

# Inclusivity as civism: theorizing the axiology of marketing and branding of places

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## Abstract

**Purpose** – This study aims to outline an axiology of inclusivity, which can facilitate self-reflection on the possible impact of acting and pursuing a more inclusive branding and marketing for places.

**Design/methodology/approach** – By deconstructing the main assumption, which constitutes the new inclusive paradigm in the marketing and branding of places as more participatory, responsible and democratic, this article tackles critical and pragmatist concerns about the political dimension and its implications for branding and marketing theories and practices in the realm of places.

**Findings** – The article argues that, to be understood and enacted as inclusive, branding and marketing should be seen and act as (bio)political arts of government, characterized by the impolitical as an alternative form of political praxis, whose axiological foundation is based on a particular form of civism, which offers a different mode and stance of approaching political effects and impacts for all stakeholders involved.

**Originality/value** – Little has been written about the political value, substance and appearance that indicate inclusivity as a fundamental notion for participation, engagement and democracy. This article contributes to the existing literature, arguing that inclusivity should be demystified, as it may present a self-fulfilling discourse that might create political problems.

**Keywords** Inclusivity, Civism, Branding, Marketing, Places

**Paper type** Conceptual paper

## Introduction

This article outlines an axiology of inclusivity, which can help to engage and reflect on the possible impact of acting and pursuing more inclusivity in place-based marketing and branding research and practices. In so doing, the paper illustrates the need to unpack inclusivity by first problematizing previous studies and outlining that the branding and marketing of places should be seen as (bio)political arts of government. It presents an ecological view of politics via the concept of the impolitical, which can be considered as a political approach to inclusivity that establishes the branding and marketing of places as both structuring (mundane) and structural (instrumental-discursive) factors in the spatial realm. These two factors are in the present paper linked by presenting the argument that inclusivity is the mode that both researchers and practitioners need to adopt to understand, analyze and practice the different political praxes which constitute the branding and



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marketing of places. Finally, the axiology of inclusivity is discussed by sketching out *civism* as its core. This last section highlights the political implications and impacts in terms of what type of stance different place-based stakeholders should take.

### **Problematising the new inclusive paradigm in the marketing and branding of places**

A new hot topic has emerged in place-related marketing and branding research and practices, which is both a discourse and a mantra: the one of *inclusivity*. Regardless of it being presented as a means to pursue more responsible and democratic marketing and branding activities for places (see for a debate and summary [Kavaratzis et al., 2017](#); [Gonzalez and Gale, 2020](#)), or as a core assumption to foster and promote bottom-up participatory practices ([Eugenio-Vela et al., 2020](#); [Tøttenborg et al., 2021](#)), inclusivity is that which is argued and strived for when conceptualizing how place-related marketing and branding research and practices should be conceived and performed in the present and future.

However, as marketing and branding applied to places are political ([Ooi, 2008](#); [Eshuis and Edward, 2012](#); [Anttiroiko, 2014](#); [Ginesta and de San Eugenio, 2021](#)), inclusivity as a fundamental notion for participation, engagement and democracy should be demystified ([Insch, 2021](#)). This is because the application of marketing and branding concepts, terms and models to the spatial realm cannot come as a pure *broadening* of the market(ing) and brand(ing) logic, where principles of incremental “value” and “benefit” – along with entrepreneurial principles like “numbers,” “efficiency” and “quantification” for all stakeholders involved – should be seen as the uncontested and equally considered as the most viable and proper approach to adopt ([Kavaratzis et al., 2017](#)). In fact, in this regard, while inclusivity is indicated as a remedy to spark a more participatory – but also self-critical and emancipatory – approach to marketing and branding applied to places ([Kavaratzis et al., 2017](#)), it has been, in turn, criticized as it might create a self-fulfilling discourse. Such discourse, while being inclusive in theory, is likely to create problems in practice. These are not problems of implementation ([Coletti and Rabbiosi, 2021](#); [Collins, 2021](#)). Rather, they are linked to the fact that inclusivity implies a pro-market humanist-based ideology that takes only human beings into consideration, excluding post-human or non-human agents, like cyborg, animals and plants ([Coffin, 2019](#)).

Following up on previous critiques ([Coletti and Rabbiosi, 2021](#); [Collins, 2021](#)), this paper attempts to tackle inclusivity from another angle. While inclusivity in the branding and marketing of places has been argued to be based on three different and related dimensions, namely, strategic, cultural and socio-political ([Kavaratzis et al., 2017](#)), the implications of their relationship have been spelled out at the methodological and individual level ([Rebelo et al., 2020](#)), focusing on how inclusivity could be grasped and analyzed, at the procedural and meso-level ([Källström and Siljeklint, 2021](#)), highlighting on how inclusivity could be implemented and facilitated and finally, at the transformative (i.e. normative) and macro level ([Jernsand, 2017](#)), with a focus on how inclusivity should be used to create an ethical stance that creates better conditions for the different stakeholders involved. Although relying on different approaches, these studies share the common implication that inclusivity means, in the case of places, a process that is participatory, democratic and engaging. And yet, one should keep in mind that, like inclusivity, all these terms are political certainly at the onto-epistemological but also, as here stressed, at the axiological levels. In other words, while previous applications of the inclusive paradigm have unpacked the epistemological and ontological aspects of inclusivity, they all leave out the axiological. As the axiological bridges the discussion of what and how knowledge is pursued, by asking which is the value

of inclusivity – if it has any at all – this would require an in-depth assessment of the political philosophical and philological pre-conditions of inclusivity.

