

ANALYSING THEMATIC CONTINUITIES AND DISCONTINUITIES IN EUROPEAN CAPITAL OF CULTURE VIDEOS

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Abstract – The title European Capital of Culture (ECoC) represents an opportunity for cities to enhance their brand image in the eyes of their own inhabitants and the whole of Europe alike; in addition, from a socio-economic standpoint, the title is a catalyst for the city's cultural development and urban revitalization as well as a boost for tourism. For this reason, it is important for cities aspiring to the ECoC title to make sure that their place identity is well-formulated in all their ECoC-related materials and in line with the expectations of ECoC calls. This article will thus explore place identity and the related concept of place branding in relation to 60 videos marketing and communicating 35 ECoCs in the 2007-2025 time period. In particular, by combining genre analysis and corpus-based Critical Multimodal Discourse Analysis it looks at the thematics enacted in the videos and the forms and strategies of place branding they use. The analysis shows that, while some thematics are common to many videos (e.g. the city, local cultural heritage and performing arts), others are rarer or related to the ECoC leitmotiv (e.g. borders and crossing borders in the case of the videos promoting Nova Gorica and Gorizia). The results seem to suggest that the ECoC event represents an opportunity for the designated cities to showcase themselves as well as their cultural heritage.

Keywords: place branding; European Capital of Culture initiative; Intertextual Thematic Formations; corpus-based Critical Multimodal Discourse Analysis.

1. Introduction

Drawing on Paasi (2002, 2003), in this article the term *place identity* refers to:

features of nature, culture and people that are *used* in the discourses and classifications of science, politics, cultural activism, regional marketing, governance and political or religious regionalization to distinguish one region from others. (Paasi 2003, p. 478) (italics in the original)

This concept has attracted considerable interest in various disciplines including geography, urban planning, sociology, environmental studies, and tourism, to



mention just a few. In their review of bibliographical records retrieved from the core data set of Web of Science, Peng, Strijker and Wu (2020) found that there was a rise in 2006 in academic articles with “place identity”, “regional identity” or “regional identities” in their title and this rise was observed in various disciplines; after 2010, articles on place identity gradually came to be concentrated in humanities and social sciences, the disciplines with a more recent shift towards place marketing.

Indeed, related to the concept of place identity is that of *place branding* defined by Kavaratzis and Ashworth (2006, p. 186) as “the application of product branding to places”. Place branding captures a place’s unique meaning and differentiates a place from the others so that place consumers recognize it as existing, perceive it as possessing qualities superior to those of competitors and “consume[d] [it] in a manner commensurate with the objectives of the place” (Kavaratzis, Ashworth 2006, p. 189).

One of the three main strategies for city branding identified by Kavaratzis and Ashworth (2006) is events branding, which is exemplified, *inter alia*, by the European Capital of Culture (ECoC), a EU-financed initiative aiming to highlight the cultural diversity and richness of different European cities every year. The initiative is a prestigious platform for cities to showcase their cultural and artistic offerings in the eyes of their inhabitants and the whole of Europe alike. From a socio-economic standpoint, an ECoC title is a catalyst for a city’s cultural development and urban revitalization as well as a boost for tourism (e.g. Liu 2012; Richards, Duif 2019). For this reason, it is important for cities aspiring to the ECoC title to make sure that their place brand is properly constructed in all their ECoC-related materials, including their bid-book and promotional materials. A case in point is Liverpool which, when bidding for the ECoC title, was branded as *The World in One City* in reference to its multiethnic identity.¹ In line with this, the promotional material produced for the ECoC events entextualized a narrative of diversity and Otherness depicting images of people of African, Indian or Arabic origins and using slogans such as *wondrously diverse* and *melting pot* (Krüger 2013). Moreover, a city’s brand should also be in line with the expectations of ECoC calls. In this respect, Lähdesmäki (2009) analyses the application books of Istanbul, Pécs, Tallinn and Turku and observes that their language makes constant use of expressions such as *local culture*, *local identity*, *regionality*, *European culture*, *European heritage*, and *common European*; these expressions clearly hint at the concepts of locality, regionality and Europeanness which are the cornerstones of the EU’s cultural policy as well as of the ECoC initiative.

With a specific focus on the ECoC initiative, this article focuses on the concepts of place identity and place branding from a sociosemiotic perspective

¹ Liverpool is indeed a multicultural city where many communities coexist, including the Indian, African, Chinese and Arab communities who settled in the city at the height of British imperialism.

