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Branding a City: From Analysis to Action
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Abstract
This paper develops a stakeholder engagement framework for city branding in Prishtina, Kosovo, and Tirana, Albania. Drawing on participatory place branding, stakeholder salience and the Coordinated Management of Meaning perspective, it examines the role of municipal authorities in connecting urban identity, public participation and strategic development. A qualitative, conceptual comparison combines the original Prishtina engagement proposal with documentary evidence of Tirana's participatory planning, green transition and youth-oriented initiatives. A six-phase framework covers stakeholder analysis, mapping, engagement design, communication, implementation scheduling, and monitoring, followed by post-implementation maintenance. The comparison suggests that a common governance framework can accommodate distinct urban narratives and institutional arrangements. Tirana's documented planning consultations provide practical entry points for dialogue, while the Prishtina proposal illustrates how municipal stewardship can be organised. The paper proposes locally adaptable indicators and communication mechanisms rather than reporting measured branding outcomes. Its contribution is a practical framework for linking city identity to inclusive governance in two Western Balkan capitals.

Keywords: *city branding; stakeholder engagement; participatory governance; Prishtina; Tirana; Western Balkans*

Introduction

City branding requires effective stakeholder engagement, which is arguably an essential part of making place branding initiatives succeed. The applied part of the stakeholder focused place branding strategy should be inclusive for stakeholders to help shape place's identity together. We argue that this is done to produce branding that feels more genuine and connects better with people.

One way to increase stakeholder engagement in city branding is through participatory action research (PAR). This approach invites stakeholders to critically reflect on how they engage with one another, which fosters shared learning and stronger collaboration (Gonzalez & Gale, 2020). Similarly, sociological intervention can bring to light the obstacles that hinder effective collaboration, allowing stakeholders to tackle these challenges together (González, 2017).

We argue that although these strategies offer a promising framework for strengthening stakeholder engagement, obstacles such as power dynamics between the public and private sectors and institutional expectations can make them harder to put into practice. Overcoming these barriers is vital if participatory place branding is to reach its full potential.

Place branding is increasingly seen as more than a way of building an image. It is also an essential tool for managing the complex identities of cities, regions, and nations (Eshuis et al., 2014; Kavaratzis et al., 2015; Smith & Frech, 2017). The literature shows a marked move toward participatory approaches, in which creating a place brand is understood as a co-creative process involving a broad range of stakeholders (Ripoll González & Gale, 2020; Ripoll González & Lester, 2018; Zenker & Erfgen, 2014). Stakeholder engagement plans aim to go beyond conventional top-down structures by bringing the voices of residents, businesses, and government bodies together into one shared brand identity (de San Eugenio-Vela et al., 2023; Ripoll González & Lester, 2018; Stubbs & Warnaby, 2015).

In today's globalised and competitive environment, capital cities such as Prishtina and Tirana must work strategically to position themselves as attractive places to live, work and invest. Often, policymakers rely on advertising and promotion to achieve branding goals. However, place branding is not just about promoting a city; it is about shaping a shared identity that resonates with internal and external audiences. Central to this process are the stakeholders who influence, live in and govern each place.

This paper offers an engagement plan for the Municipality of Prishtina and the Municipality of Tirana as key decision-makers in building participatory, inclusive and sustainable city brands. Drawing on the communication-based engagement model proposed by Limani et al. (2024), the plan views communication as a two-way, dialogic process critical for building legitimacy and collective ownership of each city's brand. The proposed six-phase framework moves from stakeholder identification to monitoring and evaluation, followed by post-implementation sustainability.

Research approach and comparative context

The paper uses a qualitative, conceptual two-city comparison. The original Prishtina stakeholder plan is retained as a proposed intervention, while Tirana is contextualised through publicly available institutional documents. These sources are used to identify potential engagement mechanisms, not to establish causal effects or rank the cities. The same analytical categories are applied to each capital; stakeholder ratings and performance targets are provisional and require local validation through interviews, workshops and baseline data.

Tirana offers a complementary context in which city identity intersects with spatial planning and civic participation. Its Green City Action Plan establishes environmental priorities and a process for stakeholder communication (Municipality of Tirana & EBRD, 2018). The sustainable urban mobility planning process included a facilitated visioning workshop in 2019 (European Commission, 2021). Tirana's European Youth Capital 2022 designation also provides a platform for considering youth participation and international visibility (European Youth Forum, n.d.). These initiatives are not assumed to constitute a single integrated city brand.