In so doing, one should note that, at the outset, marketing and branding applied to places should be considered as a biopolitical apparatus, in which practices and theories emerge as political forms (e.g. urban marketing and branding policy). This entails addressing the politics of inclusivity via the question of its inherent political value, substance and appearance (i.e. axiology) as applied to research and practice in the spatial realm. Following previous studies that, on the one hand, examine different criticalities of the specific socio-political applications of inclusivity (Coletti and Rabbiosi, 2021; Insch, 2021; Collins, 2021) and, on the other hand, develop inclusive place branding in a more programmatic manner (Kavaratzis *et al.*, 2017; Jernsand, 2017; Rebelo *et al.*, 2020; Källström and Siljeklint, 2021), this article addresses the axiological implications of inclusivity in the branding and marketing of places. In other words, this paper outlines the possible (political), concrete and effective implications (i.e. condition) of inclusivity for practitioners and researchers who might want to pursue a different (i.e. emancipatory and transformative) type of scholarship or/and practice.

### Unpacking inclusivity and its political conditions

The “broadening” of the marketing and management vocabulary in the realm of places is the main discourse on which the existing literature holds a common view concerning the increasing commercialization of places under the principle of incremental “value” and “benefit” (Ashworth and Kavaratzis, 2009). The paradigm of inclusive place branding has been suggested as a more participatory, democratic and engaged alternative, which is also self-critical and emancipatory (Kavaratzis *et al.*, 2017). However, this new paradigm moves from the same premises. In particular, the focus on inclusivity hints at the value of including diverse stakeholders to gain democratic legitimacy and be seriously considered by institutional actors. This is to propose that inclusivity can be a tool to improve the living conditions of communities affected by branding processes and establish ethical representational practices, as well as a way for those communities to relinquish control over the process of marketing places.

More specifically, inclusivity in the branding and marketing of places is seen as encompassing three separate but related dimensions: strategic, cultural and socio-political (Kavaratzis *et al.*, 2017). Existing studies of inclusive place branding offer interesting analyses of the structural and mundane conditions in which branding and marketing affect places. They highlight how, in a late-capitalistic socio-economic and political environment, the purely “private” logic, activities, ideas and practices proper to commercial branding have merged with the purely “public” logic, activities, ideas and practices that are proper to local urban governments. They also illustrate how they should be opposed via a more participatory and responsible stance for all involved stakeholders (Gonzalez and Gale, 2020; Eugenio-Vela *et al.*, 2020; Tøttenborg *et al.*, 2021).

However, other studies specify that concepts such as participation and inclusion are complex and relative, and may be subjected to different interpretations by different actors on the spectrum (Collins, 2021). As a result, there is always a possibility that well-intended actions may prove counter-productive, resulting, at times, in the exclusion of residents – particularly under-privileged stakeholders – from deliberations in the branding and marketing process. In this regard, Rebelo *et al.* (2020) suggest that the strategic, cultural and socio-political use of local experiential knowledge involving and empowering local communities in the branding and marketing process may contribute to endogenous developments for place-shaping with a higher focus and onus on the roles played by

residents in the process. This can help to actively engage and empower residents in the processes of branding and marketing their own place, suggesting that residents and stakeholders should attribute their own values and meanings to places. Further, supporting the role of lower powerful actors as residents and dwellers, [Rebelo et al. \(2020\)](#) present them as integral activators of the political process of branding places. They are in fact equated to ambassadors of the place, their gravitas and importance placing them on the same level of all the other, more powerful involved stakeholders. In a similar fashion, [Källström and Siljeklint's \(2021\)](#) procedural view of inclusivity advances the core idea that conflicts over meaning or over the process of branding itself are inherent to inclusivity, as they can spark participation and curtail feelings of exclusion. These authors (2021) also maintain that inclusivity should be implemented as an ongoing and evolving “ecological” process with no fixed beginning or end, which instead promotes a governance system allowing for coordination (i.e. as form of moderate controlled process). In this system, ownership is shared but power is diffused and weighted differently, based more on specific regulations drafted in place-based assemblies. Such an argument does not see power as the expression of the inherent socio-economic and cultural political capital of different stakeholders. What the above-mentioned process means is that beyond being open and transformational of the place, inclusivity also transforms the multiplicity of democratic, ethical relationships ([Jernsand 2017](#)). This stems from the empowerment and responsibility that different stakeholders have toward each other and in relation to the place itself. For [Jernsand \(2017\)](#), inclusivity should ultimately be projected and enhanced as a means to combine critical and pragmatist approaches focusing on a multiplicity of context-based, experimental, bottom-up, long-term engagements.

And yet, such programmatic presentation of inclusivity, while it has been so far successfully offered as a solution to traditional paradigms of branding and marketing of places, it has also been criticized. It has been presented as new normative ideology producing a self-fulfilling discourse that might create problems, not only of theoretical and practical implementation ([Coletti and Rabbiosi, 2021](#); [Collins, 2021](#)), but also because it has so far not taken into consideration which philosophical underpinnings and axiological foundations inclusivity is based upon. In fact, as highlighted by [Kavaratzis and colleagues \(2017\)](#), reflecting on the “value of inclusivity is not just a sociological or geographical intellectual exercise *per se*, but it should entail a more constructive step towards a more complete understanding of the mechanisms underpinning that dynamicity and unpredictability of places as they are required to consider the existence or implementation of processes of *civic* (my emphasis) and social inclusion” (p. 230).