(e.g. Aiello, Thurlow 2006; Koller 2008; Paganoni 2015, 2019; Thurlow 2024). Specifically, it explores place branding in relation to a small corpus of 60 videos marketing and presenting 35 ECoCs in the 2007-2025 time period (henceforth: ECoC corpus) by looking at the thematics entextualized in the videos. The article aims to understand whether and how the videos capture ECoCs' cultural uniqueness and promote cultural diversity, but also combine them with European (and international) perspectives, thus increasing European citizens' sense of belonging to a common cultural area. Relevant to this article is Aiello and Thurlow's (2006) study examining the visual themes entextualized in official promotional texts of 30 cities which either competed for the ECoC title or were nominated ECoC in the 2005-2011 time period. Their analysis found that the most recurrent visual themes are: cityscapes, fireworks, children, and maps. They concluded that the repetition and uniformity of these themes:

contribute to the creation and consolidation of a visual repertoire of 'Europeanness', which in turn is likely to be used as currency for the exchange of intercultural meanings and thus also for a mutual (not necessarily equal) understanding of what European culture is and what it means to represent it through the European Capital of Culture in any given year. (Aiello, Thurlow 2006, p. 159)

The present article approaches thematics using Lemke's semantically-based theory of intertextuality (1995a, 1995b) and suggests that this theory can help identify recurrent thematics as well as rare thematics that can potentially highlight the uniqueness of the designated ECoC. The article is organized as follows: Section 2 is an overview of the ECoC initiative; Section 3 describes the theoretical framework adopted to analyse the videos; Section 4 presents the materials analysed in this study and the methodology adopted; Section 5 presents and discusses the results of the study; finally; Section 6 draws some conclusions.

2. European Capitals of Culture

Initiated by the European Commission in 1985 with the aim of bringing EU citizens close together, European Capitals of Culture is “[a]n initiative putting culture at the heart of European cities.”²

The ECoC selection competition starts six years before the *title year* and is organized at a national level with two EU Member States publishing a *call for bid* specifying the selection criteria and procedure. In a pre-selection stage,

² <https://culture.ec.europa.eu/policies/culture-in-cities-and-regions/european-capitals-of-culture> (29.05.2024).

the cities interested in participating in the competition submit a *bid-book* setting out the city's objectives, programme, financial plans and management structure. The bid is reviewed by a Panel of experts in the field of culture against the following six categories of criteria (European Commission 2017):

- contribution to the long-term cultural strategy;
- cultural and artistic content;
- European dimension;
- outreach;
- management;
- capacity to deliver.

For example, in the case of the European dimension, which is “at the heart of an ECoC's programme” (European Commission 2017, p. 18), the Panel considers the extent to which the cultural programme promotes European cultural diversity, highlights the commonalities between various European cultures, and involves artists from different parts of Europe. The Panel selects a short list of cities authorized to proceed to the final selection stage and provides them with a report with some recommendations; in the final selection stage, these cities submit a more detailed application further assessed against the criteria used in the pre-selection stage. The Panel recommends one city per host country for the title which is then ratified by the Member State four years before the title year is celebrated.

The designated ECoC then plans and prepares the event. This includes involving stakeholders, engaging with citizens, establishing the necessary European connections, and building and/or modernizing infrastructure. During this four-year period, the ECoC is monitored by the Panel which then recommends the city for the Melina Mercouri Prize funded by the EU Creative Europe Programme and currently amounting to €1.5m.

Finally, after the ECoC year, the city is evaluated by the European Commission. The evaluation, carried out by an organization unrelated to the designated city and its ECoC management, is both qualitative and quantitative in nature and is made public so that other ECoCs can benefit from it.

3. Lemke's theory of intertextuality

To investigate recurrent and rare thematics in the ECoC corpus this article draws on Lemke's (1995a, 1995b) theory of intertextuality. According to Lemke, intertextuality is a social phenomenon which depends on a given community's culture; in his view, the meaning-making practices of a community produce texts

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that are similar in their meanings. This focus on the community's meaning-making practices contrasts with previous definitions of intertextuality, such as Kristeva's (1980) and De Beaugrande and Dressler's (1981). For example, for Kristeva (1980, p. 37) "any text is constructed as a mosaic of quotations; any text is the absorption and transformation of another", meaning that a literary text is a product of a single author, but also borrows words and concepts from other texts of the past. Similarly, De Beaugrande and Dressler point out the existence of similarities between texts, but add that the recognition of these similarities depends on a reader's knowledge of other texts.

By drawing on Halliday's grammar (Halliday, Matthiessen 2013), specifically its three metafunctions (i.e. ideational, interpersonal, and textual), Lemke states that texts:

may be alike in the content of what they say about topics and subjects. They may be alike in their values, attitudes and stances toward their subjects and audiences. They may be alike in the sequence, structure and form of organization of what they say. These texts will always also be different as well, each will be in some ways unique. (Lemke 1995b, p. 6)

In other words, he postulates the existence of three types of intertextual relationship, namely, thematic ties, orientational ties, and generic ties. Thematic ties are those between texts sharing the same experiential meaning (i.e. topic); orientational ties are those between texts sharing a particular attitude or standpoint towards some topic; generic ties are those between texts belonging to the same genre.