Literature review

Scholars have proposed a range of frameworks for supporting stakeholder participation, from action-oriented research to collaborative design workshops. One prominent approach combines Participatory Action Research (PAR) with Sociological Intervention. Ripoll González and Lester (2018) applied it to engage government, business, and civil society stakeholders through in-depth interviews and multi-stage focus groups, namely the witness, confrontation, and conversion stages. The approach makes it possible to explore participant-governed network models as alternatives to conventional top-down structures (Ripoll González & Gale, 2020; Ripoll González & Lester, 2018). In a similar manner, Källström and Siljeklint (2021) paired PAR with Design Thinking to create the "Inclusive Place Diamond," a framework that brings a broad group of stakeholders into both divergent and convergent thinking.

Design-led methodologies place creativity, visualization, and empathy at the center of branding. Taboada (2009) used a collaborative design method in which brand concepts and elements served as tools to prompt stakeholders to reflect on their places. The process combined one-to-one conversations, collaborative design sessions, and concept maps to interpret shared knowledge (Taboada, 2009). Jernsand (2014) adds that design's evolutionary character suits place branding well, because prototyping and observation can strengthen local participation and support sustainable destination development.

Effective communication is widely seen as a decisive factor for engagement. Limani et al. (2024) put forward a model grounded in the Coordinated Management of Meaning (CMM) framework, which builds shared meaning and coordinated action into stakeholder mapping. This dialogical approach gives practical guidance for coordinating dialogue among diverse groups (Limani et al., 2024). In addition, Wolf et al. (2026) used

the DART framework, which covers Dialogue, Access, Risk-benefits, and Transparency, to examine how communication processes shape co-creation in city branding.

A major theme in the literature is that residents should be treated as active ambassadors rather than just targets of branding (Hakala, 2021; Zenker & Erfgen, 2014). Zenker and Erfgen (2014) suggest a three-stage participatory approach that sets a shared vision around core place elements and helps residents lead their own branding projects. Hakala (2021) looks at "listening" to residents through mayoral visits and participatory budgeting, which build pride in local areas and produce thousands of community suggestions.

In Tirana, the Council of Europe documented stakeholder assessment and consultation activities in 2023 involving municipal departments and civic organisations (Council of Europe, 2023a, 2023b). These experiences illustrate how dialogic engagement can be connected to municipal planning. In Prishtina, the proposed listening forums and stakeholder mapping offer analogous mechanisms to be tested. In both cities, the theoretical distinction between communicating a brand and allowing stakeholders to shape it remains central.

Identified issue

In contrast to the largely optimistic accounts of participatory frameworks reviewed above, a critical strand of the literature argues that conflicting interests and power imbalances are significant barriers to inclusive branding. Many studies report that top-down structures and bureaucratic gatekeeping limit genuine participation (Källström & Siljeklint, 2024; Ripoll González & Gale, 2020; Ripoll González & Lester, 2018). In some cases, primary stakeholders enforce strategies while secondary stakeholders pursue conflicting agendas (Henninger et al., 2016). Resistance toward losing power is also observed when moving toward more inclusive frameworks (Källström & Siljeklint, 2021). Casidy et al. (2019) found that tensions between a place's brand identity and a stakeholder's own organizational identity can lead to disengagement.

Stakeholder skepticism is a common starting point for many initiatives (Ripoll González & Gale, 2020). Källström and Siljeklint (2024) documented low workshop participation due to stakeholder fatigue and a lack of interest, which prevented the achievement of a shared vision. In some instances, residents remain passive or feel excluded by an "elitist" brand image (Eshuis et al., 2014; Henninger et al., 2016).

Resource limitations, complex brand architectures, and political issues frequently complicate engagement (Helmi, 2016). Furthermore, communication gaps, social closure, and extended implementation delays can lead to groupthink or the pursuit of predefined goals that do not reflect community desires (Hakala, 2021). There is often a gap between the brand ownership "given" by authorities and the ownership actually "taken" by local businesses (Tøttenborg et al., 2022).

For Prishtina and Tirana, these concerns translate into questions about whose identity is represented, how competing development interests are negotiated and how feedback influences decisions. In Tirana, mobility and environmental planning provide concrete policy contexts in which the credibility of a city narrative can be examined (European Commission, 2021; Municipality of Tirana & EBRD, 2018). Neither city should be assumed to have resolved participation barriers simply because consultation mechanisms exist.