“Civic” is the core term here. The quotation, however, only vaguely outlines what possible value and stance, or in other terms “axiology,” inclusivity might entail. The rest of this article unpacks and considers “civic” as a possible axiology *of and for* inclusivity in the branding and marketing of places. To do this, one should, however, first consider the conditions in which inclusivity in relation to the branding and marketing of places is embedded. In other words, while the paradigm of inclusive place branding offers a possible new overarching framework to conceptualize, analyze and understand the political discourse and mundane processes of place branding as a neoliberal manifestation, its substance (discourse) and appearances (mundane processes) have not yet been defined and connected with its value (i.e. axiology). For this reason, the following sections introduce the axiology of inclusivity first in the philosophical political and socio-historical context upon which inclusivity in the realms of places should be considered. This is followed by a presentation of what type of political appearance, or form, of inclusivity is happening and materializing in the branding and marketing of places. These two are also linked with a

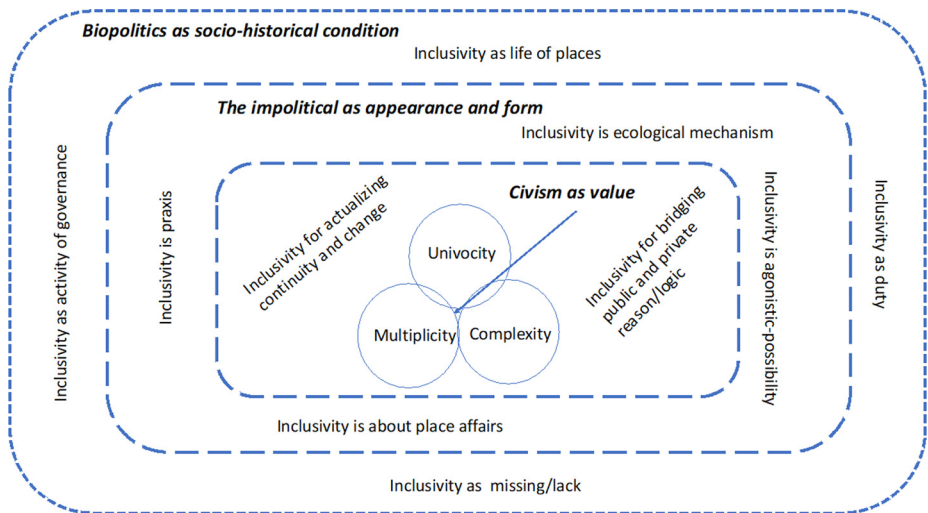
discussion of *civism* as value of inclusivity (Figure 1). Together, these sections illustrate the axiology of inclusivity as both empiricist and normative, or, as pointed by the Jernsand (2017), both critical and pragmatic.

**Towards an axiology of inclusivity as (civic) political condition**

Prior studies that link inclusivity to civic inclusion as a form of plural, democratic and engaged participation in the branding and marketing of places consider such a process inherently ontological and epistemologically political. Some of these studies point out that inclusion should be examined meticulously and processed as an instrumental and regulatory dimension of political participation, just like legislation, legitimacy and accountability (Eshuis *et al.*, 2013; Eshuis and Edwards, 2012; Eshuis and Klijn, 2017). Others consider instead how the contemporary discourse of *broadening* in the realm of places has sparked a certain degree of “colonization” of the public realm by managerial ideologies (Sevin, 2011) as the reflection of a neo-liberal type of entrepreneurialism affecting the spatial domain (Harvey, 1989), which imbues the new inclusive paradigm with a specific ethics that might be in contradiction with – or even in opposition to – what a civic ethics might entail. It has been argued that the inclusive paradigm can be a consequence of its utopian and dystopian “unknown theoretical and ethical underpinnings” (Cassinger *et al.*, 2021; Insch, 2021), as the emancipatory ethos of the new paradigm could spark both critical and pragmatic analyses (Jernsand, 2017), recognizing the different shapes and forms that neoliberalism can take when applied to the realm of places (i.e. neo-statism, neo-corporatism, neo-communitarism). Still, if one considers previous studies on the one hand, and looks at the socio-historical structural and conflictual ways in which the practices and theories of branding and marketing places unfold on the other, it emerges that the political conditions of the new inclusive paradigm have not yet been fully unpacked. The following sections address and attempt to problematize this gap of knowledge.

*Biopolitics as socio-historical condition of inclusivity*

Kavaratzis and colleagues (2017) observe that civic stance and *civism* as an axiology for inclusiveness are not always easy to operationalize, not only in terms of approach and



**Figure 1.**  
Toward an axiology  
of inclusivity as  
*civism*

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design, but especially in terms of the specific institutional contexts in which researchers and practitioner may operate.

The first step to do this is to consider the historical socio-political and socio-economic conditions that led to the emergence of inclusivity as a philosophical notion and that have been intertwined to this today. One needs to consider that, historically, places as cities and towns are loci where the political condition of inclusivity has emerged beyond pure economic (i.e. mercantilist, capitalist or neoliberal) logic and rationale (Agnew, 2005). They are, in fact, the sites where, through time, political decisions were taken, debated, contested, executed and legislated, where political entities, bodies and institutions were seized and re-seized by both low and high political actors (i.e. street politics vs council politics) and during local and international events leading to life-altering political decisions (i.e. wars, treaties, revolts and revolutions). Locations in cities and towns, including market squares, councils, parliaments, houses, courts, battlefields, arenas and offices, were also the places where those particular political decisions were taken, contested and debated and the private interests of the aristocracy, the bourgeoisie and the citizens clashed with public commercial, financial and cooperative interests. Ultimately, those sites have been governed, shaped and managed through specific regulations and legislations that were agreed and disagreed upon, imposed and scrutinized, by different stakeholders, based on the quality, ability and possibility of enhancing places as common and shared locations.