When it comes to thematic ties, Lemke states that these can be identified by looking at the Intertextual Thematic Formations (ITFs) present in a text, defined as "[t]he shared and repeated patterns of semantic relationships, mainly ideational ones, usually characteristic of a register's Field. [...] They consist of context-specific thematic items [...] and semantic relations among these items" (Lemke 2005, p. 34); he (1995b, p. 35) adds that "[t]he same patterns recur from text to text in slightly different wordings, but recognizably the same, and each wording can be mapped onto a generic semantic pattern that is the same for all". Lemke investigated how thematic ties are made through linguistic resources by extending Hasan's (1984) notion of cohesive ties in texts, particularly of synonymy, antonymy, hyponymy, and metonymy.

This article posits that Lemke's ITF is a viable tool for identifying the recurrent and rare thematics in the ECoC corpus. However, considering the multimodal nature of the texts under analysis, it extends Lemke's theory and investigates how thematic ties are made through linguistic resources as well as visual ones.

4. Materials and methods

The present study aims to propose a methodology to identify recurrent thematics in videos in a structured way. To do so, corpus-assisted multimodal discourse analysis (Bednarek 2015; Baldry, Kantz 2022) was adopted to analyse the ECoC corpus, a small corpus consisting of 60 videos marketing and presenting 35 ECoCs³ in the 2007-2025 time period. The videos were retrieved from the YouTube and Vimeo video sharing platforms using the following search phrases: *European Capital of Culture*, *European Capital of Culture [year]*, *European Capital of Culture [name of the city]*, and *European Capital of Culture [year] [name of the city]*. The videos making up the corpus exemplify various types of videos, including adverts, image films, and legacy videos. The text types making up the corpus are shown in the line chart in Figure 1.

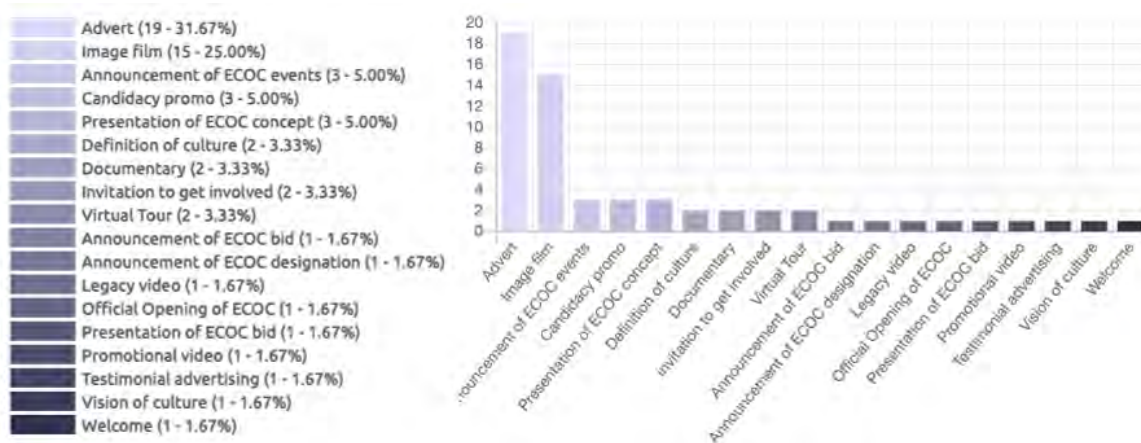


Figure 1
Corpus composition: text types.

As can be seen, adverts are the most frequent video type (31.67% of the total), followed by image films (25% of the total), that is, a film “used to present, sharpen and strengthen the image and identity of a company, brand or organization” (The mmmake agency 2023); in the case of the videos under analysis, the image films convey the core values, messages and culture of the respective ECoC. Among the least frequent video types are videos describing

³ The ECoCs whose promotional videos are included in the corpus are (in alphabetical order): Aarhus (2017), Bodø (2024), Donostia-San Sebastian (2016), Elefsina (2023), Esch-sur-Alzette (2022), Galway (2020), Guimarães (2012), Istanbul (2010), Kauna (2022), Košice (2013), Leeuwarden-Fryslân (2018), Linz (2009), Liverpool (2008), Marseille-Provence (2013), Matera (2019), Mons (2015), Nova Gorica and Gorizia (2025), Novi Sad (2022), Paphos (2017), Pilsen (2015), Plovdiv (2019), Riga (2014), Rijeka (2020), Salzkammergut (2024), Sibiu (2007), Stavanger (2008), Tallinn (2011), Tartu (2024), Timișoara (2023), Turku (2011), Umeå (2014), Valletta (2018), Veszprém (2023), Vilnius (2009) and Wrocław (2016).

how the ECoC conceives culture, videos announcing the ECoC bid, and legacy videos. Legacy videos describe the legacy of the ECoC mega-event in terms of how this has enhanced the city which has hosted it; legacy videos can cover the aims envisaged by the ECoC initiative such as improvement of the city image, urban regeneration and investment attraction.

