope that this will improve throughout the years, but at the moment the city is still very bike-unfriendly. The drivers are very disrespectful with parking on the bike-path, as well as they are not used to checking if there are any bikes on the paths and therefore are making it dangerous to go around the city on the bike. I wish there would be more efforts put into improving this situation.

**Participant 7:** Public transport facilities and infrastructure are, in general, a sore point. It would be nice to better them: make transport evenly accessible, cheaper, and precise.

**Participants 6:** Still, at least the good thing is that people who are residents of Riga and who are declared here are able to get the special Riga resident's card, which gives you the possibility for cheaper public transport.

**Participant 8:** It is surprising for me of how expensive the public transport is at the moment. It is often cheaper to take a taxi around the city.

**Participant 5:** Also, there is a need for more parking places in residential areas.

**Participants 6:** Exactly! Even from the point of safety, there are so many cars around the houses, that it is difficult for a fire truck or an ambulance to park near in case of need.

**Participant 7:** It would be great to arrange a general view of the city nicely, including facades of buildings.

**Participants 6:** True. If all old wooden houses, like in Āgenskalns, would be renovated, it would definitely add value to the city and tourist attractions as well. Besides, it is also Riga's authenticity!

**Participant 5:** Yes, it would be a completely different angle to look at the city, as all these small toy houses have their own architecture.

**Participant 6:** Also, it would be great to develop and better libraries around the city. Just a few people now that besides the main national and the city libraries, we also have 76 branches all around the city, but they are in neglected conditions.

**Researches:** *What would you like people to know about your city?*

**Participant 5:** That Riga is an environmentally friendly and VERY cultural capital: we have a lot of exhibitions and performances. Besides the National Opera and theaters, we also possess multiple informal events and festivals, like in Splendid Palace. I believe it would be great to display!

**Participant 7:** I agree! Culture – that what should be portrayed, and not superficially by just quickly showing the National Opera House, but much more comprehensive. We have Baltā Nakts [translate: The White Night, an yearly event when all Riga's museums are free and open until late hours], Baznīcu nakts [translate: The Church Night, when all churches are open for visitors and have prepared cultural programmes], Staro Rīga [a yearly light festival], Skaņu Mežs [a yearly musical festival] and so much more.

We have a significant number of young designers and artists, and the same amount comes to Riga for participating in exhibitions. Recently we had an amazing performance from the group of artists that covered social problems. Of course, people visited it; however, in general, such attractions are not popularized or advertised. Assuming, it still would be interesting for foreigners as well. At a pinch, it is a crucial part of Riga's local culture.

**Participant 6:** Completely agree. In addition, there are a lot of free open-air concerts; weekly local markets; local guide tours in different districts...

**Participant 7:** Adding to that, we are fitness-minded. We are sporty! We have various big marathons and activities.

**Participant 8:** Exactly! We have Stand Up Paddling throughout the canals of Riga or canoeing, when you do that during the sunset or dark hours of the day - amazing.

**Participant 5:** Also, we are innovative! There are regular hackathons, and TechHubs happen, which are covered by foreign media as well. In general, we have a well-developed IT sector.

**Participant 8:** The history should be highlighted more! How proud we are to live in a free country today. That many people fought for Riga to be the city it is today. Also, how old is the city of Riga! Also, about how many enthusiastic, young people live there and that it actually has potential!

*AT SOME POINT THERE WAS A NEW TWIST IN THE CONVERSATION TOWARDS MEDIA REPRESENTATION OF RIGA, AND THE REMAINED SOVIET UNION IMAGE*

**Participant 6:** I would not say that Riga has the Soviet image. Of course, we do have buildings and memorials that carry the Soviet architecture, but I do not feel that there is a spirit of the USSR here. Yes, we do have the big Russian-speaking minority, but it has nothing to do with the Soviet image.

**Participant 7:** For sure, Riga, as well as Latvia in general, has developed a lot since regaining its independence. So, it is not as bad! Moreover, speaking about media, it should be highlighted that there is no such conflict between ethnic Latvians and Russian-speakers; people are living side by side peacefully. The language question is the real stumbling block, yes. However, youngsters from Russian-speaking families speak Latvian nowadays, and the next generations are going to be even more assimilated. Nevertheless, whenever you open the news about Latvia, these conflicts are always covered. It is not nice! It creates a bad impression!

*AT SOME POINT DURING THE DISCUSSION THE POSITIONING OF RIGA AND LATVIA WAS TOUCHED UPON*

**Participant 5:** Now Latvia officially belongs to northern counties. In my opinion, it might be used for strengthening its position on the market.

What Latvia did wrong is that it was not aiming at the Scandinavian level from the begging, but somehow was pairing with Lithuania... "The Baltic couple" (laughing) On the contrary, Estonia was always trying to pair with Finland and other Scandinavia, and as a result, Estonia is booming right now.

**Participant 7:** But if to think, Latvian people have many commonalities with Scandinavians, we are kinda Scandinavians in the hearts with love to the style and all that 'hygge'... We have our own word as well for 'hygge': OMULĪGS (laughing)

**Participant 5:** We are small cold ice-hearts (laughing)

**Researcher:** *Speaking about all-round globalization, are you seeing Riga global or local?*

**Participant 6:** Well, nice question. We cannot sit in the box, so we need to develop and globalize in order to be in line with the other world. However, what I can see, is that any attempts for globalization are taken aggressively from the residents' side because usually, the flagship projects aimed at globalization cost an insane amount of money... And people do not like, consequently do not support it.

**Participant 7:** To say the truth, I believe, that domestic policy enhance that attitude towards globalization, because of corruption. Also, as we were speaking, media represents Latvia not in the best light. When you

continuously see the bad news about theft, and that the city's budget is pilfered, you – as a local – will not see the potential benefits of another project.

**Participant 5:** Unfortunately, it feels that theoretically, we would like to be global; however, we are not ready for that.

**Participant 8:** For me, I guess, I would rather see it as a local, because it is not so big and it has the cozy feeling around it. However, the perfect situation in my mind would be that Riga would be a global city, yet there would be smaller cities or parts of Riga that would have the lovely coziness that Riga has, and that would be the 'local' parts of the area.

**Researcher:** *Can you describe general the feeling or mood that you associate with Riga?*

**Participant 5:** In my case, it is probably melancholic coziness. I have a picture in my head that I am sitting on a windowsill, drinking tea, and looking outside. It is calm and peaceful. Or, when I am walking in the Old Town, I feel some kind of sweet feeling... Riga is sweet.

**Participant 7:** Contrary, I feel the power! Riga is strong and powerful because of its history. I would say that there are even some feelings of roughness.

**Participant 6:** It is hard for me to come up with a word...But, probably, I would say that Riga is dynamic, as it can be different: romantic, calm, fun, and irrepressible. At the same time, a lot of things and developing and evolving right now.

**Researcher:** *Can you emphasize some intangible assets of Riga, unique features of it?*

**Participant 8:** Nature, friends, special atmosphere.

**Participant 5:** Roots. Riga is my home.

**Participant 6:** Hm, history, of course...But I would say – knowledge. Riga can be presented as a 'Brain Hub' (laughing).