It follows that, to outline an axiology of inclusivity, one should recognize that branding and marketing in the realm of places are political, practical and emergent (i.e. praxis) (Agnew 2005). This is to say that places are locations where different forms of branding and marketing praxis emerge and converge because, throughout history, places have been at the forefront of the body-politics (i.e. another way to refer to *biopolitics*). In other words, the above description introduces the notion that places are loci of biopolitics, where biopolitics is the politics of the life of places. Because of its biopolitical socio-historical condition, every activity taking place around and inside cities (e.g. participatory branding activities, co-creational designs, building and lurching of slogans, creation of urban corridors and residential areas) simultaneously and inherently entails both exclusion and inclusion. This janus-nature of inclusivity, as inclusive and exclusory, is due to the process of branding and marketing of places emerging from communality, understood not as using something in common with others, but rather as sharing with others the fact of missing something (Esposito, 2011). For example, let us consider the different branding and marketing policies put in place to foster and put in agreement different stakeholders and aimed at tackling the lack of green areas, specific commercial and business events or even transportation connections. Such communality is biopolitical because it is, at the same time, a way to celebrate and negate the place as an ecology of different stakeholder positions in the specific place under discussion, be it a whole city, or an area of it. Thus, socio-historically, the marketing and branding of places constitutes a biopolitical apparatus, which is a form of pure governance practice.

Here *civism* as an axiology of inclusivity should therefore be considered a “duty” (Lucarelli, 2018) to place, which should be borne and performed by the different stakeholders involved. This duty is biopolitical. This means that, while it has contemporary “neo-liberal” manifestations – where marketing and branding theories and practices are both cause and effect of the entanglement of domains like “politics” and “economics” in places (Agamben, 2011) – such duty suggests that an axiology of inclusivity in the realm of places might be both affirmative and negative (Esposito, 2008), as it could be utopian or dystopian (Cassingier *et al.*, 2021). In the realm of places this can be seen, for example, in marketed urban areas that might offer redemption (e.g. a sense of citizenship, belonging or a higher

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standard of living) or undergo catastrophic developments (e.g. gentrification, the waste of public money, inter-urban conflicts). This means, in other words, that inclusivity is an organic and complex (i.e. ecological) art of government, or *oekonomia* (Agamben, 2011) that encompasses multiple and converging aspects of place (strategic, cultural and socio-political).

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*The impolitical as appearance and form of inclusivity*

As the condition of inclusiveness is socio-historically bound to places – as biopolitics is the main framework under which multiple branding and marketing policies and activities are grouped, organized and activated – one could ask not only, whether branding and marketing in the realm of places are compatible with participatory, democratic and engaged practices and theories as argued by Kavaratzis and colleagues (2017), but also whether this is possible in the first place. In fact, as noted in the previous section, the marketing and branding of places raises possible concerns. It delineates a context of exclusive-inclusivity that often, in practice, tends to express a single unified vision of place (e.g. one brand, one campaign, one drafted policy that instructs the building of a new school, in one city area or even one single outcome from a resident-led project), where different forms of legitimacy emerge that relate to the different weight certain stakeholders have in the process of branding places (i.e. consider for example the weight of politicians vis à vis architects, or consultants *vis-à-vis* residents). It requires the effort and consent of the various stakeholders in regulated form – e.g. via open-participatory process or closed assembly – but also a form of civic partaking into place-based affairs that is militant, yet careful and respectful. This partaking could in turn be a way to resist or even fight against branding policies to claim different levels of ownership of and right to place.

To tackle the second issue of how partaking could be militant and yet careful and respectful, one has to consider which form and appearance inclusivity might take. The answer is to consider the *impolitical* as an eruptive constructed biopolitical mechanism organizing the collective life of cities, in which civism is defined a politics of agonistic-possibility. This means that inclusivity in the branding and marketing of places is both consistent and constitutive (i.e. immanent and transcendent) (Lucarelli, 2018) of different branding and marketing activities. For example, consider the gestalt of the design, decision-making and consultation process of building an artifact like as a skyscraper or airport, which has the potential of putting a city “on the map,” while at the same time causing environmental issues and concerns. The impolitical also implies a way to envision how civism, as an axiology of place intended as community, could shift focus from the major key (i.e. discourse) of politics (i.e. institutionalized, formal) to its minor key (i.e. mundane practices) so that each branding and marketing activity and effort should be analyzed and understood as performed practice.

Here the link between civism and inclusivity appears more clearly evident. As marketing and branding practices are a biopolitical art of city life government, it follows that every stakeholder, researcher (i.e. scholar) and practitioner (e.g. branding and marketing agent), as well as politician, dweller, entrepreneur, resident, visitor, media is bound and exposed to the duty of inclusivity, thus bearing responsibility to the place in itself and to its own relation to the place. In turn, this double-sided form of responsibility is a form of obligation to be performers in different branding and marketing theories and practices. This is another way of saying that inclusivity should be seen as a political art (i.e. in Machiavellian terms) that has to create its own conditions of emergence, disentangled from references to universal human truth (i.e. normativism). Rather than understanding politics as purely ontological (i.e. empiricism) (Mol, 1999), this view foregrounds a way of thinking about the modes that

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acting and pursuing branding and marketing activities have value (i.e. axiology). Such concept envisions inclusivity as a becoming-political of the different place-based actors and of the branding and marketing process itself: implying that it should be analyzed, understood and practiced “in the making.”