53 videos were produced before and five after the designation (Figure 2). While for some videos this information was available in the description box below the video on the YouTube or Vimeo webpage, in other cases the distinction was made on the basis of the details provided by the video itself. When it was not possible to retrieve this information, the label UNDECIDED was used.

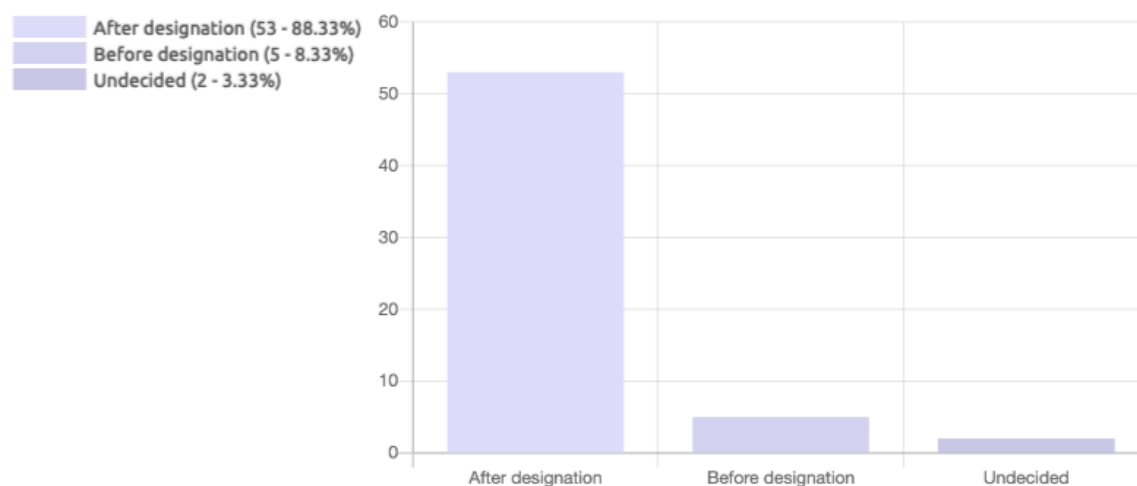


Figure 2
Corpus composition: time of production.

Information on the text type and on whether the video was produced before or after designation was deemed to be particularly relevant to understanding the relationship between the video genre and the specific thematics (see Discussion below).

The videos were uploaded to the OpenMWS platform⁴ (Taibi 2023) to facilitate their annotation for ITFs and subsequent retrieval. In this respect, OpenMWS allows corpora of videos available on media sharing sites (e.g. YouTube and Vimeo) to be compiled and sequences in the corpus to be annotated using a tagging system created by individual researchers on the basis of their research objectives; sequences can then be searched using the OpenMWS search engine and, once retrieved, can be viewed so that a systematic multimodal analysis can be performed for specific sequences. For example, in the case of the present study, an ITF can be retrieved with a view to establishing the specific

⁴ <http://openmws-dslcc.pa.itd.cnr.it/pages/login.jsf> (7.10.2024).

semiotic resources used in its construction and to assessing whether they are entextualized in the soundtrack, the videotrack or both simultaneously.

Once uploaded to the OpenMWS platform, the videos under analysis were divided into sequences; in this study, the term *sequence* is used to indicate a part of a video where a given thematic is entextualized. The sequences were then annotated in the platform's Annotation and Transcription Panel. An example of sequence annotation is given in Figure 3 with respect to a sequence of a video announcing the designation of Nova Goriza and Gorizia (WnitO6GlkxU)⁵ as 2025 ECoCs.


Item: V9_ECOC_057	Duration: 00:32	Video: WnitO6GlkxU
		Oral discourse: NONE
		Sounds: MUSIC
		Written discourse: ITALY SLOVENIA
ITFs: BORDERS		Visual images: Aerial view of the natural border between Italy and Slovenia

Figure 3

Example of sequence annotation in the Annotation and Transcription Panel.