Discussion

We treat engagement not only as a means to communicate but also as a tool to co-govern and shape shared value. The following objectives reflect the strategic roles of the municipalities of Prishtina and Tirana in stewarding their respective place brands:

- •Reinforce the role of each municipality as a strategic actor and facilitator in the place branding process.
- •Enhance collaborative governance through transparent and sustained stakeholder communication.
- •Co-create a shared identity and narrative that reflects the aspirations of citizens and aligns with the city's development vision.
- •Improve policy acceptance and legitimacy of branding-related initiatives by involving public officials early in the process.
- •Strengthen the brand's resilience and adaptability through institutional support and policy continuity.

Conduct a Stakeholder Analysis

To guide the engagement process, stakeholders are identified, analysed by influence and legitimacy, and prioritised using the stakeholder salience model (Mitchell et al., 1997). The plan addresses the municipalities of Prishtina and Tirana and their respective stakeholder ecosystems. The ratings below are indicative analytical judgements, not measured attributes.

Key stakeholders in the place brand ecosystems of Prishtina and Tirana:

Stakeholder	Type	Role	Influence	Legitimacy	Urgency
Municipalities of Prishtina and Tirana	Public sector	Coordinator, enabler, implementer	High	High	High
Private Businesses	Private sector	Economic contributors	High	Medium	Medium
Residents	Civil society	Beneficiaries, co-creators	Medium	High	High
Diaspora	Transnational	Investors, image ambassadors	Medium	Medium	Medium
NGOs & Youth Groups	Civic actors	Mobilizers, policy influencers	Medium	High	Medium
Universities and research institutions	Academic sector	Evidence, facilitation, evaluation	Medium	High	Medium

Table 1. Key stakeholders in Prishtina and Tirana by type, role and salience attributes

Stakeholder Salience Assessment (Mitchell et al., 1997)

Each municipality is provisionally classified as possessing:

- •Power – administrative and budgetary control.
- •Legitimacy – officially recognized authority.
- •Urgency – mandated to act amidst urban challenges.

Thus, each may be treated as a definitive stakeholder requiring tailored engagement, subject to validation of the relevant mandates and urgency.

Roles, Objectives, Challenges, and Tools Summary

For Tirana, the documented municipal strategy consultation offers a starting point for identifying civic organisations and departmental counterparts (Council of Europe, 2023a). In Prishtina, equivalent stakeholder registers should be compiled through local consultation. Universities in both cities can contribute research, facilitation and independent evaluation.

Stakeholder	Role	Objective	Challenges	Engagement Tools
Municipality	Coordinator, policy maker	Empower, connect, deliver	Coordination across mandates, legacy systems	Web portals, joint workshops, newsletters
Private Sector	Ambassador, sponsor	Invest, co-create, promote	Aligning commercial and civic goals	Events, sponsorships, Superbrands programs
Diaspora	Advocate, connector	Bring best practices, investment	Distance, inconsistent participation	Diaspora summits, digital networks
Residents	Voice, ambassador	Co-design, feedback	Disengagement, distrust	Town halls, social media forums
NGOs/Youth Groups	Facilitators	Mobilize, innovate	Funding, capacity gaps	Hackathons, school programs, testimonial videos
Universities	Research partners	Support evidence and dialogue	Access to data	Research labs, workshops

Table 2. Roles, Objectives, Challenges, and Engagement Tools by Stakeholder

This analysis positions both municipalities as potentially definitive stakeholders in their respective branding processes. Tirana's administrative units, universities, youth organisations and environmental groups should be explicitly mapped alongside businesses and residents. Prishtina's corresponding actors should be identified through the same local assessment rather than assuming identical levels of influence.

Map and Categorize the Stakeholders

Using the Power/Interest Matrix and CMM model, stakeholders are categorized to determine engagement priorities.

The matrix is a shared working hypothesis. Tirana's transport operators, planning actors and youth networks should be assessed individually; Prishtina's business, diaspora and civic networks likewise require local validation. The classifications should be revised when interests or decision rights change. The Power/Interest Matrix further refines engagement strategy by positioning stakeholders according to influence and level of involvement.

