



BRAND ARCHITECTURE IN CULTURAL AND CREATIVE PLACES

Endorsed Brand Strategies

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ABSTRACT

This research investigates the application of the endorsed brand strategy by cultural and creative actors on the periphery of established cultural and creative spaces. The study focuses on two cultural and creative quarters in the United Kingdom: the Ouseburn Valley, in Newcastle Upon Tyne, and Digbeth, in Birmingham. By analysing these case studies, the research explores how peripheral actors leverage the reputation and appeal of central, established brands to enhance their own visibility and appeal. Consequently, the study analyses brand architecture techniques and their applicability to cultural and creative places. A key finding is the effective use of endorsed brand strategies by peripheral actors, who have developed independent brands that are intrinsically linked to the district's central brand. This synergy between peripheral and central actors not only promotes the peripheral entities but also contributes to the district's overall appeal.

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1. Introduction

1.1. Brand architecture and endorsed brands

Brand architecture refers to the strategic organisation and structure of a brand portfolio. It determines how brands within a portfolio are related and differentiated from one another, influencing the overall perception and value of the brand ecosystem. Effective brand architecture helps manage the relationships between the corporate brand and its sub-brands, ensuring clarity, coherence, and strategic alignment in brand communication and management.

In the context of place branding, brand architecture is crucial for managing the diverse identities and strategic goals associated with different territories. There are 3 main approaches: the monolithic, the endorsed brand and multi-brand architecture.

Monolithic (branded house) architecture, where a single, cohesive brand identity represents the entire place: this strategy, exemplified by Sydney's branding efforts, simplifies communication and creates a strong, unified image. However, it can be challenging to encapsulate the diversity of a place under one brand (Dooley and Bowie, 2005; Go and Govers, 2012). Endorsed brand architecture offers a balanced approach, where sub-brands maintain their unique identities while being linked to an overarching brand. This model is seen in cities like Melbourne, where various initiatives and districts have their own branding but are endorsed by the city's primary brand. This strategy reflects the place's territorial diversity and leverages a strong central brand for credibility. The challenge lies in ensuring consistent messaging across sub-brands (Anholt, 2007; Anholt, 2011; Dooley & Bowie, 2005; Zenker y Braun, 2010). Finally, multi-brand (house of brands) architecture involves branding different regions or aspects of a place independently, each with its unique identity. This approach allows for tailored marketing strategies and highlights the distinct characteristics of each region. However, it can lead to a fragmented overall identity and potential internal competition, complicating the management and strategic alignment of the place brand (Dooley and Bowie, 2005; Mabillard et al., 2023). Thus, place brand architecture, whether monolithic, endorsed, or multi-brand, plays a vital role in organising and promoting the diverse elements of a place. Each model has its advantages and drawbacks, requiring careful consideration and strategic alignment to effectively manage and sustain the place's brand identity.

This research focuses on how the endorsed brand strategy is used when branding cultural and creative quarters and/or urban places in the city, considering that an endorsed brand strategy occupies a middle ground between a monolithic (branded house) and a house of brands approach. In this strategy, sub-brands retain their unique identities but are linked to the parent brand, leveraging its credibility, reputation, and quality without overshadowing their distinct characteristics (Dooley and Bowie, 2005). This linkage is subtle, ensuring that the core values of the sub-brands are not diluted by the association with the corporate brand. In an endorsed brand structure, there is a perceptual link between the parent brand and its sub-brands, transferring general values such as trust and assurance without compromising the individual brand identities. This linkage is beneficial for transferring brand equity, where the credibility of the umbrella brand enhances the perceived value of the sub-brands (Devlin & McKechnie, 2003; Rajagopal and Sanchez, 2004). Prominent examples of endorsed brand strategies in the corporative world include 'Novotel by Accor', 'Kit-Kat by Nestlé', and 'Obsession by Calvin Klein' (Aaker, 2004). In these cases, the parent brand lends its credibility and quality assurance to the sub-brand, which maintains its unique market position and identity. This strategic endorsement helps sub-brands capitalise on the established reputation of the corporate brand while preserving their distinctive attributes.

In the realm of place branding, brand architecture becomes crucial due to the diverse stakeholders and target audiences involved. Places, much like commercial brands, need to create value for both internal (residents, businesses) and external (tourists, investors) publics (García Carrizo, 2021c). Several place brands can coexist within the same territory, necessitating a strategic design that aligns with the overall brand architecture (Dooley and Bowie, 2005; Sarabia-Sanchez and Cerda-Bertomeu, 2017). Endorsed brand architecture in place branding allows for a 'polyhedral' identity, where the core identity remains consistent, but extended identities adapt to different target segments and territories (Anholt, 2007; 2011). This approach acknowledges the complex nature of place brands, which must cater to varied internal and external audiences. It enables places to communicate specific messages

tailored to different stakeholders, enhancing the overall brand's relevance and impact (Zenker and Braun, 2010; Zenker and Petersen, 2010).

