

Stockholm's Standing

Benchmarking findings

The Business of Cities
2025

Summary Findings

Stockholm's competitiveness continues to improve. As a result it is more definitively on the global radar, its features admired and its flaws scrutinised. It finds itself competing with more cities who are upping their game on affordability, vibrancy and speed.

Innovation and entrepreneurship remains a key hook of Stockholm's international reputation. The city's 'startup vibe' is strong, although this does not always translate into broader reputation for business, clustering, talent and institutions.

Stockholm retains enviable liveability and sustainability. Foreigners love the city's offer, yet while admiration is growing from afar, local endorsement is waning. Negative stories and side effects of Stockholm's have affected perceptions locally, while the city needs to be vigilant that its work/life offer remains attractive.

Nordic success poses choices for Stockholm. Oslo, Helsinki and especially Copenhagen have all gained more credit for their improved lifestyle, urbanism and culture. With other cities viewed to be pacesetting on future agendas, Stockholm has to be intentional about how it communicates.

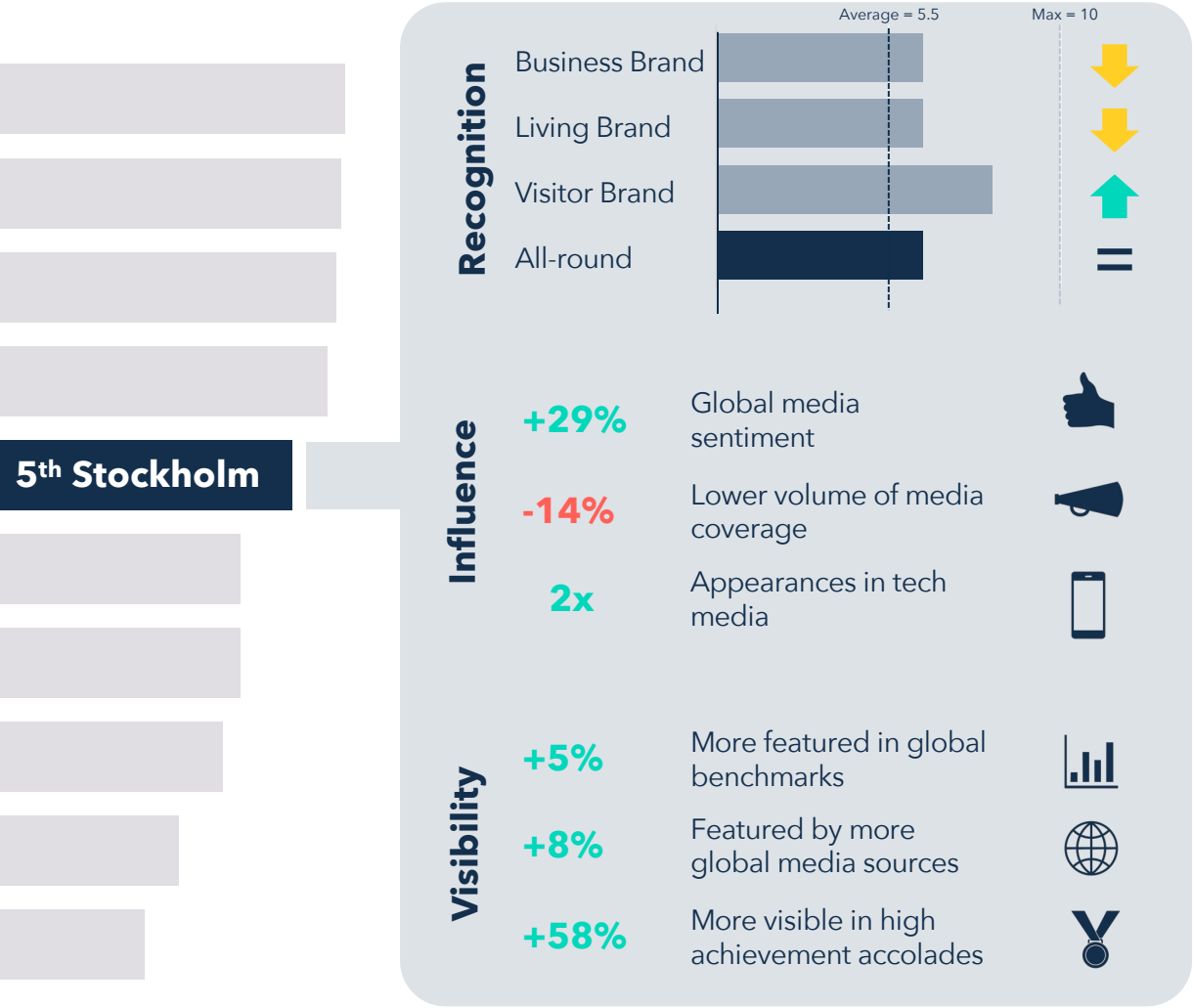
A more defined Stockholm identity will help it navigate the wider context. National politics, domestic incidents, and geopolitical shifts set the recent backdrop to perceptions of Stockholm. Stockholm can distinguish its unique points of difference and galvanise partners to share them.