Category	Stakeholder Examples	Strategy
High Power / High Interest	Municipalities of Prishtina and Tirana, Private Sector (IT sector leaders, investors)	**Manage closely**
High Power / Low Interest	National Ministries, Regulatory Bodies	**Keep satisfied**
Low Power / High Interest	Residents, NGOs, Youth Groups, Students	**Keep informed**
Low Power / Low Interest	Passive Citizens, Infrequent diaspora contributors	**Monitor**

Table 3. Stakeholder Categorization Based on the Power/Interest Matrix

The Logic Behind

- •Municipality & Private Sector: High power due to their financial, legislative, and operational control. Their engagement interest is also high, especially in public image, development, and investment returns.
- •National Ministries: Hold high power in approving laws and national alignment, but may not be as actively involved in local branding unless targeted.
- •Residents, NGOs, Youth: These groups have high interest (they live the brand and can champion it) but comparatively less formal power—hence, they need empowerment.

This categorization ensures resource prioritization and engagement efforts are proportionate to each group's potential to shape or obstruct branding outcomes.

Develop a Stakeholder Engagement Plan

Focusing on the municipalities of Prishtina and Tirana as both stakeholders and stewards, this section defines a shared engagement roadmap with locally differentiated applications.

Municipalities of Prishtina and Tirana

Context: Prishtina, Kosovo; Tirana, Albania.

Purpose: Reinforce each municipality's leadership role in co-creating and sustaining a strong, inclusive and credible place brand.

Stakeholder Role Overview
Objectives of Engagement

Aspect	Details
Stakeholder	Municipalities of Prishtina and Tirana
Type	Government / Public Institution
Primary Role	Coordinator, Policymaker, Facilitator
Interest Level	High
Power Level	High
Strategic Position	Central authority for urban planning, regulation, branding, and resource allocation

Table 4. Stakeholder role overview of the municipalities of Prishtina and Tirana

- •Strengthen institutional commitment to place branding as a long-term developmental priority.
- •Enhance internal coordination among municipal departments related to tourism, infrastructure, youth, and culture.
- •Position the municipality as a co-creator of the city brand narrative rather than a top-down communicator.
- •Increase transparency and inclusiveness to build legitimacy and trust in brand-related initiatives.
- •Institutionalize place branding as a permanent urban governance practice.

In Prishtina, engagement can begin with the proposed municipal listening forums and identity workshops. In Tirana, it can build on existing consultation formats documented by the Council of Europe (2023b), connecting the city narrative to neighbourhood needs and service delivery.

Engagement Strategy

Tirana-specific applications include linking brand discussions to green infrastructure, mobility and youth participation; Prishtina-specific applications include testing local civic identity, cultural programming and diaspora involvement. Both should use resident feedback to select priorities rather than prescribe slogans in advance.

Strategic Pillar	Tactics
Internal Coordination	Interdepartmental task force on place branding; regular progress reviews.
Capacity Building	Training sessions on city branding, public communication, and participatory governance.
Dialogue with Citizens	Organize structured "City Listening Forums" to gather feedback from residents.
Transparency & Accountability	Develop an open-data dashboard tracking branding initiatives and spending.
Leadership Visibility	Public statements and participation in local and international branding events.
Brand Integration	Ensure branding is reflected in signage, infrastructure, digital platforms, and city festivals.
Symbolic Acts	Launch brand ambassador awards, issue a branding charter, rename spaces in line with brand values.

Table 5. Engagement Strategy: Strategic Pillars and Tactics

Key Challenges and Responses

In Tirana, potential tensions between development, environmental quality and accessibility should be discussed with affected communities. In Prishtina, the original plan highlights coordination and trust as priorities to examine. These are proposed risk areas, not comparative findings.

Challenge	Response Strategy
Departmental silos & weak horizontal coordination	Appoint a cross-sectoral branding coordinator and establish an internal branding unit.
Short-term political cycles and leadership turnover	Institutionalize the brand through legal frameworks, branding policy, and shared KPIs.
Lack of technical branding capacity within the institution	Bring in external experts for training and mentorship; partner with universities.
Low public trust in institutions	Emphasize co-creation; increase transparency using participatory budgeting & reporting.
Weak connection between urban policies and brand promise	Align infrastructure, environmental, and cultural projects with brand identity.
Resistance to change or brand ownership within the institution	Use internal communication campaigns, staff incentives, and leadership modeling.

Table 6. Key Challenges and Response Strategies

Communication Tools & Channels

Tirana may draw on its documented open government commitments (Municipality of Tirana, 2021) when designing feedback channels. Prishtina may test the proposed municipal dashboard and town halls. Each city should publish how input has affected decisions.