1.2. The importance of communication and branding in cultural and creative places

Communication and branding are vital components in the development and promotion of cultural and creative places but are also key for the place being legitimised to citizens (García Carrizo, 2021c). Besides, these elements not only shape perceptions but also drive engagement, investment, and tourism, which are crucial for the sustainability and growth of these areas.

In this sense, effective branding helps cultural and creative places establish a distinct identity that differentiates them from other destinations. This unique identity captures the essence of the place's cultural and creative assets, allowing it to stand out in a crowded market. A strong brand communicates the place's core values, history, and unique offerings, which can attract visitors, investors, and new residents (Sarabia-Sanchez and Cerda-Bertomeu, 2017) and enhance the urban sustainability of the area helping it to fight against gentrification when using branding for creating citizen engagement with the place (García Carrizo, 2021c).

Communication strategies play a crucial role in shaping how cultural and creative places are perceived by both internal and external audiences. By consistently conveying positive messages and narratives, these places can enhance their reputation and perceived value. This, in turn, can lead to increased tourism, higher levels of investment, and greater community pride and engagement with the urban area. Effective communication ensures that the place's brand resonates with its target audiences, reinforcing its cultural and creative significance (Zenker and Petersen, 2010). However, the most important side of branding and communication is that they are essential for engaging local communities, businesses, and policymakers. Involving these groups in the branding process ensures that the brand reflects the place's true character and aspirations, its sustainability and its *raison d'être*. This engagement fosters a sense of ownership and pride among residents and stakeholders, which is critical for the long-term success of the place brand (Calvento and Colombo, 2009; García Carrizo, 2021c).

In this sense, a well-executed branding and communication strategy can significantly impact the economic, social and urban development of cultural and creative places. By attracting tourists, artists, cultural institutions, creative industries, and businesses, these areas can boost their local economies, create jobs, and stimulate investment. Effective branding can transform cultural and creative places into thriving hubs of activity, fostering innovation and economic resilience (Cárdenas et al., 2021) which go beyond being a touristic site to being key locations in the cities for economic, urban and social development (García Carrizo and Granger, 2020).

In conclusion, communication and branding are indispensable in the promotion, development and sustainability of cultural and creative places. They help establish a unique identity, enhance perception, engage stakeholders, and drive economic and social growth, ensuring the vitality and sustainability of these vibrant areas.

2. Objectives and methodology

2.1. Research objectives

The main research goal of this study is to analyse how peripheral cultural and creative actors leverage the reputation and appeal of established brands within cultural and creative places. To achieve this, the study focuses on two case studies: the Ouseburn Valley in Newcastle upon Tyne and Digbeth in Birmingham (both in the United Kingdom). These areas were selected for their rich post-industrial heritage and significant efforts in cultural regeneration. Birmingham, as the second largest city in England and a historical centre of the Industrial Revolution, provides a contrasting case to Newcastle, which benefits from a status that is more independent from London geographically and administratively. This comparative analysis aims to provide insights into how different urban scales and contexts influence the utilisation of established cultural brands by peripheral actors.

2.2. Research methodology

Data collection spanned from 2016 to 2024, incorporating participant observations and in-depth interviews. Seventy observation periods were conducted, strategically avoiding major events to capture everyday activities within the areas analysed. Observations focused on key cultural hubs such as the Custard Factory and Fazeley Studios in Digbeth, and the Ouseburn Trust and Ouseburn Farm in the Ouseburn Valley. Additionally, more than 2,500 photographs and various kinds of informational material (brochures, maps, information flyers,...) were collected to document the physical and social landscapes of these areas. The materials collected from these observations have been published in open access on Zenodo (www.doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.14243566).

Furthermore, twenty-seven in-depth interviews with academics, professionals, and local stakeholders provided nuanced insights into the branding strategies and challenges relating to communication and implementation faced by these quarters. The interviews adhered to an exploratory framework, categorising responses into three main themes: historical changes, citizen participation, and branding and identity.

3. Results: Peripheral cultural and creative places in branded districts and the importance of endorsed brands as a solution

3.1. Case Study 1: The Digbeth, Birmingham

3.1.1. Digbeth's Brand Management: The Custard Factory and Oval Real Estate branding strategy

Digbeth is a cultural and creative place in the urban centre of Birmingham, United Kingdom, which has undergone a process of urban regeneration since the late twentieth century. Originally an industrial neighbourhood, Digbeth has been transformed into a unique urban space, characterised by old factories, historic buildings, ruined warehouses, and a mix of housing, canals, and pubs. During the 1980s and 1990s, the area suffered a population decline due to relocation policies, leaving many facilities unused (Bayer et al., 2018).