An explanation is needed here: for the sake of clarity, the argument pursued so far should be understood with respect to the notion that branding and marketing in places are political – much like the inclusive paradigm summarized by [Kavaratzis et al. \(2017\)](#) – and have a socio-political dimension. More specifically, I would like to explain my choice of the term impolitical *vis-à-vis* previous authors who instead prefer to use “political.” First, my choice rests on a different philosophical premise, because the process of marketing and branding of places is a biopolitical, and therefore organic and complex (i.e. ecological), art of government. This art requires the use of a term, the impolitical, which, following ([Esposito, 2008](#)), allows to take into account both the *politics on* and the *politics of* the life of places. Second, the impolitical is axiologically different from the “political,” which in both [Rancière \(2004\)](#) and [Mouffe \(2005\)](#) refers to a form of politics similar to the “political interpretation of politics,” i.e. the act of political intervention and the interpretation of such an act that can take the form of either a friend/enemy or sovereignty/anarchist connotation. In fact, the impolitical is considered here as an oblique contextual view of politics, not embedded exclusively in normativism or empiricism, which in turns becomes a way to presentivism as an axiology of inclusivity. Finally, this is practical, as it breaks the dichotomous linear relationship between “politics” and “the political” in the way that the branding and marketing of places have been understood in other studies ([Coletti and Rabbiosi, 2021](#); [Collins, 2021](#); [Kavaratzis et al., 2017](#); [Jernsand, 2017](#)). It does so by breaking down the traditional assumption that the political is a process of materialization of a certain type of politics, or political modalities ([Kavaratzis et al., 2017](#)), where “politics” is seen as a simple process of subjectivation (identity politics). Rather, it allows one to place such a process in the context of the separation between politics (i.e. politics itself as an institutional practice) and the thinking of politics (i.e. the political), or, in other words, between the way branding and marketing efforts appear to us as daily political activities and the way those political activities are both planned, thought out, idealized and eventually analyzed and researched in such a way that inclusivity – understood as democracy, legitimacy, participation engagement – should not follow a pre-defined ideology (i.e. liberalism, communism, etc.).

Returning to our main argument, the impolitical as form and appearance of inclusivity entails a rethinking of the category of the “political” not only as it is analyzed and practiced, but also valued. It should not be valued only in terms of social contacts – thus as “economics,” following Rosseau’s theory (see for a critique [Agamben, 2011](#)) – but rather as a mode that implies thinking of politics as experimentation and innovation. Another way of presenting it is that the impolitical should not be valued merely as a social contract formalizing an agreement among all the stakeholders of a place about certain social conditions as for example relating to the co-creation of brands or a marketing campaign. Rather, it should be valued based on the epistemic co-evolution, in a place, of human and non-human agents ([Coffin, 2019](#)), which implies considering for example the place of “environment,” ultimately being able to generate an area of political conflict and agonism. For example, branding practices and campaigns are not agreed upon only by human beings, but can sometimes be imposed by narratives generated by social media. Those narratives, in turn, can be disturbed spatially and temporally by the stakeholders. Also, when planning to build new areas, many branding and marketing activities are hindered or enhanced by environmental forces, like the level of water in cities canals or the presence of geological hazards.



The impolitical facilitates an understanding of city life as an ecologically complex form in which the central issue of the place's affairs (i.e. as form of *res publica*) merge with the central issue of stakeholder's power and resistance (i.e. as form of *res privata*). It urges us to think of inclusivity as a way to perform place-based policies and activities that could imply an extension of friendship/enmity, as well as a space to incite dialogue among stakeholders in a process that can impact violently on the places (e.g. gentrification or exploitation of heritage-cultural areas), while at the same time improving the life and well-being of urban areas and their inhabitants (e.g. the rejuvenation of polluted run-down urban corridors, or the co-design of participatory decision meeting assemblies for deliberation). This creates the conditions of a shared ownership, in which branding and marketing in places should not be valued as creating the conditions of having something in common, but rather determining a "lack" of communality that delimits, draw lines, builds identities and makes spatial arrangements in a way that introduces inclusivity as a celebration and negation of communality and ownership of a place.

#### *Civism as value of inclusivity*

The two previous sections have set the conditions for unpacking inclusivity and civism as axiology. This section links the core guiding principle and value of understating, analyzing and practicing inclusivity with the two arguments previously discussed, which are summarized in [Figure 1](#).

Inclusivity is presented as acknowledging an alternative to the marketing and branding of places (Kavaratzis *et al.*, 2017). The new paradigm addresses the articulations of different political impacts (Lucarelli and Giovanardi, 2018; Hulme, 2018). The focus is on the practical and radical view of the relations of power among different and consequent place-based networks (Pasquinelli, 2013). This view is inclusive, because it does not simply propose a strategy to understand and analyze different events and modalities of branding and marketing practices and theories. More crucially, it is a framework to acknowledge the role of the researcher who contributes to assemble them (Cassinger *et al.*, 2021).

Inclusivity is axiological, as it has implications for the ethos and habitus enacted in the customs, social organizations and creative-regulative principles of places. The implications and effects relate to certain states of affairs (e.g. marketing processes), situations (e.g. analyses of campaign effect and events) and created activities (e.g. brand logos, equity reports), as well as how these might be encouraged, nurtured or stopped. This has to be done by both researchers and practitioners, as they map existing epistemic political terrains to analyze the promises and problems in the life of places that are branded and marketed.

Civism is an axiology, as the process of branding and marketing establishes an obligation, or duty, for every stakeholder involved. It is endowed with political and economic weight, as in the example of regional actors that pay, or not pay, fees and take part in a regional branding campaign, like in several regional branding assemblies, including in Amsterdam, Öresund-Copenhagen and Greater Stockholm. This is also true of other actors performing more mundane activities, like for example the residential housing boards, or local small entrepreneurs, destination management organizations and social media agents that share pictures about their own activities and properties in a specific area of a city, or even local protests about something that is missing/lacking in the life of cities, like a newer artifact, a different participatory process, or a new green park. This may refer, for example, to the totality of the branding and marketing process of the entire place. Consider the complex branding and marketing process of bigger cities, which are assembled by multiple small projects, which in turn continuously alter the positions of different stakeholders in relation to the place or between themselves by reshuffling the boundaries between private

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interest and common ideas, possibly triggering conflicts that might prove vital to envisioning place as both a private and public affair.