Channel	Purpose
Internal newsletters	Update departments on branding progress and participation calls.
Workshops and retreats	Team-building and strategic alignment around branding vision.
Public dashboards	Maintain transparency on progress and budget allocation.
Municipal website & social media	Disseminate brand campaigns, citizen stories, and engagement invitations.
Town hall meetings	Foster dialogue, showcase progress, and invite feedback.

Table 7. Communication Tools and Channels

Indicators of Successful Engagement

- •Establishment of a permanent Place Branding Office within the Municipality.
- •Municipal branding vision integrated into policy planning documents.
- •Active collaboration with stakeholders (NGOs, diaspora, private sector).
- •Improved citizen satisfaction with city image and participation.
- •Positive media coverage and increased brand recognition regionally.

For Tirana, an additional indicator could track the proportion of branding actions connected to documented mobility, environmental or youth priorities. For Prishtina, a corresponding indicator could track alignment with locally agreed development priorities. Both require verification.

Prepare a Communication Plan

Effective communication is at the heart of stakeholder engagement. Moving from unidirectional messaging to co-constructed meaning (Limani et al., 2024), the strategy adopts four levels of engagement tailored to the respective municipal roles in Prishtina and Tirana.

A. Inform (Build Awareness)

- •Tactics: Official branding presentations, white papers, infographics in council sessions.
- •Purpose: Ensure municipal departments understand the importance of place branding and how it aligns with urban planning goals.
- •Tools: Email briefings, city council sessions, internal newsletters.

B. Consult (Gather Input)

- •Tactics: Stakeholder interviews with department heads, policy review sessions, participatory workshops.
- •Purpose: Gain insight on regulatory constraints, past branding failures, and institutional priorities.
- •Tools: Focus groups, SWOT sessions, survey instruments.

C. Collaborate (Co-create Solutions)

- •Tactics: Joint task force with municipal staff and branding experts to co-design city narratives, slogans, and activation plans.
- •Purpose: Foster ownership and co-responsibility.
- •Tools: Brand Labs, co-creation retreats, design thinking workshops.

D. Empower (Integrate in Governance)

- •Tactics: Integrate branding goals in strategic planning documents (e.g., Smart City plans, EU integration alignment).
- •Purpose: Institutionalize branding within governance structures.
- •Tools: Memoranda of understanding (MoUs), legislative proposals, budget line items for branding.

For Prishtina, the four levels can be operationalised through the proposed listening forums, interviews and brand labs. For Tirana, existing strategy consultation and mobility visioning practices provide precedents for consultation and collaborative agenda setting (Council of Europe, 2023b; European Commission, 2021). Each city should retain a separate identity narrative.

Timeline and Engagement Plan

A proposed seven-month engagement cycle is presented for each city, aligned with five operational stages. The periods are

indicative and should be adapted to municipal planning and budget cycles.

In month 1, Prishtina could establish its proposed coordination group and Tirana could identify existing participation structures. Months 2–5 should develop city-specific evidence and narratives; months 6–7 should test policy alignment and feedback mechanisms separately.

Phase	Timeframe	Activities
Initiation	Month 1	Kick-off meeting with municipal officials, overview of branding objectives
Assessment	Month 2–3	Consultations, surveys, interviews with municipal departments
Co-Creation	Month 4–5	Workshops, joint vision statements, drafting identity elements
Integration	Month 6	Embed branding outcomes into municipal plans and budgets
Feedback Loop	Month 7	Evaluation of process, revisions, and final rollout strategy

Table 8. Timeline and Engagement Plan by Phase

Monitoring and Evaluation

Robust monitoring supports strategic alignment and timely course correction. The following proposed KPIs apply separately to Prishtina and Tirana, subject to baseline assessment and institutional agreement. They are targets, not observed results.

Comparable reporting should use the same indicator definitions but separate denominators and baselines for each city. Tirana could additionally monitor links between brand commitments and green or mobility measures; Prishtina could track locally selected civic and cultural commitments. Neither should equate social media reach with representativeness.