Thus, the branding management of Digbeth began in the late 1990s when the City Council attempted to rebrand the area as 'Eastside' to give it a modern touch similar to New York's Eastside. However, this designation did not resonate with the locals, who continued to refer to the area as Digbeth. By the early 2000s, the City Council restored the name Digbeth, losing the opportunity to create a strong brand from a public perspective and paving the way for private initiatives (García Carrizo, 2021b).

A turning point in the branding of Digbeth was the remodelling of the Custard Factory in 1993. This former factory was transformed into a centre for creative and cultural industries under the management of its then- owner, Gray. Artistic and architectural interventions, such as the installation of the central fountain, Digbeth's Dragon, and the Green Man, contributed to the revitalisation of the area, although they were not initially conceived as branding strategies.

Over the years, the Custard Factory became perceived as the symbol of Digbeth, promoting an image of creativity and diversity in the area. However, the district as a whole was not widely promoted, and other significant spaces in the area, such as The Bond and Fazeley Studios, failed to integrate under a common brand image. The lack of cohesion and joint promotion resulted in a diffuse perception of Digbeth's cultural and creative district.

In 2017, Oval Real Estate acquired several key buildings, including the Custard Factory, and initiated a new phase in the branding management of Digbeth between 2019 and 2020. This change included the homogenisation of the physical environment using corporate colours (black and yellow) and the creation of a coherent visual identity for the district (figure 1). This new image aimed to unify the various spaces Oval Real Estate owned in Digbeth and strengthen the sense of belonging, prominently featuring the word "Digbeth" in numerous locations to reinforce the area's identity.

Figure 1. Digbeth's visual identity



Sources: García Carrizo, 2019 and Oval Digbeth Ltd., 2024.

Digitally, Oval Real Estate consolidated the websites and social media profiles of the acquired spaces under the domain www.digbeth.com and the account @indigbeth, promoting the use of the hashtag #onlyindigbeth. This approach sought to eliminate negative associations and revitalise the area's perception. Besides, Oval Real Estate's branding strategy is based on three core values: industrious workers, independent individuals, and a united community. The vision is to create a revitalised neighbourhood that offers new models of work and life while respecting Digbeth's industrial and cultural history (Oval Digbeth Ltd., 2024).

However, despite the creation of a central brand around Digbeth, Oval Real Estate did not successfully involve all the creative and cultural actors in the district in their branding strategy, only those places acquired by Oval Real Estate were included in this new branding strategy (García Carrizo, 2024; García Carrizo 2021a). The exclusion of independent cultural agents, such as the Grand Union Canal galleries and Eastside Projects, prevented complete integration of all the area's creative and cultural elements, which could have further strengthened Digbeth's brand.

3.1.2. Endorsed brand architecture strategy followed by Oval Real Estate: The Bond, Green House, Fazeley Studios and other cultural and creative places

As previously discussed, starting in 2017, Oval Real Estate gained control over several spaces in Digbeth: the Custard Factory, the Green House, Fazeley Studios, The Bond, Tubeworks, Floodgate Factories, Arthaus, Wilds, Retail, and Leisure.

In this context, the Custard Factory continues to represent industrial heritage with its original architectural elements, such as steel windows, exposed steelwork, and high ceilings. Across from the Custard Factory is the Green House, a modern seven-storey building designed for incubators, accelerators, and small businesses related to cultural and creative industries. It offers half of its spaces with private balconies overlooking the central square and the iconic Old Crown pub, one of the oldest extant secular buildings in the city.

Fazeley Studios, a former warehouse and church refurbished in the early 2000s, serves as a versatile venue nestled within the cultural heart of Digbeth. It provides spaces beneath high ceilings or overlooking a peaceful courtyard. The Bond, Birmingham's lively creative hub, repurposes industrial architecture to encourage collaboration in the TV, film, media, and tech sectors, fostering innovation and compelling partnerships. The Tubeworks, Floodgate Factories, Arthaus, and Wilds offer a diverse range of workspaces with distinct characters, each contributing to Digbeth's creative landscape.

Therefore, all of these spaces are linked to the creative and cultural industries located in Digbeth. While they share a similar historical origin, each was an independent space until Oval Real Estate Ltd. acquired them in 2017. To maintain a degree of independence, their brand identity is managed through an endorsed brand strategy. Consequently, although all these brands fall under the Digbeth umbrella, they maintain a certain graphic independence and brand identity (figure 2).