Stockholm's story can deepen. Stockholm's core excels but there is more to be done to reveal the region's other edges, centres, institutions, cultures and personalities. This will help Stockholm to be appraised not only as a small slice of heaven but also as a region that is well-rounded, resilient and ready for the global stage.

Stockholm Perception: Summary of Findings in 2024/5

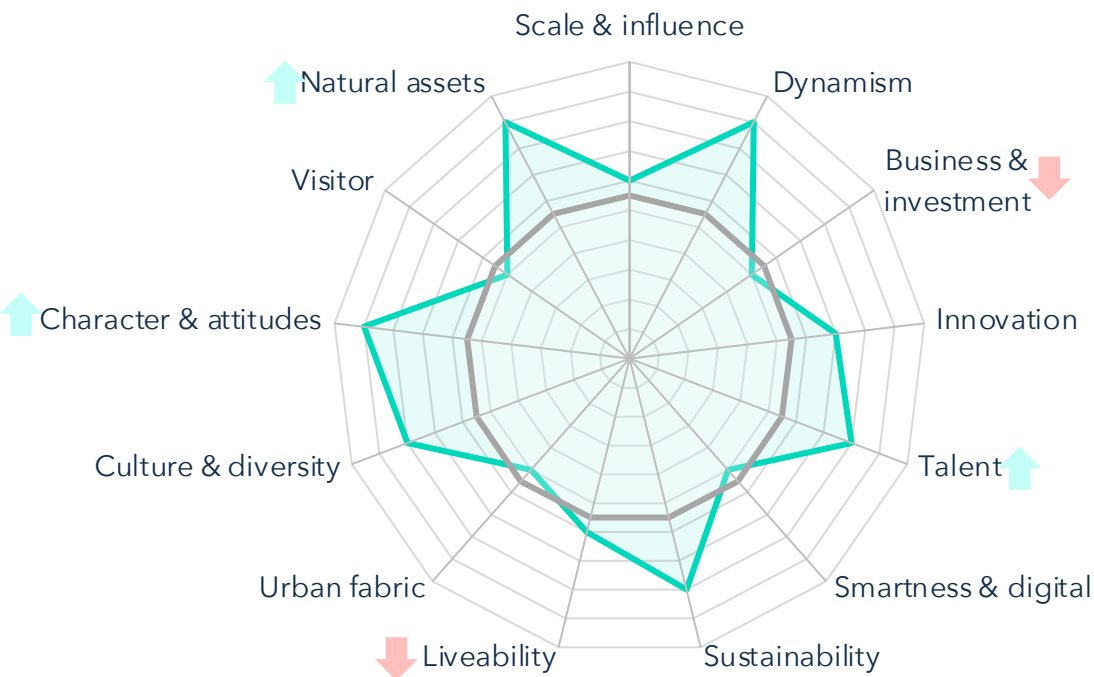
Overall Reputation Index

Max = 1, against peers



Brand Balance Breakdown

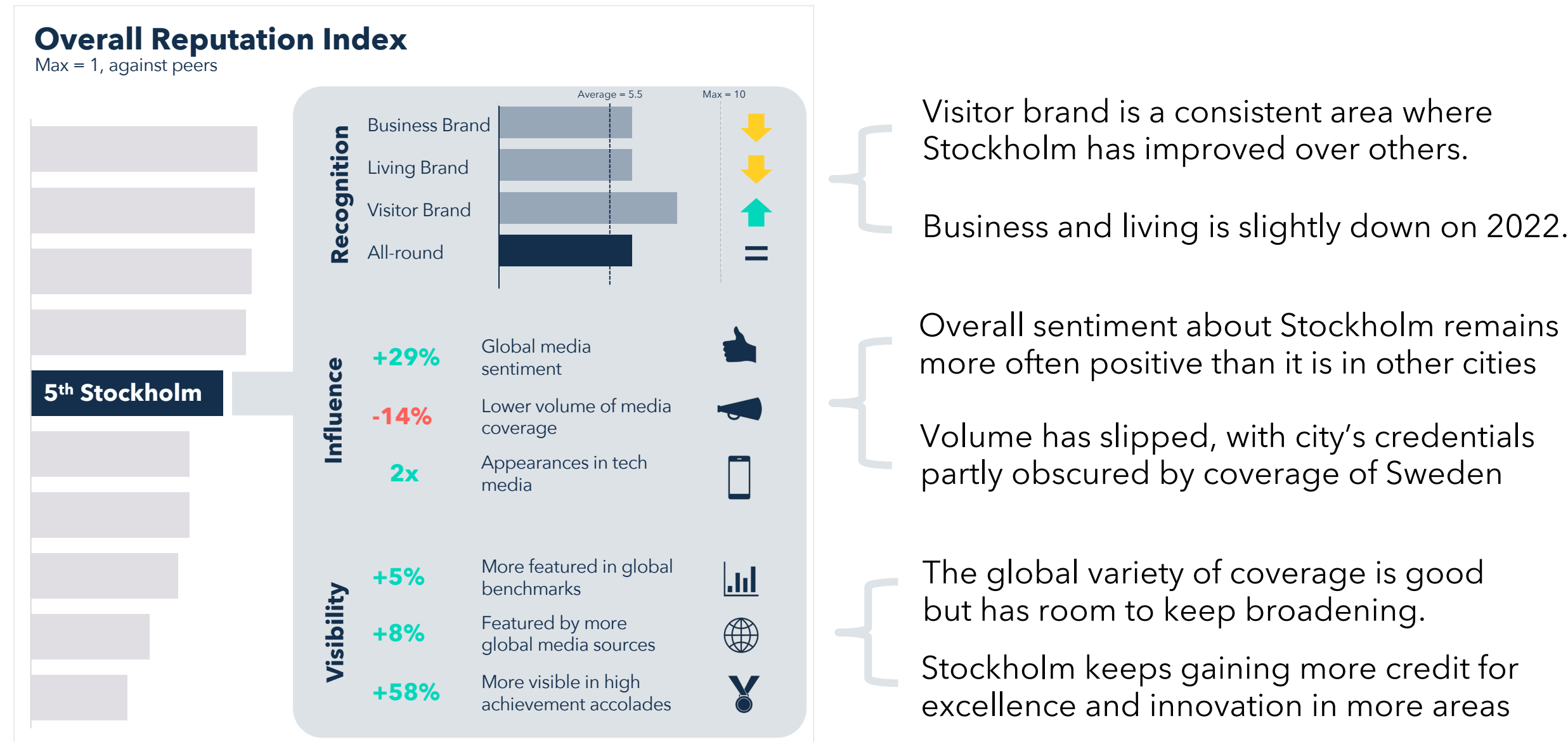
Max = 10/10 (top ranked peer city)