Civism implies that engaging in the practice of marketing and branding in places means “rendering manifest” or, in other words, *actualizing*. This process is receptive and participatory in the way it is received and is manifested by humans, although not entirely because of them, as it entails imaging politics as the “force of things” that have the power to move human and non-human agents (Coffin, 2019). For example, branding concepts or ideas (e.g. vision, mission, statements) should be recognized as an activity that can move stakeholders via brand assemblage (Kavaratzis and Kalandides, 2015). Civism as inclusivity could be seen as the potential issue arising from the branding and marketing process, which has both negative (gentrification) and positive connotations (a sense of belonging). However, this potential issue should be addressed as a singular collective disruption, rather than the sum of intentional acts performed by different actors, for a place to be vital and productive, as, for example, in the comparison between the occupation of a public wall by a graffiti artist and the occupation of a residential building by squatters.

The axiology of inclusivity as civism is based on the political philosophy of value, which is removed from traditionally moral and normative political theories, as it does not assume the subject as an abstract, interchangeable and autonomous individual. At the same time, it also differs from relativist political theories that put context and the contextualized subject at their center. Rather, it offers a way to relocate the inquiry and practice of politics where knowledge is made, negotiated and circulated and, above all, valued. It is about constituting inclusivity as a civic politicized view system (i.e. ideology), a civic political struggle on (im) balances (i.e. power), a civic political process and a series of civic political activities (i.e. policy process) in which those facets, rather than materializing separately, emerge conjointly and are axiologically founded on the three tenets of *complexity*, *multiplicity* and *univocity*, reflecting what Kavaratzis *et al.* (2017) call the strategic, the cultural and the socio-political.

*Complexity* refers to the non-representational, contra-dualistic, modern form of Cartesian thinking (and not to the Leibnizian account of multiplicity, i.e. see the section below) that recognizes two kinds of substance: matter – of which the essential property is that which is spatially extended – and mind – of which the essential property is that it thinks. In other words, complexity is based on a contra dichotomization, which sees ideology, power-politics and policy as a separate “substance” of politics that operates on a certain degree of causality, whose consequences are brought about by these emergent combinations. This relates to what Kavaratzis *et al.* (2017) call the strategic dimension of the inclusive paradigm, which denotes a vision for a place and a plan of action that needs to be implemented tactically to unify multiple stakeholder voices, agendas and desires, as well to serve the interests of the many while establishing, maintaining or enhancing the competitive advantages of the place. Here, instead, complexity refers more specifically to the particular strategic conditions in which knowledge about branding and marketing in places is politically produced and inclusivity is framed, *par excellence*, as a way to devalue and value dichotomy, which both branding and marketing theories and practices describe as applied to places (i.e. consumption–production, brand–place, identity–image, vision–mission).

*Multiplicity* refers to the idea that different modalities interact in a partial way, based on what Leibniz describes as mind and matter. These domains are made of the same kind of substance (i.e. a version of monism) in which they interact according to the rules of a causally, pre-established harmony. This means that the civic implications and effects of the branding and marketing of places on inclusivity are based on a contra-harmonic, pre-established thesis of causality (i.e. this is explicit, e.g. in many cases of counter-brand campaigns, as pointed out by Colomb (2012) in the case of Berlin, and by Neuts and

colleagues (2014) in the case of Amsterdam). This relates to what Kavaratzis *et al.* (2017) refer to as the cultural dimension of the inclusive paradigm. The latter denotes a focus on the cultural milieu of a place and its dialogical relationship with a place origination in a way that branding and marketing efforts should capitalize on particular cultural meanings of place while remaining attentive to specific multiple interpretations of a place emerging to foster bottom up and plural co-existence. Here, instead, multiplicity refers more specifically to the fact that, through differentiation, branding and marketing activities become “immediate” in the sense that they “appear” not in opposition to each other (i.e. mechanistic causality), but rather in a different quality (i.e. heterogeneity) than quantity (i.e. homogeneity). Such view recognizes that the different modalities are continuous with one another, interpenetrating one another. As they are in opposition to each other, they creatively and progressively lay the foundations for branding and marketing as a biopolitical art of government that is inclusive and exclusive at the same.

*Univocity* refers to what Deleuze and Guattari (1994, 1988) following Duns Scotus, refer to as the univocity of being. In univocity, the single “sense of being” releases a charge of difference. This relates to what Kavaratzis *et al.* (2017) term the socio-political dimension of the inclusive paradigm, which shows that the branding and marketing of places should be considered a public and private governmental activity, which, despite striving to reach legitimacy, could do so only by referring to the regulative power of politics in the form of norms and policies to frame a just and open process, possibly rendering democratic and participatory outputs. In this article, univocity refers instead more specifically to the way in which inclusivity has implications for/on power, as the ability to affect and to be affected, and to form assemblages or consistencies, as for example in both the brand transformation process and the co-creation process of a specific online campaign. This means that the implications and effects of branding efforts have different degrees of power. Power here refers to “puissance” rather than “pouvoir,” meaning the power to act rather than that to dominate another or, as pointed above, praxis (i.e. a practical power) in which clashing or acting together, rather than with each other, is the way to establish branding activities.

This means that civism as an axiology of inclusivity is the way here suggested to value (i.e. understand–analyze–practice) two tendencies conjointly, which have emerged across the evolution of the marketing and branding of places as biopolitical socio-historical conditions in the form of the impolitical. The first of these two is the distinction between civism as the reason of/for the public, as the art of preserving *res publica*, in the sense of a community of people living together and sharing a common “lack.” The other is civism as the reason of/for the private, as the art of the bounded place (e.g. municipality, province or state), that is a collective political power and control over different practices, policies and institutions that are linked to the specific place. The implications of this argument are discussed in the next section.

### **Axiological implications for inclusivity as civism**

Based on the abstract treatment of civism so far discussed, this section introduces a more specific outline of the type of stance, or position one should take when embracing the new alternative inclusive paradigm. In this regard, one should bear in mind that civism would entail a stance that is rooted in history, more specifically in the historical context that has popularized marketing and branding of places, letting them evolve into a daily practice and discourse in the life of places. In other words, this means that civism implies that concern about the political conduct of performing and practicing inclusivity should be related to political impacts and effects, in other words to its conditions.