Figure 2. Digbeth's umbrella brand architecture.



Source: Oval Digbeth Ltd., 2024.

Nevertheless, since they all follow an endorsed brand strategy with Digbeth, they align with and benefit from the reputation and identity of this particular district in Birmingham. This strategy involves directly associating each place with Digbeth and leveraging its reputation as a cultural and creative hub. By adopting this approach, these spaces not only benefit from Digbeth's established brand but also contribute to strengthening it by offering unique experiences and enriching the vitality and diversity of the area. From preserving industrial history at the Custard Factory to transforming former factories into modern and creative spaces, each of these places contributes to Digbeth's identity as a dynamic and culturally enriching destination.

Note that special mention is deserved by The Bond, the former Victorian industrial factory located on the Grand Union Canal, which has been offering spaces for conferences and events since 1988, such as weddings, business meetings, etc. The building, which had previously been a customs house and an old HP sauce warehouse (Gibson, 2014), is situated alongside the canal and has several outdoor spaces (Jones, 2019). The Bond Company, which owned the space until it was acquired by Oval Real Estate Ltd. in 2017, was a pioneer in establishing creative and cultural industries in Digbeth and launched the first major project to convert historic buildings along the canals, becoming a vital element in the area's regeneration (Interview 1, personal communication, November 14, 2017). The success of the project led the company to acquire other spaces in Digbeth in 2001, such as The Arch on Floodgate Street. Financing for the renovation of these spaces was obtained from the European Regional Development Fund and the English Partnership, which provided shelter for different 'Think Tanks' housed in the company's buildings, developing their innovative projects at local, national, and international levels (The Bond, 2024). However, until 2018, when these spaces were integrated as part of Digbeth by Oval Real Estate Ltd., The Bond Company had positioned them more as part of Eastside and, therefore, they had been more linked to the area near Millennium Point than to the Custard Factory itself, interacting more with these spaces instead of developing activities with the creative and cultural actors of Digbeth. This would explain why The Bond still maintains, for example, an independent website (www.thebonddigbeth.com) and a certain independence from the Digbeth brand and the rest of the spaces owned by Oval Real Estate.

3.1.3. Exploring Potential Brand Endorsement Strategies at Digbeth: Junction Works/Grand Union Gallery

As previously discussed, within Digbeth, there exist additional spaces operating independently of Oval Real Estate Ltd., thus developing distinct brand strategies from the overarching cultural and creative place brand. One such example is the former Junction Works, now known as Grand Union Gallery.

The historical narrative of Junction Works dates back to 1790, coinciding with the establishment of the Branch and Warwick canals in Digbeth, marking the onset of urban and industrial growth in the area. Positioned at the convergence of these canals, Junction Works was initially acquired in 1812 by Pickford & Co., later leased by the Grand Junction Canal Company, serving as an early model of office architecture tailored for canal management (Marshall, 2019). However, the cessation of the Grand Junction Canal Company's operations in 1876 led to the factory's abandonment until its revival in 1884 by C.T. & W. Holloway to produce sweets. This shift in activity, focusing on confectionery manufacturing rather than canal usage, prompted structural modifications, orienting the factory towards street access (Marshall, 2019).

Subsequent years witnessed varied occupancy, including utilisation by canal companies and Robsons Limited, which operated a screw factory from 1911 to 1960, necessitating structural alterations reflective of evolving industrial needs. With the onset of deindustrialisation in the 1970s, the factory's utilisation dwindled, culminating in a fire incident in 2004, resulting in significant deterioration despite its Grade II heritage status and recognised historical significance (Historic England, 2019).

The period between 2019 and 2020 marked a pivotal juncture for Junction Works, as the new owners, Homes England and Grand Union, initiated a fundraising campaign raising £3.25 million for the restoration of the building, envisioning its transformation into a contemporary art hub. This endeavour aimed to accommodate galleries, artist studios, and public spaces, thereby rejuvenating the dilapidated structure into a vibrant cultural centre named Grand Union. Positioned as a premier destination for national and international artists, Grand Union aspires to foster artistic discourse, support the local creative community, and serve as a cultural landmark in Digbeth (Marshall, 2019).

Acknowledging the thriving artistic community within Digbeth, Grand Union's establishment underscores its commitment to nurturing and expanding this community, reinforcing the district's allure to visitors both locally and globally (Street, in Grand Union, 2024). As the sole provider of a public gallery space in Digbeth, Grand Union, supported by Arts Council England funding, serves as a hub for professional artists and designers, distinguished by its independent brand strategy and cultural identity (figure 3), distinct from the overarching framework outlined by Oval Real Estate.