Stockholm is now above its city peers in 9 out of 13 brand areas (10 in 2022)

- Peer Cities
- Amsterdam
 - Berlin
 - Copenhagen
 - Helsinki
 - Oslo
 - Austin
 - Vancouver
 - Singapore
 - Tel Aviv

Stockholm Perception: Summary of Findings in 2024/5



Stockholm Perception: Summary of Findings in 2024/5

Talent brand has gone up as more international workers report back favourably.

Stockholm's natural features have become more visible as the recreational side of the city gets picked up on.

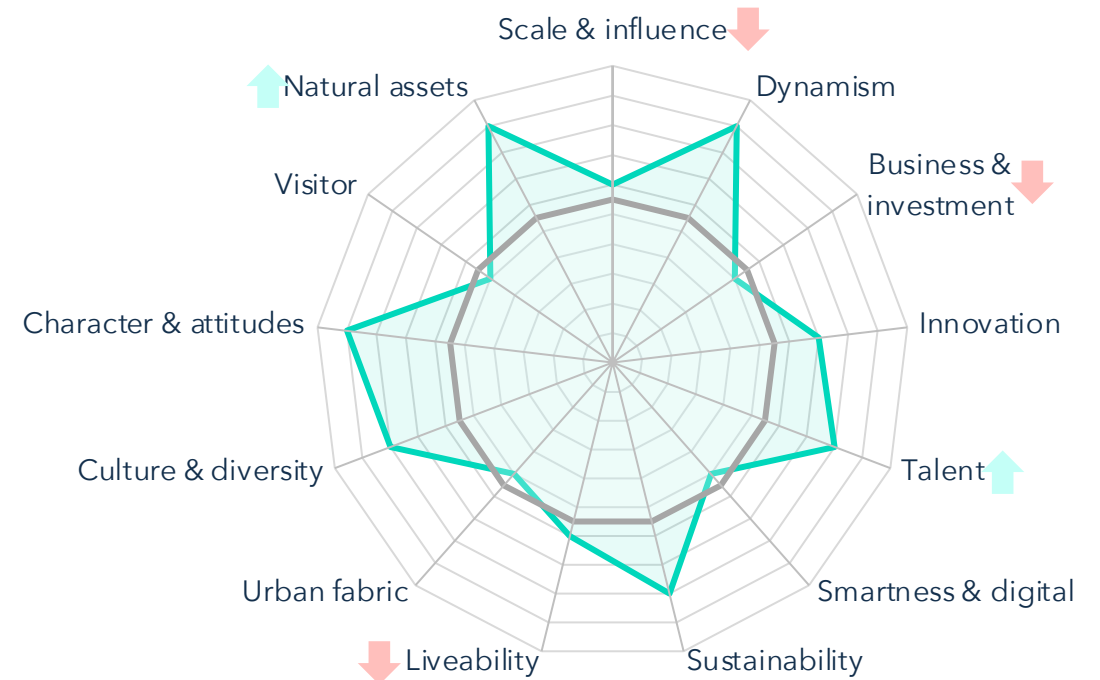
Stockholm's scale brand is down because there is less focus on its size and regional growth, and less featuring in influential studies.