The Annotation and Transcription Panel includes the video sequence that can be played to facilitate its analysis and some boxes where the researcher/annotator can add information about *ITF type*, *Oral discourse*, *Sounds*, *Written discourse* and *Visual image*. In the case of the sequence shown in Figure 3, this entextualizes the BORDERS ITF; as indicated by the annotation NONE, there is no oral discourse, but music (see Music box); the visual image shows an aerial view of the natural border between Italy and Slovenia which is indicated with written discourse in the form of the labels ITALY and SLOVENIA shown on the video. This annotation allows the corpus to be searched for ITFs using the platform's Search Panel (Figure 4): an ITF can be selected from a drop-down menu containing all the ITF types

⁵ The videos quoted can be viewed in YouTube using the code given.

identified in the corpus (Figure 4-A) and this returns a list of sequences where the ITF is entextualized (Figure 4-B) which can be played by clicking on them.

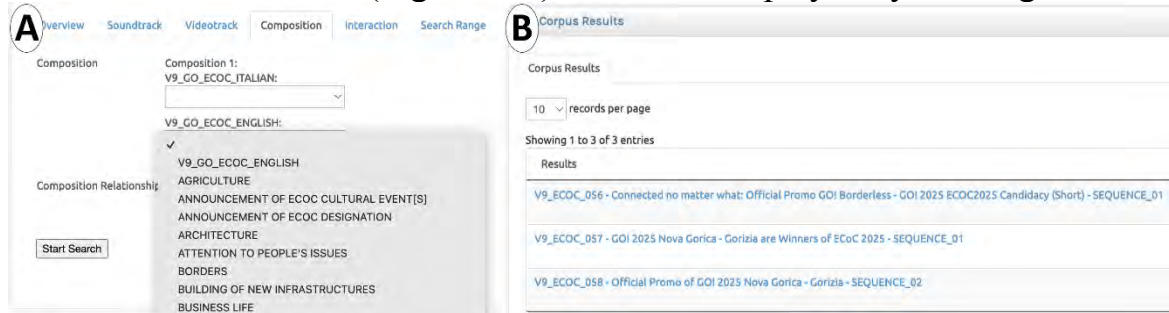


Figure 4
OpenMWS Search Panel.

Before presenting and discussing the results of the present study, a note on ITF annotation is in order. The present study has an exploratory nature, that is, establishing whether in the corpus under analysis recurrent thematics exist as well as rare thematics that can potentially highlight the uniqueness of the designated ECoC. For this reason, it was decided to annotate each ITF type only once in each video when an ITF occurred more than once in the same video.

5. Results and discussion

5.1. More frequent and rarer ITF types

In the corpus 97 ITF types were identified. Table 1 shows the top five most frequent ITFs.

	ITFs	OCCURRENCES
1st	THE CITY	42/60
2nd	LOCAL CULTURAL HERITAGE	34/60
3rd	PERFORMING ARTS	30/60
4th	FREE-TIME ACTIVITIES OFFERED BY THE CITY	14/60
5th	LOCAL CULTURAL EVENT[S]	13/60
	TOURISM	

Table 1
Top 5 most frequent ITFs.

53 of the 97 ITF types (i.e. 54.6% of the total) occur just once. Among these are CITY'S VALUES, DIVERSITY OF CULTURE, RESPECT FOR OTHER RELIGIONS, SENSE OF COMMUNITY and COMMON CULTURAL HERITAGE. The last ITF is worth mentioning. It is present in a video promoting Sibiu (HMKhVcc1WXw); here tattoos of symbols of the Italian

Renaissance (i.e. the Mona Lisa and the Vitruvian Man by Leonardo da Vinci and the Birth of Venus by Sandro Botticelli) and of the Hellenistic period (i.e. the typical painting of Greek vases) hint at the European cultural roots. This reference to the past is interesting considering that Sibius was ECoC in 2007, the year when Romania joined the EU. In addition, this ITF is related to the idea of European dimension fostered by the ECoCs programme (see Section 2), namely commonalities between various European cultures.

The following subsections present and discuss further results; the discussion is supported by the information provided in the reports published on the EU website⁶ dedicated to the ECoC initiative: the reports are particularly useful to understand whether the thematics entextualized in the videos are in line with the ones put forward by the ECoC for the initiative.

5.2. THE CITY ITF

It comes as no surprise that the most frequent ITF is THE CITY presenting the ECoC (42 occurrences in 60 videos, 70% of the total). This seems to be in line with Aiello and Thurlow's (2006) study which found that cityscape was one the more recurrent visual themes in the official promotional texts they analysed. What is surprising is that this ITF does not occur in all the videos considering that these are videos marketing and presenting the ECoCs. This can be related to the text type. A case in point is the video entitled *Culture to live together. San Sebastian 2016, European Capital of Culture* (-AeCHUMkTXM) which describes what culture means for the city of San Sebastian. Another example is a video for Pilsen as the 2015 ECoC (PRunTMLYAs4) focusing on the events taking place in the ECoC year as well as Pilsen's well-known symbol, beer.