Figure 3. Grand Union visual identity.



Source: www.grand-union.org.uk

Please note that this research is not aimed at assigning blame to any party involved, but rather seeks to illustrate the potential synergy that is currently being underutilised due to ineffective communication, hindering the creation of powerful brands. While it is acknowledged that Grand Union operates independently from Oval Real Estate Ltd. from a management perspective, it is also worth noting that they both occupy the same location within the culturally rich and creative district of Digbeth.

In this regard, all stakeholders must adopt a unified brand approach that aligns with the overarching objectives. An endorsed brand strategy presents a viable solution, wherein entities such as Grand Union and similar places, though not under the direct purview of Oval Real Estate Ltd., can be seamlessly integrated into the broader Digbeth brand while retaining a degree of autonomy.

However, it is crucial for Oval Real Estate Ltd. to recognise that place branding transcends individual and private entities and is inherently the responsibility of various public and private actors who contribute to the collective identity of the place. Understanding this fundamental aspect is pivotal for fostering collaboration and maximising the branding potential of Digbeth. Thus, the Digbeth brand is not about Oval Real Estate Ltd.; it should be about all the public and private actors and people, who live, work and enjoy themselves in the area and only in this way can a sustainable brand be achieved.

3.2. Case Study 2: The Ouseburn Valley, Newcastle upon Tyne

3.2.1. Ouseburn's Brand Management: The Ouseburn Trust

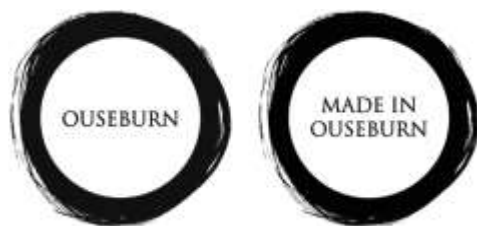
In the early 2000s, the Regional Development Agency and local authorities began exploring the economic impact of creative industries in the United Kingdom, with a particular focus on cultural and creative quarters. In Newcastle, five cultural districts were identified on a promotional map, but Ouseburn Valley, despite its high concentration of artists and creative industries, was not included due to its lack of major cultural institutions and shops. Faced with the lack of interest from the City Council, the Ouseburn Trust took the initiative to manage and promote the valley's image, developing a sense of belonging among residents and users, known as 'Ouseburnness' (Newcastle Gateshead, s.f.).

From the late 1990s to the early 2000s, the Ouseburn Trust focused its strategy on strengthening the valley's identity, associating it with values such as its industrial heritage, historical character, and the availability of affordable spaces for artists. The valley was portrayed as a heritage-rich, vibrant, social and sustainable area, which helped foster a strong sense of belonging among its residents (García Carrizo, 2022). This sense of community was based on the valley's history, unique geography, and the passion of its users.

Between 2005 and 2017, the Ouseburn Trust worked to position the valley as an ideal place to work, live, and enjoy oneself. Numerous creative and cultural projects were established, such as the Lime Street studios and Ouseburn Farm, which acted as catalysts for further development of creative and residential spaces. During this period, communication strategies included informative pamphlets, posters, and visitor maps, highlighting the area's heritage value. An attempt was made to create a common visual identity with a specific logo, but this effort faced resistance from some local actors who preferred to maintain their individuality.

Since 2018, the Ouseburn Trust has intensified its efforts in brand management, launching the 'Made in Ouseburn' campaign to highlight the valley's artistic and cultural production. Marketing and communication experts were hired to develop comprehensive strategies, and advertising campaigns such as 'Ouseburn Valley: Explore and Enjoy' were launched to promote the area on social media. Throughout its management, the Ouseburn Trust has focused on communicating the values and importance of the valley, seeking to legitimise and preserve the area through effective communication and collaboration among different actors (García Carrizo, 2022). Although implementing a common visual identity (Figure 4) has been complicated, the organisation has succeeded in strengthening the community and sense of belonging in the valley, demonstrating that communication and shared values are essential for the sustainable development of Ouseburn Valley.

Figure 4. Ouseburn logo and "Made in Ouseburn" logo campaign.



Source: García Carrizo and Granger, 2020.

Furthermore, in April 2024, the Ouseburn Trust re-designed its own logo along with the logos for two key elements of the valley: the Victoria Tunnel (one of its prominent heritage sites) and the Ouseburn Festival (a significant annual event in the area) –please, note that the Victoria Tunnel and the

Ouseburn Festival are managed by the Ouseburn Trust-. This redesign aimed to create a unified visual identity for all associated entities, ensuring a cohesive brand image across the valley. The logos share round shapes and plain colors that connect them with the main Ouseburn brand, reflecting a consistent and recognizable identity that ties together the area's heritage and cultural offerings (Figure 5).