Other cities have improved on perceived business climate or investor appeal.

Affordability and cost-related concerns drive a slip in liveability perceptions.

Brand Balance Breakdown

Max = 10/10 (top ranked peer city)



Stockholm is now above its city peers in 9 out of 13 brand areas
(10 in 2022)

Summary implications

Stockholm's standing remains very high, and there is now room to:

1. **Remind the world confidently** of Stockholm's growth model and path forward.
2. **Avoid misperceptions**, tensions or conflict that arise from success.
3. **Partner together** to define and deepen the city's identity, coordinate messaging, and integrate internal and external storytelling.

Analysis in Detail

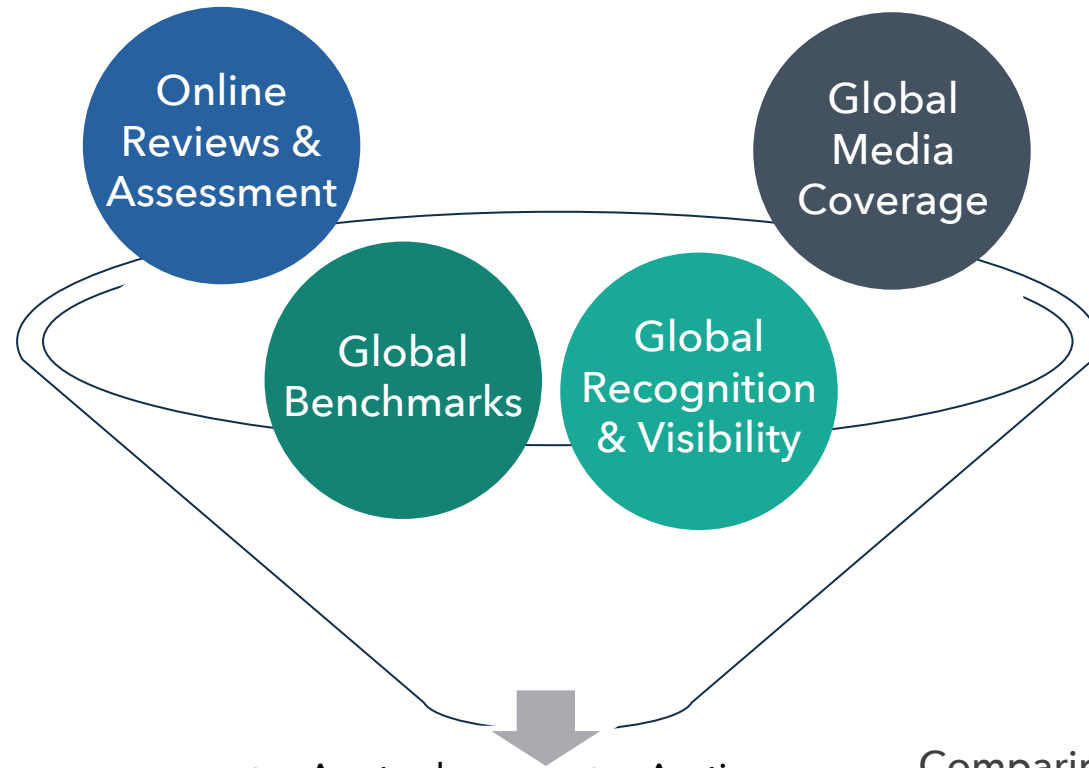


The approach

Developed and applied in 30+ cities worldwide

Content with **100m+** views
that relate to city image and brand

800+ benchmarks of city
and regional performance and
perception



100,000 news articles reviewed
across **100** media outlets

>80 awards, prizes and top lists of
cities, streets, neighbourhoods &
companies.

- Amsterdam
- Berlin
- Copenhagen
- Helsinki
- Oslo
- Austin
- Vancouver
- Singapore
- Tel Aviv
- **Stockholm**

Comparing Stockholm in the same 10-city peer
group, who share similarities in

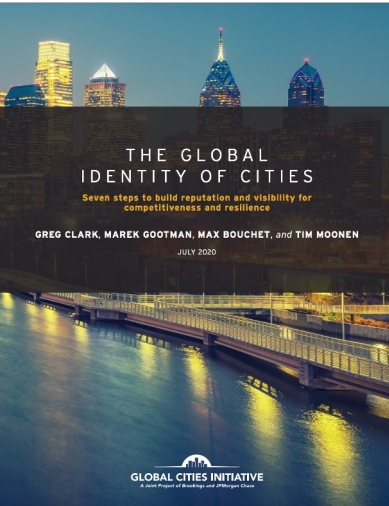
- population.
- quality of life and desirability
- ambition in the new economy
- competition against larger and/or neighbouring cities