Indicator	Target
Participation rate in workshops	80% of invited municipal staff
Satisfaction rate (post-engagement survey)	≥85%
Number of policies aligned with brand strategy	Minimum 3 by phase end
Inclusion of brand strategy in municipal budget	Confirmed by Month 6
Internal references to brand values in city communication	Tracked in all public communications

Table 9. Monitoring and Evaluation Indicators and Targets

Monitoring Tools

•Surveys (pre- and post-engagement)
•Social media analytics
•Stakeholder interviews and feedback forms
•Annual Public Engagement Report (published by the Municipality)
•Social media analytics and monitoring

Integrating Social Media in Monitoring & Evaluation

Municipal digital communication channels in Prishtina and Tirana

•The original Prishtina plan identifies Facebook and Instagram as potential channels for municipal communication. In Tirana, the open government action plan provides an additional policy context for transparent digital engagement (Municipality of Tirana, 2021).

•Both municipalities should validate their current official channels, accessibility, moderation responsibilities and data availability before implementation. Digital participation should complement, not replace, neighbourhood-level engagement.

How Social Media Supports M&E

Engagement Metrics

Reach & Impressions: Track how many residents are exposed to branding content (e.g., identity rollouts, campaign visuals).

Likes, Shares, Comments: These reflect public interest and sentiment. Sudden spikes during campaigns demonstrate engagement effectiveness.

Video Views & Story Responses: Particularly for storytelling campaigns or live updates from workshops.

Sentiment Analysis

Monitor positivity/negativity in public comments to measure trust and satisfaction.

Recurrent themes (e.g., urban cleanliness, traffic, culture) indicate alignment or misalignment with brand messages.

Participation Promotion

Use posts to invite municipal staff to internal workshops or public forums; track RSVPs and registrations generated via social media.

Live streams of key events (e.g., city listening forums, brand task force sessions) to increase transparency and digital participation.

Feedback Channel

Turn comment sections or direct messages into mini feedback loops. These can be extracted via feedback forms or interviews for qualitative analysis.

Weekly polls or interactive stories (Instagram/Facebook) to gather public sentiment quickly.

Dashboard & Reporting

Integrate social media analytics into the open-data dashboard: display reach, engagement, sentiment, and campaign milestones.

Incorporate social media trends into the Annual Public Engagement Report, highlighting public uptake and areas needing reinforcement.

Implementation in the Monitoring Framework

At each engagement phase, these actions will be tracked:

Initiation & Assessment

Announce the branding process via social media.

Monitor initial reactions, comments, and questions.

Use polls to assess awareness and invite staff/leaders to workshops.

Co-Creation

Promote upcoming workshops via event posts and reminders.

Share behind-the-scenes content and live updates to foster transparency.

Collect feedback via story questions or live Q&As.

Integration & Rollout

Highlight brand milestones (policy adoption, visual identity rollout).

Create branded campaigns (e.g., clean city, cultural events).

Measure sentiment around municipal performance in branding terms.

Feedback Loop

Encourage citizens to comment on branding initiatives and propose ideas.

Summarize social media findings in the engagement report.

Use sentiment feedback to refine brand messaging or address concerns.

For both capitals, online sentiment should be triangulated with offline surveys and deliberative feedback, including groups with limited digital access. Separate reporting will prevent differences in platform use from distorting comparison.

Post-Implementation Internal Engagement Plan

Once each place brand is launched, maintaining internal momentum is key to long-term success. For Prishtina and Tirana, this means embedding their respective brand values into daily operations, culture and communication.

Purpose: Ensure that each branding initiative becomes embedded in the daily practices, culture and institutional identity of its municipality. This stage is crucial for long-term ownership and avoiding brand fatigue or disengagement.

Core Objectives

•Embed place brand values in all institutional processes.

•Foster continued alignment between branding and service delivery.

•Reinforce the sense of pride and ownership among municipal employees.

•Use feedback and performance data to iterate and sustain the brand narrative.

Tools & Tactics for Sustained Internal Engagement

In Tirana, internal brand stewardship could be connected to strategic planning and existing departmental participation arrangements. In Prishtina, it could be introduced through the proposed cross-departmental coordination model. Both should preserve continuity beyond political and staffing changes.

Timeline for Engagement Maintenance (Year 1–2 After Implementation)

Each city should repeat the quarterly cycle during the second year, adapting activities to the first year's evaluation rather than assuming identical progress.

Monitoring Continued Engagement

Targets should be assessed separately in Prishtina and Tirana, with staff feedback used to revise engagement maintenance activities.