Figure 5. Redesign of the Ouseburn Trust, Victoria Tunnel, and Ouseburn Festival logos in 2024 to be visually similar to the Ouseburn logo.



Source: Author's archives, 2023 and Ouseburn Trust, 2024.

3.2.2. Hoult's Yard and Cycle Hub: taking advantage of the Ouseburn brand

Within the main spaces of Ouseburn, notable landmarks include Ouseburn Farm, the Ouseburn Trust, Lime Street, the Cluny, and Seven Stories, among others. This paper, however, aims to analyse how non-central spaces have engaged with Ouseburn's activities through the use of endorsed branding, successfully creating synergies with the Ouseburn brand. A prime example is Hoult's Yard, a building that is physically distant from Ouseburn's cultural and creative district but has effectively integrated into the district by leveraging the Ouseburn brand's strengths. Hoult's Yard hosts numerous creative industries within its complex of buildings. Though situated outside the 'strict boundaries of the Ouseburn Valley, it is fully integrated into the district' (Interview 2, personal communication, September 19, 2018). This complex exemplifies the diffuse boundaries of the Ouseburn Valley and how internal and external actors collaborate, enhancing the district's vitality, diversity, and sustainability over time (Interview 3, personal communication, September 20, 2017) by capitalising on endorsed brand strategies and using, for example, the same kind of corporate colours, tone and visual style (figure 6).

Figure 6. Ouseburn, Hoults Yard and Cycle Hub logos.

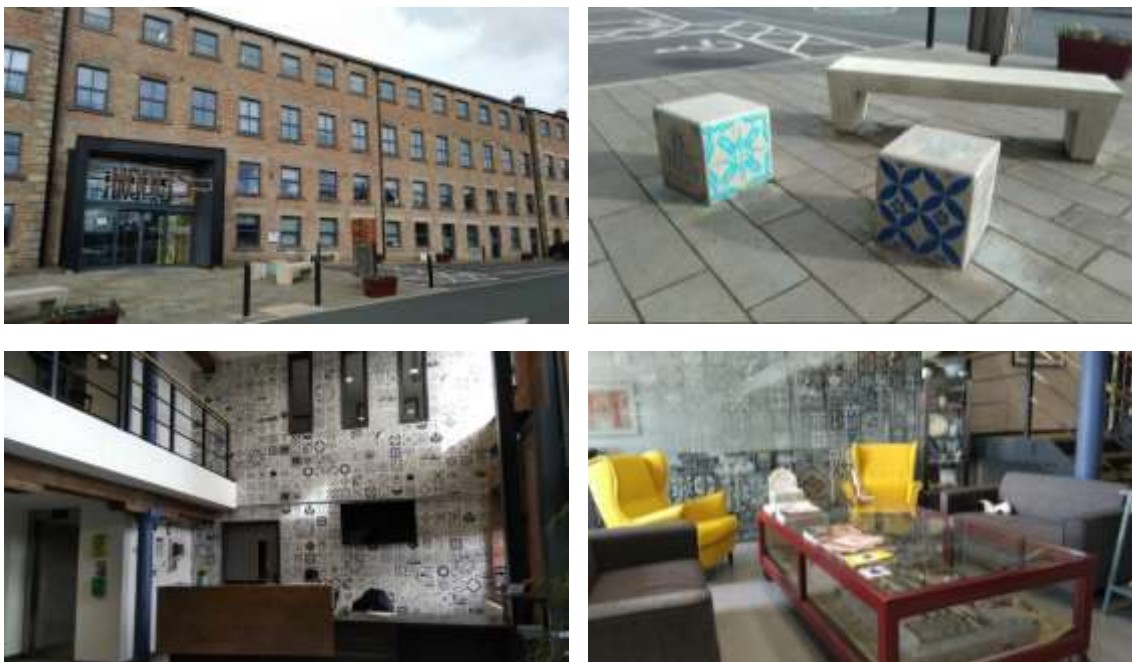


Source: hyhubs.com/hoults-yard/, Cycle Hub, 2024 and Ouseburn Trust, 2023.

Originally, Hoults Yard was part of the Malings pottery factory, which employed over 2,000 workers. From 1983, it was used by the Hoults family as a warehouse. Between 2008 and 2010, with a £5 million investment funded by the European Regional Development Fund, the building was restored to its current state (Ouseburn Trust, 2015).