Overall brand
tracker for
Stockholm

+

Insights into
Stockholm's
brand visibility

The Competitive Context in 2025



1. In a world of divisions, there is an intense war going on between more cities for talent, innovation and trust. More cities realise that they underestimate the scale of this competition at their peril.
2. Cities are battling to be defined not only by national reputations, domestic politics, and geopolitical environments that both enable and constrain them.
3. The small number of winning clusters in critical technologies, and the rise of 'safe haven' cities, sees more divergence between the winner and loser cities, and more need for a decisive proposition.
4. Demand for cities that have an appetite for their future, express themselves authentically, and look after the interests of their people and planet.
5. Cities are focusing on the welcome, concierge and 'landing pad' for inbound customers – through better focus on the whole customer journey and integration between digital and physical.
6. Well resourced cities are re-assessing the relationship between tactical campaigns and strategic communication, to ensure they line up for a big picture.
7. Cities looking for a clear shared story grounded in what they are good at, stand for, and believe in – backed by teamwork to promote cities – with businesses, institutions, citizens and diasporas having a bigger role.

Stockholm in the world – performance in 2024

Stockholm maintains its position in the global top 20, driven by growing recognition of its outstanding innovation environment, cumulative liveability advantages, excellent public services, and improved talent appeal.

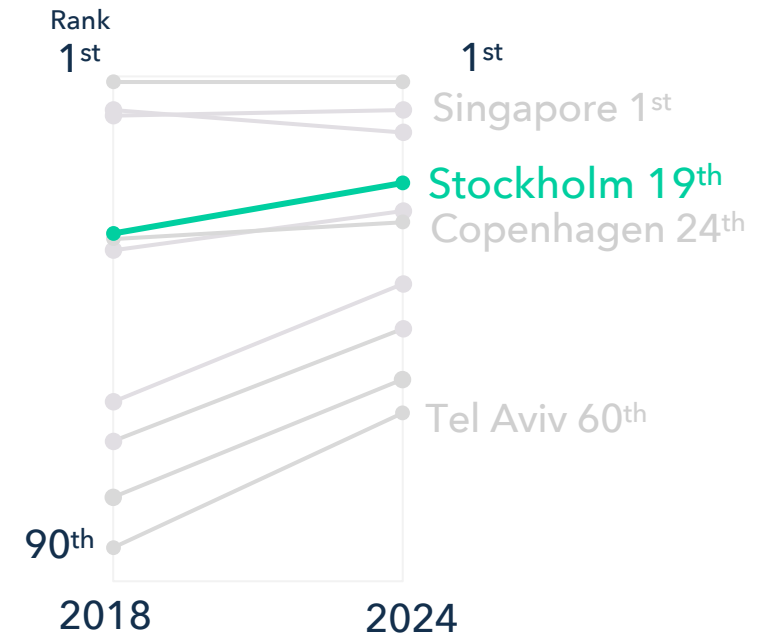
By the numbers

Stockholm is...

- Now in the top 15 largest European city economies despite only having the 30th largest population
- 31st globally for overall scale of corporate & investment activity, 14th in Europe (Kearney)
- 39th most connected corporate hub (GaWC)
- Joint 12th most visible city globally with Toronto, and 6th in Europe.

Stockholm joins the top 20 cities globally

Overall rank across all performance metrics



Stockholm's 19th position worldwide across the full range of performance metrics, is the highest it has reached since The Business of Cities measures began in 2011.

This reflects Stockholm's strengths in areas that have become more widely assessed (eg. innovation, sustainability, equality), and other cities' struggles with trade shifts, economic growth, quality of life, or affordability.

Perceptions of Stockholm among different audiences

Stockholm's product continues to gain recognition among experts and those 'in the know'. Vibrant and affordable destinations such as Madrid, Dubai and Mexico City are growing fast in the eyes of global talent. There are more concerns from those familiar with Stockholm about its cohesion, openness and leisure offer.

	Overall	Since 2022	Compared to global peers	Among Nordic capitals
Experts	17 th		4 th / 10	1 st / 4
Those not familiar with the city	18 th		3 rd / 10	1 st / 4
Global public	18 th		3 rd / 10	1 st / 4
Residents	22 nd		8 th / 10	4 th / 4
 Those familiar with the city	28 th		8 th / 10	4 th / 4

Among a sample of 300 world cities.

Spectrum of perceptions about Stockholm in 2024

Stand-outs

Benchmark	Source	Rank*	Change
Perceived friendliness (for visitors)	Conde Nast (2024)	1 st (in Europe)	NEW
Reputation as a place to study	Brand Finance	4 th	NEW
Residents' trust within neighbourhood	EU Barometer	6 th / 83 (in Europe)	-2
Residents' satisfaction with living in the city	EU Barometer	6 th / 83 (in Europe)	-4
Food scene perception	Feedr	8 th / 100	NEW
Reputation as a place to start a business	Startup Heatmap	13 th / 50 (in Europe)	-4
Visitor interest and sentiment	Saffron	17 th / 111	NEW
Destination appeal	Conde Nast	18 th	-13

*All ranks global, except where specified otherwise

Warning signs

Benchmark	Source	Rank*	Change
How easy residents find it to access an affordable home	EU Barometer	79 th /84 (in Europe)	+1
Safety as an issue for locals	IMD	133 th /146	-5
How easy it is for foreigners to make friends and socialise	Internations	45 th / 53	-9
Local perceptions about cost of public transport	EU Barometer	66 th / 84 (in Europe)	-20
Perceived openness to racial and ethnic minorities	EU Barometer	51 st / 84 (in Europe)	-13
How satisfied locals are with healthcare services	Numbeo	114 th /218	+43
Foreign expats view of the work-life balance	Internations	22 nd / 53	- 18

1. Stockholm's elevated role on the global stage

Stockholm's reputation continues to mature.