To better frame my argument, I will start by taking as point of departure Lindbloom's (1977) most famous work: "Politics and Market." In this work, the author points out that in contemporary society, it is impossible to clearly distinguish between economics and politics. This leads him to formulate his well-known statement: "much of politics is economics and much of economics is politics" (p. 8). Lindbloom worked with contemporary political scientist Dahl on a definition of political elites (i.e. polyarchy) that in their view was – contrary to the work of Pareto and Mosca – a way to define political elites, which in the case of places could be the international league of consultants, as well as translocal politicians or businesses, as dispersed assemblages of worldwide groups, co-operating and competing with each other, based on economic and political resources. According to Lindbloom and Dahl, polyarchy, despite its degeneration, namely, corporatism, was not supposed to be seen as a description of reality, but as the ideal type of contemporary politics to be axiologically pursued (Dahl, 1973). In the case of the marketing and branding of places, polyarchy is a stance adopted by different branding actors running different branding projects across the world, which all risk becoming a copy-cat outcome, but which in its more positive connotation could also be seen as a prescriptive suggestion of how the contemporary branding and marketing of places should be run by, on the one hand, expanding individual rights (i.e. particularly private rights) in the public and political sphere and, on the other, pursuing a more effective, accountable and economic system of government for cities. For the argument presented in this paper, Lindbloom and Dahl's works are therefore a clear example of the environment and context in which both the American political and economic power and the American academic discourse were embedded and from which the *broadening* brought into the realm of places by Kotler and colleagues (1993) emerged. As noted by Schwarzkopf (2011), this *broadening* – as discourse and context – was typical of the time when the political debate revolved around the economic work of Friedman and Von Hayek and the philosophical contributions of Arendt, which led to the theorization of traditional branding and marketing studies in the realm of places in a specific historical moment (1950–1960s).

The inclusive alternative instead seeks to offer a different paradigm to such a discourse, which is opposed to the political ideology of broadening (Kavaratzis *et al.*, 2017). In fact, an inclusive paradigm would uncover two critical assumptions relating to polyarchy as they are encapsulated in the concept of broadening. The first belief is linked to the assumption that the parallelism between economics and politics is not egalitarian, as economy, understood as private affairs – and everything that stands for it (e.g. individualism, private property, etc.) – has affected politics, intended as a place where politics is debated and formed, namely, the public affairs. This assumption is problematic. First, it postulates the idea that the public–private dichotomy is real, rather than an invention of the Enlightenment (i.e. reducing politics to the mere public sphere and economics to the mere private sphere). Second, this concept assumes American liberal–republicanism as a form of moral and ethical philosophy that puts forward individualism, pluralism and human rights as universal values (see also the work of Rawls on this), without taking into consideration the different meanings these notions have in other cultures, environments, histories. The second assumption is the annihilation of the incorporation of politics into economics, hence the public into the private. This argument subsumes "politics" to the idea of the logic of production, suggesting that economic considerations are the main structure allowing changes. However, this point of view does not take into consideration the "communal" intended as *communitas*, as something missing (Esposito, 2008). Instead, this is crucial since considering the communal as something missing, would then facilitate an understanding of places as co-shaped by the constellation of differently assembled spheres of the economic

and politics that are always entangled across histories and geographies (see a similar account on history by Braudel, 1979). The impolitical view of politics thus leads to the assumption that the concept of politics is embedded in an economic thinking, just as the concept of the economic is embedded in politics, both coming together around the idea of biopolitics as the art of government.

Now that the premise of a more concrete and humble suggestion is set, we can introduce the implications of this axiology. For the sake of clarity, this is spelled out in relation to what previous studies (Kavaratzis *et al.*, 2017; Rebelo *et al.*, 2020 Källström and Siljeklint, 2021 see Jernsand, 2017) have so far programmatically elaborated in terms of inclusivity as a more participatory, democratic and engaged paradigm. Moreover, the implications of civism are also examined in relation to the traditional broadening paradigm (Table 1).

Civism as presented in Table 1 presents an axiology of *actuality* that relates to a political framework that is mainly inspired by the work of late Christian and early Renaissance writers, such as Latini, Guicciardini and Machiavelli (Viroli, 1992). More contemporary traces of this political stance can be found in the biopolitical writings of Negri, Agamben and Esposito (i.e. which have been used to present the branding and marketing of places as a biopolitical apparatus). Civism – emerging between 1100 and 1300 – as suggested by manner of philological comparison by Viroli (1992), can be understood as *civic republicanism*, and it has very little in common with the contemporary communitarian and republican political philosophy that has flourished in the USA with the work of, among others, Arendt (1953, 1990), Taylor (1989, 1997) and Walzer (1991). The main difference is that the contemporary American communitarian and republican political version (also called civism) is structurally, normatively and morally grounded in presuppositions based on universalism, whereas civic republicanism is more attentive to praxis. In other words, it pays much more attention to what happens in a specific environment and then conceptualizes from such position (i.e. this due to its theological Christian foundations, see Agamben, 2011).

Thus, in this article, civism is, at the same time, less normative and less empiricist. It is instead more tactical and political, more actual and power-related. It is at the same time *inclusive*, in the sense that it describes and defines an actual political process – in our case, inclusive branding and marketing of places – while also investigating what a true or just politics should be – in our case, the right to city spaces, for example. However again, compared with the American version, civism is less interested in the universal, thus the structural and more instead in the peculiar truth of politics. Unlike the American version of civism in all its forms (e.g. Rawls, Arendt, Dewey, Walzer) – which can be considered as the axiology of traditional *broadening* – the branding and marketing of places is less interested in normative and universal procedures and structures. It rather focuses predominantly on the micro-action and micro-structures endowing a certain ethical-normative stand that cannot be washed away by a specific instrumentalism and normative viewpoint adopted by different stakeholders, as it is based on a relational way of seeing, thinking and acting in and around places.