When occurring, THE CITY ITF is entextualized mainly in the visual image where, to use Kress and van Leeuwen's ([1996] 2021) terminology⁷, views of the city are 'offered' to the viewers: i.e. the city is the object of the viewers' gaze. This ITF thus represents an opportunity for the designated ECoC to build the image it wants to convey to viewers. For example, in the case of Elefsina, the visual images (see Figure 5) present the city as a heavily industrialized entity, an image the city itself aimed to change with the revenues from the ECoC title as highlighted by the Panel of experts in their report:

[t]he city sees their bid as a major contributor to the progress the city has been making from its heavy industrial and polluted past, "a grey industrial city" to its

⁶ <https://culture.ec.europa.eu/policies/culture-in-cities-and-regions/designated-capitals-of-culture> (5.10.2024)

⁷ Kress and van Leeuwen ([1996] 2021) distinguish between 'demand' image and 'offer' image; in the former, the represented participants look directly at the viewer as if demanding to enter into some kind of relation with them; in the latter, the represented participants do not look directly at the viewer but are "the object of the viewer's dispassionate scrutiny" (Kress, van Leeuwen 2021, p. 118) and the viewer plays the role of an invisible onlooker.

new sustainable urban economy in the wider metropolitan area of Athens. (European Commission 2016, p. 7).

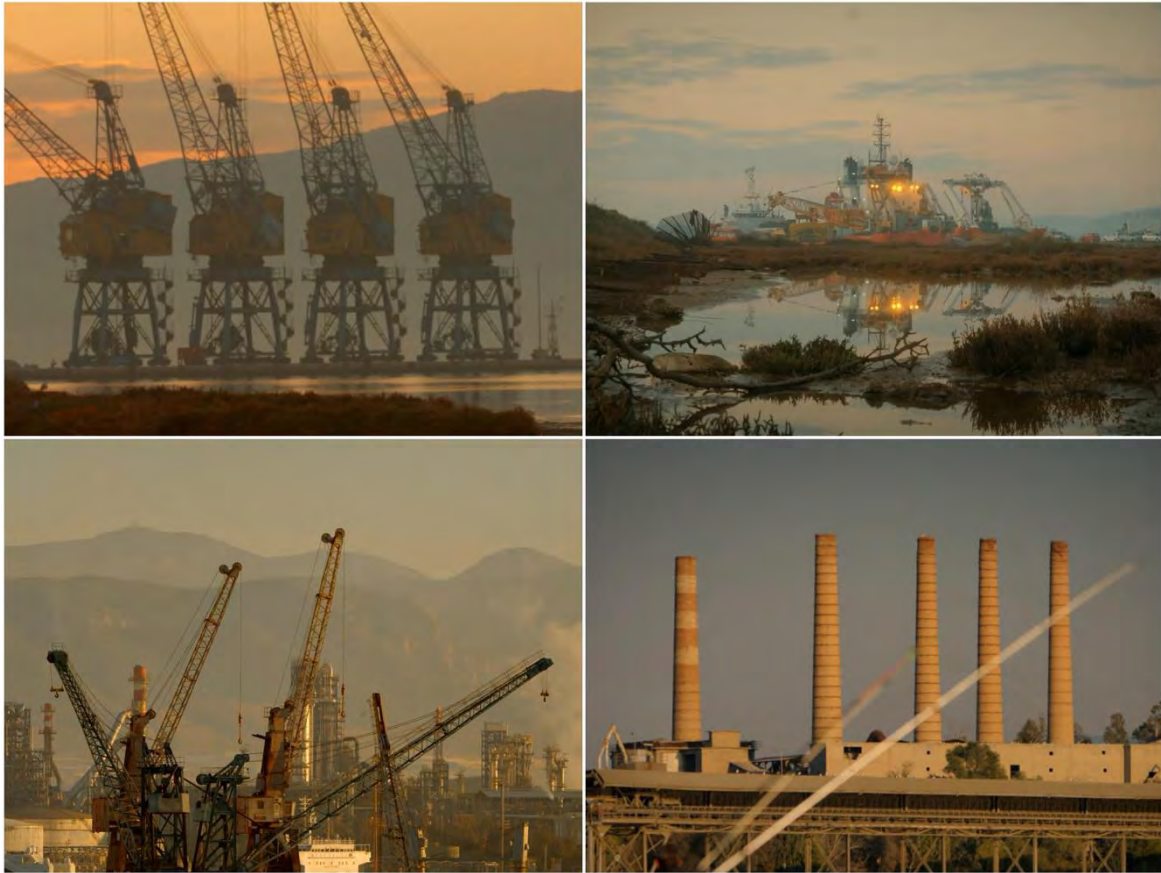


Figure 5
Representation of Elefsina as “a grey industrial city”
(European Commission 2016, p. 7) in an ECoC video (0Hwx9lWM4g4).