Stockholm is successfully attracting more attention from visitors, investors, and corporate executives on the global stage. This attention gravitates around Stockholm's credentials as an innovation hub, a lifestyle destination, and one of the 10 pioneer cities showing the way forward for our urban planet.

On the whole the world perceives Stockholm's recent story in a positive way. The balance of sentiment on the whole is strong.

This reflects a wider trend of Nordic capitals attracting positive attention in global media and often behaving as a cluster near the top of the global benchmarks.

Stockholm now appears in 55%+ of all assessments of global cities - on a par with Madrid, San Francisco, and Seoul.

The 3rd most positive sentiment overall in salient global media coverage.

4th most profiled in its peer group, after much larger cities of Singapore, Berlin, and Amsterdam

Still the most profiled Nordic city, although Copenhagen has closed the gap (24th to 14th).

2nd most profiled mid-sized city in the world

6th in Europe, in terms of perceived prestige and importance

5th most featured city in the global charts for sustainability

Top 30 most spotlighted cities globally for high achievements, accolades or recommendations.

2. Stockholm's social advantages are expanding its draw for talent

Stockholm is not just liveable but trusted

The world's impressions of Stockholm as a place to live has evolved and deepened. There is more recognition that the city is not just good for families, but also for mobile talent and even retirees. Audiences are attracted by the city's improved sense of welcome, high trust, and healthy urban environment.

Residents also enjoy Stockholm's clean air, safety and green and public spaces. The city also impresses for its accessibility to the elderly and people with disabilities.

In 2024 Stockholm stands out for its values and social fabric. Residents and visitors alike rate the high levels of trust in the city, low corruption and local friendliness.

Stockholm is still in the top 20 among the global public but has fallen for resident perceptions

Aggregate position in perception benchmarks

Perceptions of...	Globally*	Among peers	Among Nordic peers	Change
...Global public	18 th	3 rd / 10	1 st / 4	-3
...Residents	22 nd	8 th / 10	4 th / 4	-6



+50%

More positive coverage of Stockholm for urban fabric & liveability

1st

globally for being accessible to elderly and people with disabilities (Brand Finance)

4th

Best city to consider to study in (Brand Finance)

3. Stockholm's visitor credentials are building

Despite intense competition Stockholm is entering a new echelon of cachet cities.

Stockholm is shifting towards 'must visit' status to a growing cohort of global travellers. While it not typically defined or described as a 'tourist city', it has featured more often in premium assessments of great cities in the world that are usually the preserve of 'exclusive' or 'exceptional' cities.

It is much more frequently on the shortlist for top destinations in Europe than it was 5 years ago. The world perceives improvements in Stockholm's welcome, openness and friendliness to visitors.

Despite this progress, competition is growing from a wider suite of locations for global awards and destination showcases (e.g. Athens, Muscat and Pittsburgh).



+16%

More positive tourism coverage globally than the average peer.

1st

In Europe for local friendliness as perceived by visitors (Conde Nast, 2024)

18th

Best visitor destination globally, as voted by global public (Conde Nast)

-12%

less associated with visitor appeal than average in global media

4. Stockholm is known for its hip tech flagships, less for business as a whole

The success of Stockholm's start ups and scale ups drives recognition of the city's economy, but with opportunities for a broader based reputation for business and jobs.

Stockholm is now well established in the top 20 globally in tech and innovation, a top 15 preferred destination among European founders, and by some measures a top 5 performer for fintech. The tech talent pool is also deeper than ever.

Exciting high growth companies in edtech, biotech, AI and impact gain plenty of coverage, including in globally influential media. However the broader talent base and job opportunities associated with Stockholm's advanced economy are not as well recognised in international surveys.

In general Stockholm stands out less in more conventional commercial and industrial sectors.

"Stockholm is the most 'seasoned' ecosystem in the Nordics, having produced groundbreaking tech and exits for many years."

TechCrunch, United States

"A city long renowned for innovation, sustainability and progression."

Wired, United Kingdom

"Stockholm is a world-class tech hub in Europe ... Acting as a gateway to the rest of the bloc"

Euro News, France

1st among Europe peers for coverage of local startup success stories

2x more coverage in leading tech media – highest among peers.

2nd in Europe for software engineers in graphics & gaming – behind only London (Sequoia)

+9% more mentions of Stockholm's big-name companies, firms, and start-ups

Not in Top 30 talked about cities for investment & business in Europe.