During the recovery and rehabilitation works, two key aspects were prioritised. First, to foster a sense of belonging and support the local economy: companies based in Ouseburn were engaged for specific project details (Interview 3, personal communication, September 20, 2017). Thus, the project was led by Xsite Architects and local artist Raskl, who designed the reception desk and signage for Hoults Yard. Prefab77, along with artists such as Bruce Reid Framing and Jack Lowe, created a brand image inspired by the Malings pottery factory, with Brightspark Advertising handling other promotional aspects. These contributors also focused on the second key aspect: preserving the buildings' history and past. When refurbishing the interiors and creating a brand image, the local artists drew inspiration from the site's history as a ceramics factory and the designs of the objects produced there, incorporating these patterns into the new spaces (Ouseburn Trust, 2015) (Figure 7).

Figure 7. Images of Hoults Yard after restoration. The upper section shows the exterior of the main building and public space within the complex, where ornamental motifs from the site's historical ceramics inspired the design. The lower section shows the building's interior.



Source: García Carrizo, 2020 and 2024.

Currently, Hoults Yard is a complex of offices and workspaces housing over one hundred creative industries, including public relations, design, marketing, digital communication, audiovisuals, and

cultural, artistic, and musical event production (Newcastle Gateshead, 2024). The complex also includes industrial units and storage facilities across different buildings, such as The Kiln, The Old Forge, The Pattern Shop, and The Teapots. Thus, it offers flexible industrial spaces (30-300 sqm), storage options for various quantities, and over one hundred offices across five buildings, catering to individual entrepreneurs and larger teams. It features meeting rooms (Chintz, The Majolica, The Coronation) with projection facilities and smart televisions. The Clock Tower Café, a historic freight train terminal, provides an informal meeting space (Hoult Yard, 2024).

Nevertheless, the importance of this place lies in the fact that, despite having a distinct branding strategy; it aligns with the district's essence and follows an endorsed branding approach. This implies that, while maintaining its own identity, Hoult's Yard collaborates with the Ouseburn brand and reinforces its brand image, working in harmony and complementing promotional and developmental efforts in the area, sharing not only a brand strategy but also activities and a common vision for the sustainability of the creative and cultural place.

On the other hand, also in the peripheral areas of Ouseburn, there is the Cycle Hub. Cycling routes have always been of significant importance in the Valley. Cycle Hub is a space where you can rent bicycles, repair them, and obtain any necessary cycling-related products (Newcastle Gateshead, n.d.). Additionally, it offers a place to relax in its café. The objective of Cycle Hub is "to provide a great meeting place for everyone, cyclists and non-cyclists, to catch up over coffee and cakes or recharge with a delicious homemade meal" (Cycle Hub, 2024), becoming a meeting space for athletes and other visitors, aiming to encourage those who do not yet practice the sport. The center also offers a variety of courses and classes that cover everything from the most basic to the most complex aspects of bicycle maintenance. In terms of brand management, once again, this space employs the endorsed brand strategy, actively collaborating in the development of events in the Ouseburn. In fact, it organizes various races through the Valley, known as Ouseburn Valley Cross, which are usually held in August and attract a large number of cycling enthusiasts. Furthermore, in terms of visual identity, the brand relates to that of Ouseburn by using the same corporate colors and rounded aesthetic (Figure 6).

4. Discussion

Brand architecture and endorsed brand strategies assume pivotal roles in the efficacious management and communication of both commercial and place brands. Through strategic structuring of brand portfolios, organisations and places can optimise brand equity, cultivate stakeholder engagement, and augment their overall market positioning. This research shows that it is essential that the different spaces located in cultural and creative quarters interrelate with the place's own brand through endorsed brand architecture strategies. However, how should this cultural and creative place brand relate to the city brand to which the cultural and creative district pertains?

The management of the cultural and creative place brand must proceed from the premise that it should configure itself as a sub-brand of the city brand, considering again the endorsed brand strategy. Consequently, brand architecture should be established where the city brand serves as an umbrella brand encompassing various sub-brands, such as the cultural and creative place brand. Earlier suggestions by authors like Devlin and McKechnie (2008) and Dinnie (2011) advocate scrutinising the city brand as akin to a brand with multiple sub-brands, akin to how corporations manage their product portfolios or service brands (Dinnie, 2011). Thus, given that 'one of the most challenging aspects of city brands is communicating with different stakeholders and their multiple audiences in a relevant, conscious, and coherent way' (Insch 2011, p. 11), the city brand should function as an umbrella brand embracing distinct sub-brands, each catering to the diverse audiences a city attracts. Consequently, the interests of the umbrella brand (city brand) and its sub-brands, such as the cultural and creative place brand, should align and mutually reinforce each other (Belloso et al., 2017), exactly as in endorsed brand strategies. The city should assume the role of a parent brand featuring diverse endorsed sub-brands catering to varied users of the city, contingent upon the merits of each locale.