Besides images, some videos make use of written discourse to present the ECoC. A case in point is Liverpool (44K9bfXmQOw) which describes itself as: *dynamic, fresh, creative, real, inspirational, ironic* and *classical*.

While the majority of the THE CITY ITFs are entextualized mainly in the videotrack with images and in few cases with written discourse, there are some occurrences using entextualization in the soundtrack. One such example is Vilnius’ (nJLvEM0aOSk) use of a very abstract videotrack (a kind of animation) which requires the support of an extensive description:

Streets breathing nature, kind citizens and floating spirit of creativeness. It all lives here till these days. It is only with the heart that one can see rightly. What is essential is invisible to the eye.

The characteristics of the city are further highlighted in the videotrack with the keywords *nature, kindness* and *creativity*. It is hard to say whether these are elements that Vilnius intended to marketise during the ECoC year: in the two

reports available on the EU website dedicated to the ECoC initiative this does not seem to emerge; one of the elements emerging from McCoshan *et al.*'s report (n/a, 80) is, on the other hand, the “strong emphasis [put forward by the city] on [the city’s] long European history and cultural heritage”: this is present in the video with the EUROPEAN DIMENSION ITF entextualized in the soundtrack as “[t]he most talented artists from all over Europe came to create grace and cherish this peaceful town.” What seems to emerge from the sample analyses presented so far is the connection between an ECoC’s programme and the way in which the ECoC is presented in THE CITY ITFs. This is a connection further discussed below with respect to other ITFs.

One final example of the THE CITY ITF worth mentioning is taken from a video relating to Umeå (GE0vsw1K8j4). What is highlighted here are the many affordances for people and this is conveyed by images of the city and a happy woman who says:

I’ve lived in bigger cities all my life, and now we’ve moved here where there’s lots of space, and we find that this gives us a lot of chance to be creative and inspired by the nature around. It’s different, but it’s opening up our minds in different ways.

5.3. The LOCAL CULTURAL HERITAGE ITF

The second most frequent ITF type is LOCAL CULTURAL HERITAGE (34 occurrences out of 60 videos, 56.7% of the total). This focus on local cultural heritage seems to be in line with one of the objectives of the ECoC initiative, namely “highlighting the richness and diversity of cultures in Europe”.⁸

According to UNESCO (2003, p. 3), the term *cultural heritage* refers to monuments and collections of objects as well as:

traditions or living expressions inherited from our ancestors and passed on to our descendants, such as oral traditions, performing arts, social practices, rituals, festive events, knowledge and practices concerning nature and the universe or the knowledge and skills to produce traditional crafts. (UNESCO 2003, p. 3)

UNESCO distinguishes between tangible cultural heritage, that is, monuments, buildings and historic places, and intangible cultural heritage, that is language, folklore, customs and traditions. As shown in Table 2, various aspects of cultural heritage are presented in the videos.

⁸ <https://culture.ec.europa.eu/policies/culture-in-cities-and-regions/european-capitals-of-culture> (29.05.2024).

	ITFs FOR LOCAL CULTURAL HERITAGE	OCCURRENCES
1st	HISTORY	11/34
2nd	FOOD AND DRINK	8/34
3rd	RELIGION	5/34
4th	DANCE	4/34
5th	CLOTHES	2/34
	LITERATURE	
6th	MUSIC	1/34
	PAINTING	

Table 2
Aspects of cultural heritage presented in the videos.

HISTORY is the most frequent LOCAL CULTURAL HERITAGE ITF (11 out of 34 occurrences, 32.3% of the total CULTURAL HERITAGE ITFs). What is represented in the videos highlights the long history of Europe characterized by old civilizations whose remains are still visible (e.g. Matera, dsWC576w1JU; Galway, 44QnS6aqgA0; Elefsina, 0Hwx9IWM4g4), or important historical figures who are remembered and celebrated in the city's statues as is the case of Jean de Valette⁹ whose statue stands in a square in Valletta (izWmqkEiYJ0). However, in many cases it can be hard for viewers to understand the historical references especially when they have no or little knowledge about the history of the city promoted. Illustrative of this is the video on Valletta, a mini-documentary showing snapshots of the city against background music. No written or spoken discourse is used nor are labels or captions which could have guided viewers during viewings.