5. The global brand continues to close towards the product

Stockholm's brand has been catching up to the product for 10 years. Perceptions in Europe are very positive while the global picture is more mixed.

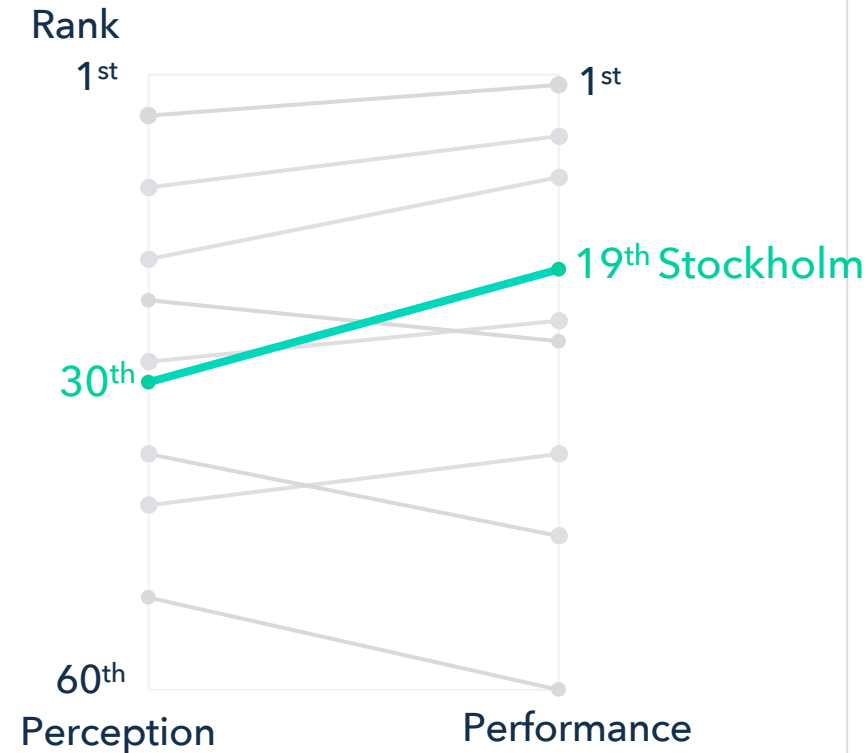
Stockholm is now firmly in the top 20 in Europe for perceived development opportunities, and has risen significantly into the top 30 as a fintech hub. It does not yet gain all the recognition it deserves, for example in climate tech.

Stockholm's status as paragon for sustainability, especially in Europe, is matched by its improvements in sustainable transport, climate change adaptation and carbon emissions.

External visitor perceptions have increasingly caught up of Stockholm as a friendly and inclusive city. Yet globally Stockholm's amenity and excitement brand does not yet quite match the improved offer. In areas like nightlife, performance or food, cities like Berlin or Amsterdam tend to gain more credit or recognition.

Stockholm's brand is catching up

Global rank across all perception and performance metrics



23rd

for overall
perceptions of
place vibrancy
and amenities
(Resonance)

Back into

top 30

for reputation as fintech hub
(Z-Yen)

+64%

higher share of
global media
coverage for
sustainability-
related topics

-15%

less often rated
as a top city for
culture and street
vibrancy than
peers

6. National and geopolitical shadows

Stockholm's light shines bright but the undercurrent of national and geopolitical concerns influence perceptions.

In global media coverage, Stockholm has recently featured more often as a venue for national decision-making and diplomacy. This partly overshadows the coverage and message of Stockholm's distinctive character as a city.

More of Stockholm's earned coverage in media articles in the last two years highlighted the role of the Swedish capital in inter-governmental and security affairs, than for other peer capital cities.

One result is less salient visibility, and relatively less discussion of Stockholm's own growth and dynamism in the most impactful media.

Stockholm's distinctive identity



"A city that breathes calm and tranquility, open to visitors."

"A world-class tech hub"

"A family and pedestrian-friendly city"

"A city rich in green space and culture"

"A city as superb as it is comfortable"

National and geopolitical undertone



"In Stockholm, EU ministers were discussing plans to ramp up defence production"

"[The European Union's] 27 justice ministers met in Stockholm"

"Helsinki's and Stockholm's NATO applications were accepted simultaneously"

"Stockholm is only 500km from the Russian exclave Kaliningrad"

2x more coverage of Stockholm in relation to NATO and geopolitics than peer average.