How would this axiology affect our work as researchers and practitioners, especially if we aim to expand our thinking beyond the pure realm of places? To answer this question, let us consider the following: in contemporary terms, one could argue that such political stance is very similar to pragmatism, either its positive, communitarian and progressive forms, like the one suggested by Dewey (1940, 2012), or its more or less elitist, procedural and negative versions, like the one put forward by Lippmann (1946, 1962). In fact and in spite of their mutual differences (Jansen, 2009), these scholars share a common philosophical view based on pragmatism that, with Dewey as its best-known proponent, offers a radical but still

Inclusivity (propositions from previous studies)	Civism (implications)	Traditional broadening approach
Strategic, cultural and socio-political dimension (Kavaratzis <i>et al.</i> , 2017)	Republicanism to foster political liberty as practices (praxis)	Communitarian–liberalism to foster political liberty as norm (negative or positive)
Mix of critical and normative approaches (Jernsand, 2017)	Pragmatism and Empiricism as balancing act to project possibility and duties for any	Pragmatism as way to fully project human flourishing
Stakeholders with different degrees of power as integral activators (Rebelo <i>et al.</i> , 2020)	Integral activation via community as the missing/lack created by different stakeholder powers in the process (i.e. biopolitics)	Integral activation via social contract among different stakeholders having different degrees of power in the process (i.e. polyarchy)
Rise of ambassadorship of the place (Rebelo <i>et al.</i> , 2020)	Multiple levels of stakeholder fame and power come along with equivalent duty for the place (i.e. fame and power correspond to obligation in the affairs of the place)	Multiple stakeholder fame and power represent different degrees of power on the place (i.e. fame and power reflect the multiple stakes in the affairs of the place)
Open and transformational of place and stakeholder relationship (Jernsand, 2017)	Civic greatness and wealth as “confidence” to be and live in the place as an end to means, as well means to an end (i.e. branding efforts and activities framed for one’s own place/city)	Democratic universalism and participation as mean to an end (i.e. branding efforts and activities framed for more places/cities)
System that allows for coordination (i.e. as form of moderately controlled process) (Källström and Sijekint, 2021)	Self-governing process enhancing representation, based on virtues like public spiritedness and private measured	Process regulated at the outset enhancing representation, based on determined actors’ expertise or public or private power
Shared ownership, but power diffused and weighted differently, based on specific regulations (Källström and Sijekint, 2021)	Promotion and fostering “discord” via a coercive modular process of checks and balances build by legislation	Attempt to build agreement on bureaucratic process of checks and balances build by normalization
Long-term multiplicity of reciprocal engagements for based on empowerment and responsibility (Jernsand, 2017)	Seeking prudence in taking part in the public and private affairs of a place	Seeking predominance in taking part in the public and private affairs of a place

**Table 1.**  
Implications for  
civism as axiology  
in the  
marketing and  
branding of places

progressive democratic thinking that is open, tolerant and experimental. Its notions of fact and truth are fluid and contingent, without succumbing to the radical relativism that characterizes most branches of postmodernism (Marres, 2007). However, what such political philosophical thought has not in common with the impolitical as presented in this article, for example, is that the impolitical is the element allowing inclusivity to be both critical and pragmatic (Jernsand, 2017), in the sense of offering a less optimistic, less secular stance with a more contextual and contingent approach to political realities and political morality that is at odds with the progressive modernist democratic thinking typical of American pragmatism (both in Dewey and Lippmann versions). The political philosophy upon which pragmatism builds reflects a type of radical democracy based on American liberalism that is linked to traditional broadening in the branding and marketing of places. The issues that both Lippmann and Dewey struggled with throughout their work reflect only different solutions to the same problem, namely, preserving and expanding the forms of the American democracy, as already described by Tocqueville (2003), that are possible in a complex, heterogeneous, technologically advanced liberal society. It is then clear that an axiology of inclusivity for branding and marketing places instead, as pointed by Kavaratzis *et al.* (2017, p. 302), is attentive “to the argument that civic participation is useless or unsuccessful,” as well as being radically different, because the spatial and historical are more local, contextual and contingent. In other words, an inclusive political axiology endorses neither universalist nor pluralist claims about the world and political phenomena. Rather, it critically reviews its real impact and consequences.

All this implies that:

- Any actor having a direct or indirect stake in place affairs should endorse a civil stance, seeking to unmask any pretensions of just process or necessary outcome that might be invoked in the process of branding and marketing by any actors to justify, modify, gentrify, modernize the spatial areas in a city with the aim of appropriating the roles and city spaces of other actors;
- Any actor should be a branding and marketing practitioner and theoretician of their own place, being fully attentive and acquainted to the socio-historical environment of the place and how it relates to their own stake in the place, at the same time recognizing the validity of loyalties and the attachments of any actors acting and living in other places, this not only for benchmarking purposes, but also for building translocal projects that could expand inclusivity;
- Any actor should engage in the process of branding and marketing of places, pursuing to justly and peacefully propose efforts and activities that strengthen and promote the place, not in a dangerously patriotic way, but as a way to foster collaboration and coexistence between different efforts and activities even if these might not be sound, as for example incoherent marketing communications;
- Any actor should participate in the branding and marketing of places with the idea that it is all about the public and private affairs of the place, where any effort and activity is both the main goal and outcome of the branding and marketing process as an art of government; and
- Finally, it follows that any actor is an artist rather than a scientist, and should not presuppose the validity of any pre-defined gold standard branding international process.
- Each actor should, instead, perform designed activities and efforts to promote a place and defend it from external (e.g. over-tourism, business relocation) and internal (i.e. gentrification, pollution) aggression, all this by fostering dialogue and prudence.

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