In other words, the city brand should satisfy the functional, symbolic, and emotional requisites (Moilanen and Rainisto, 2008) of a specified set of target audiences. In contrast to the more defined audience of a corporate or business brand, the city brand would establish distinct value propositions, depending on the public to be addressed. Consequently, to address each unique value proposition, the city brand could introduce a sub-brand (figure 8).

Figure 8. Exemplification of the application of the umbrella brand architecture strategy in the management of city sub-brands, as the cultural and creative place brands.



Source: Own elaboration, 2025.

In this sense, the brand architecture of a city like Newcastle could be visualized similarly to the representation shown in Figure 9. Please, note this is a hypothetical and incomplete representation of the brand architecture that does not include all the sub brands related to Ouseburn, as its purpose is simply to illustrate what has been discussed, being an exemplification beyond Figure 8.

Figure 9. Hypothetical representation of the Newcastle upon Tyne city and the Ouseburn brand architecture strategy in the management of city sub-brands.



Source: Own elaboration, 2025.

In this way, the cultural and creative place brand would be treated as an endorsed sub-brand of the city brand. Both brands (cultural and creative place brands and city brands) would pull together and share a long-term vision. This would allow for the creation of a symbiosis between the city brand and the cultural and creative place brand, facilitating the parent brand (the city brand) to target different publics through specialist brands. Each sub-brand would be projected towards a specific stakeholder 'through a focused value proposition, but with a flagship brand (the city brand) that shelters and endorses the rest' (Summa, 2019). Similarly, the cultural and creative place brand would be reinforced because it is supported and endorsed by the city brand, which must provide the necessary conditions to ensure the sustainability of the cultural and creative district brand. These conditions would include, for example, citizen participation and the construction of a common project among the different actors of the district that promotes its differentiation and avoids gentrification.

5. Conclusions

As observed thus far, the endorsed brand management model is coherent concerning cultural and creative place brands and their organisation of sub-brands within various spaces. The establishment of a primary brand for the district, incorporating sub-brands for individual spaces, holds significant interest, provided they receive endorsement from the overarching cultural and creative place brand. This entails following an endorsed brand strategy. Illustrative instances include sub-brands such as Custard Factory or Green House in the Digbeth, or Hoult Yard in the Ouseburn. Moreover, the consensus on endorsed brand architecture in place branding underscores the imperative to reconcile territorial diversity with strategic coherence. By capitalising on the parent brand's strengths while permitting sub-brands to retain their distinct identities, locales can formulate robust brand strategies that resonate with diverse audiences (Kavaratzis and Ashworth, 2005).

This study underscores the critical role of brand architecture and endorsed brand strategies in the effective management and promotion of cultural and creative places. Examining the cases of Digbeth in Birmingham and the Ouseburn Valley in Newcastle upon Tyne highlights how peripheral cultural and creative actors leverage the reputation of established brands to enhance their visibility and appeal. Both cases studies reveal that successful branding in cultural and creative districts depends on the integration and collaboration of various stakeholders, including public and private entities, to create a cohesive and compelling brand identity.

In Digbeth, the branding efforts led by Oval Real Estate demonstrated how a unified visual identity and deliberate strategic use of digital platforms can revitalise an area. However, the exclusion of independent cultural agents from the branding strategy highlights the challenges of achieving full integration. Similarly, in the Ouseburn Valley, the Ouseburn Trust's initiatives showcase the importance of community-driven branding that aligns with the area's historical and cultural values. In this case, the examples of Hoult's Yard and the Cycle Hub illustrate how spaces physically distant from the core district can successfully integrate and benefit from the overarching brand through strategic collaboration and endorsed branding.

Finally, the relationship between cultural and creative place brands and their respective city brands has been analysed. Thus, this research argues that cultural and creative districts should be positioned as sub-brands within the larger city brand architecture, ensuring alignment and mutual reinforcement, being the first to explicitly state it. This approach facilitates the communication and the overall brand equity of both the cultural and creative places and the city. It also emphasises the importance of citizen participation and collaborative efforts among different creative and cultural actors to promote the differentiation and prevent the gentrification of the area.

Therefore, this research supports the view that effective branding of cultural and creative places requires a strategic blend of integration, collaboration, and alignment with broader city branding efforts. By adopting endorsed brand strategies and fostering community engagement, cultural and creative districts can achieve sustainable development and enhance their appeal as vibrant, dynamic destinations.

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