Strategy	Tool/Activity	Purpose
1. Brand Integration in HR	• Brand-aligned job descriptions • Onboarding kits with brand vision • Performance KPIs tied to brand goals	Reinforce identity from entry-level to leadership roles
2. Internal Brand Ambassadors	• Create a cross-departmental team of "Brand Stewards" • Rotate leadership annually	Enable peer-led engagement and keep enthusiasm high
3. Monthly Brand Spotlights	• Short email stories/videos celebrating brand-aligned achievements	Celebrate progress and build internal morale
4. Interactive Learning	• Quarterly learning labs • Gamified challenges (e.g., "Brand Bingo" or "Best Branded Memo")	Keep staff engaged and thinking creatively about brand values
5. Leadership Modeling	• Mayor and directors using brand language in speeches and emails	Reinforce credibility and top-down support
6. Visual Reinforcement	• Branded posters, mugs, wallpapers in municipal offices	Keep the identity visually embedded in the workplace
7. Intranet Hub / Portal	• Central online space with brand resources, testimonials, ongoing campaigns	Facilitate access and update-sharing
8. Recognition & Awards	• "Brand Champion of the Month" for municipal staff	Create positive reinforcement for brand-supportive behavior
9. Feedback Loop	• Digital suggestion boxes • Anonymous surveys every 6 months	Enable continuous feedback and adjust internal strategy accordingly

Table 10. Tools and Tactics for Sustained Internal Engagement

Quarter	Focus Area	Key Activities
Q1	Brand Awareness & Onboarding	Distribute brand kits, hold orientation sessions
Q2	Peer Leadership & Recognition	Launch Brand Stewards team and reward program
Q3	Feedback & Innovation	Internal feedback survey, launch staff-led innovation labs
Q4	Institutionalization	Embed brand KPIs into job evaluations; update internal SOPs with brand tone

Table 11. Timeline for Engagement Maintenance in Years 1–2 After

Metric	Target
Participation in internal campaigns	≥ 70% staff across departments
Staff recognition submissions	≥ 1 nomination per department/month
Internal survey satisfaction	≥ 85% brand alignment among staff
Intranet traffic	Steady or increasing monthly visits

Table 12. Metrics and Targets for Monitoring Continued Engagement-Implementation

Conclusion

The municipalities of Prishtina and Tirana are central actors in their respective city branding processes. Their ability to connect branding with governance makes their engagement essential. Applying the communication perspective (Limani et al., 2024), the proposed plan positions each municipality as a proactive partner alongside residents, businesses and civil society. Tirana's documented consultation and youth initiatives provide practical starting points; Prishtina's proposed engagement roadmap offers a complementary planning framework. Neither case establishes that the proposed branding outcomes have already been achieved. The most cited outcome of effective engagement is the creation of a shared identity and brand story accepted by both public and private agents (de San Eugenio-Vela et al., 2023). In the case of Dobryanka, stakeholder engagement led to measurable

brand acceptance through new empirical estimation approaches (Dubeykovskiy, 2014). Similarly, in Tasmania, participants who were initially skeptical became excited by the possibilities of a shared purpose through participatory governance (Ripoll González & Gale, 2020). Stakeholder engagement also fosters place brand advocacy, orientation, and credibility (Helmi, 2016). Engagement plans can empower communities by reinforcing a sense of pride, belonging, and conservation (Taboada, 2009; 'Ulaa & Sumarlan, 2026). In Bobung, engagement through a "Tourism Awareness Group" fostered trust, long-term cooperation, and community empowerment dimensions like increased economic income and cultural pride ('Ulaa & Sumarlan, 2026).

Limitations

The paper has several limitations. Its focus on two Western Balkan capitals limits generalisability (Smith & Frech, 2017; Wolf et al., 2026). The evidence is asymmetric: Prishtina is represented primarily by the original conceptual plan, while Tirana is supplemented by institutional documentation. No comparable primary interviews, surveys or longitudinal branding data were collected. Stakeholder salience ratings and KPIs require validation in each city. Methodological variation in defining internal stakeholders also affects comparability (Golestaneh et al., 2022).

Another limitation can be the focus on planning rather than implementation. Some studies focus on the planning process and initial consultations such as the present paper. However, they do not address the long-term-outcomes or specific implementation barriers (Baker, 2009; Dewi, 2018). In addition, the whole push for the citizens' participation is still more of the recommendation and rhetorical rather than the actual influence which is low when it comes to the spatial planning and marketing policies applied by the public sector (Eshuis et al., 2014).

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