5.4. ECoC leitmotif-related ITFs: The case of Nova Gorica and Gorizia

What emerges from the analysis is that some of the ITFs are connected with the ECoC leitmotif. A case in point are the ITFs CROSSING BORDERS and BORDERS present in all the videos for Nova Gorica and Gorizia which clearly refer to the two cities' special topography.¹⁰ In this respect, the selection report of the 2025 ECoC in Slovenia points out that "Nova Gorica wants to grow together with its Italian bordering city Gorizia as if they were one" (European Commission 2021, p. 10). Figure 6 shows two occurrences of the BORDER ITF: the one on the left shows the Italian-Slovenian border line in Transalpina/Europe Square, while the one on the right shows the Isonzo River which is considered the natural boundary between the two countries.

⁹ Jean de Valette was a French nobleman and a Grand Master of the Order of Malta. In 1565, he commanded the resistance against the Ottomans who had attempted to conquer Malta and in 1566 laid the foundation stone of La Vallette.

¹⁰ After WWII, the Treaty of Paris between Italy and the Allied Powers (1947) annexed part of the municipality of Gorizia to Yugoslavia thus drawing a national border just off the town centre.



Figure 6

Two examples of the BORDER ITF.

Figure 7 shows two CROSSING BORDERS ITFs. The one on the left shows the mayors of Gorizia and Nova Goriza separated by a fence having what appears to be a friendly chat, thus giving the idea that despite the borders they can and do collaborate. The one on the right shows Tine Kancler, a Slovenian canoe athlete, canoeing on the Isonzo River and then saying: “Sono orgoglioso di essere entrato in acqua in Slovenia pochi minuti fa, e ora sono libero di uscire in Italia.”¹¹

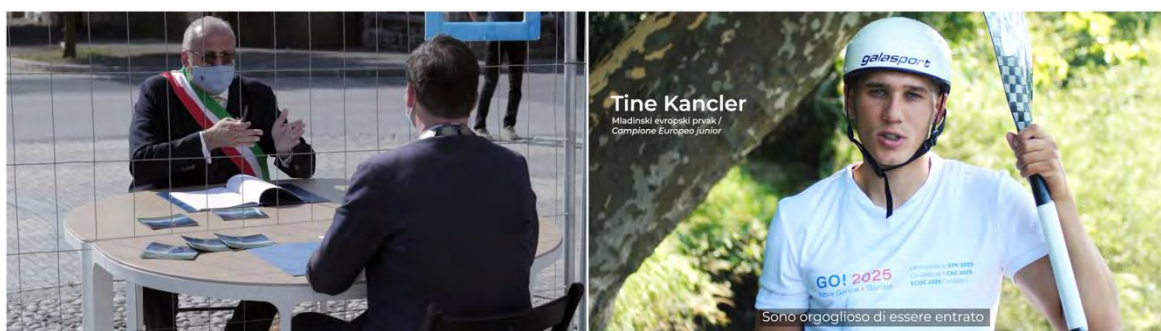


Figure 7

Two examples of the CROSSING BORDER ITF.

Conclusions

This article has given a sociosemiotic perspective to the analysis of place branding and place identity *vis-à-vis* the ECoC initiative. More precisely, using a small corpus of 60 promotional videos of 35 ECoCs it has looked for recurrent thematics as well as rare thematics that can potentially capture the uniqueness of the designated ECoC. To do so, it has put forward a model

¹¹ I am proud of the fact that a few minutes ago I got onto the river in Slovenia and am now free to get out of it in Italy (author’s translation).

drawing on Lemke's (1995a, 1995b, 2005) theory of ITFs. The article has also shown that the investigation is not limited to ITF types but also embraces the way in which they are enacted in the corpus. The results presented are preliminary and based on a small corpus; however, there is good reason to believe that the application of the model will allow researchers to quantify ITFs and provide a clearer picture of how place branding and place identity are enacted in videos.

In some ways even more significant perhaps is the article's demonstration of the importance of involving sociosemioticians in the place branding process which seems to pivot around a branding consultants-stakeholders co-operation. According to Eurocities (2011), indeed, an important consideration for successful place branding is the involvement of a wide range of stakeholders. In the case of city branding, these should include the city's government, the private sector, tourism and civil society, but also external stakeholders. In a similar vein, place branding consultant Natasha Grand states that "[o]n the operational level, political leadership and support is an essential condition for the success of place-branding and identity work" (Kaefer 2021, p. 234). Stakeholders should, *inter alia*, work together to ensure brand creativity and share a vision for the future of the place overcoming their differences. This article puts forward the need for joint work between place branding consultants, stakeholders and sociosemioticians in an effort to find best practices for place branding and place identity. These strategies can be used by sectors of public policy and urban governance to marketise their place branding in various media channels and digital genres with the ultimate goal of attracting tourism and investments.

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