+43% more coverage of Stockholm mentions than peer cities' coverage mentions their respective countries

-66% fewer features of cycling and bike infrastructure about Stockholm than for Copenhagen, and about par among peers

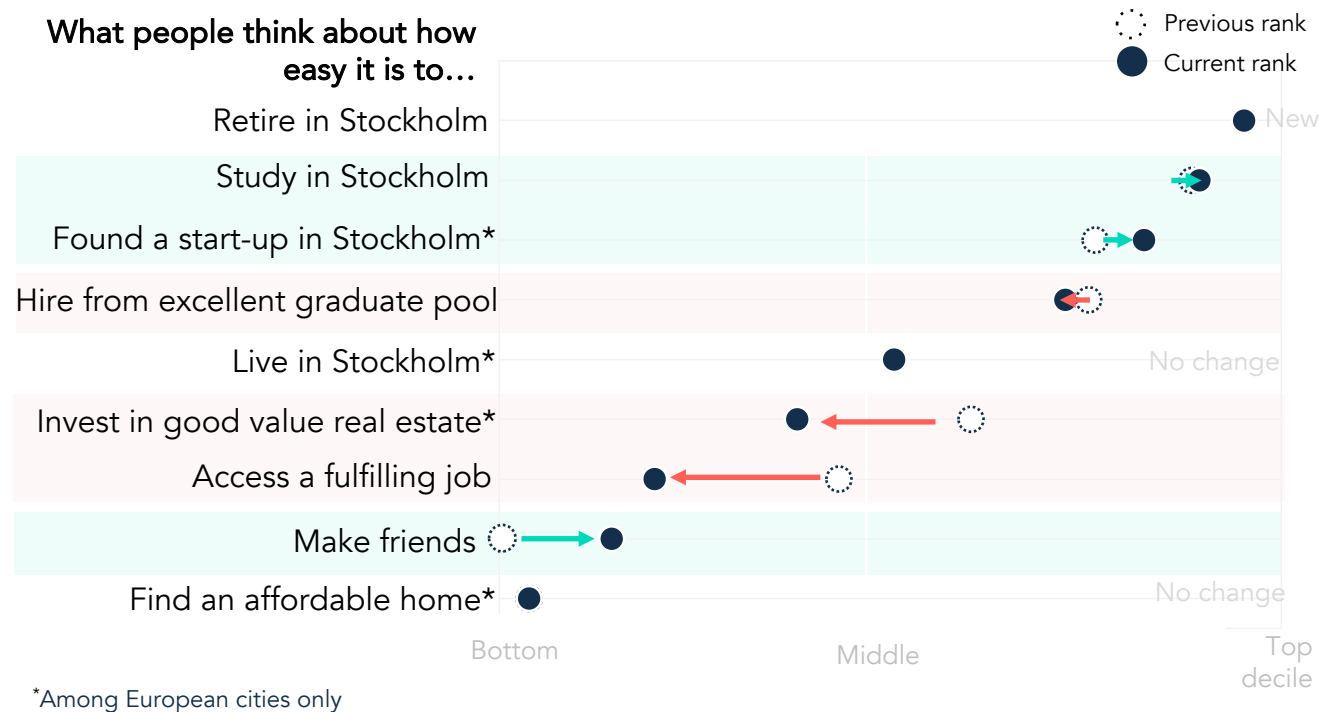
7. Warning signs for attracting and retaining talent.

High growth cities in Southern Europe, SE Asia and the USA have been competing more strongly as attractive places for mobile talent (most notably Madrid, Bangkok, Melbourne, Lisbon and Austin).

Retaining talent longer term relies on a diverse range of jobs, housing and lifestyle choices. Perceptions point to higher concerns about job security and lower confidence in Stockholm as a place to get a fulfilling job as a local and attaining work-life balance.

Doubts also still persist in some quarters about whether Stockholm's culture, food and experiences really are world class - although this trend has been improving.

Fulfilling jobs and affordable homes have become sharper concerns
Stockholm's global position across talent-related perception benchmarks



Not in **top 30** preferred destinations for digital talent (BCG)

-11

Places to 42nd for how satisfied expats are with job and career prospects. (Internations)

-40%

less often featured for food excellence than Copenhagen

8. Local perceptions are fraying

Risks of a divide between international and local expectations.

There is widely shared belief in Stockholm's overall standard of services, infrastructure and social trust. In a challenging economic context, Stockholm is also more resilient than most for jobs.

While expats tend to see Stockholm as a more and more comfortable city to be part of, locals further down the income spectrum are more concerned about affordability, safety, schools, education and jobs. There are also signs that Stockholm is viewed as a lonelier city, and not as well suited to all age groups.

This points to a divide between expat and resident sentiment, that can affect confidence in Stockholm's direction. Other cities have recognised the need to address this divide proactively and build shared opportunity and identity.

"If we don't fight to get talent here and make sure that Stockholm is a good place to work and build companies in, then we will become like Venice in a bad way, I'm afraid"

SVT Nyheter, 22 February 2024

"Stockholm is last among the Swedish cities on the list ... 18 percent active mobility."

Dagens Industri, on active mobility, 27 June 2024

"There is a certain improvement in the mental health of young people in Stockholm ... young people are drinking less and less. But gambling addiction is increasing and they don't want to report crimes."

Aftonbladet, 22 August 2024

6th

in Europe for satisfaction with city and with life (EU Barometer)

44th

For how citizens, businesses, and investors engage with the city (Saffron)

49th

Out of 84 cities in Europe for personal job satisfaction (EU Barometer)

2x

Coverage of crime in global media is more than double the peer average.

9. Greater challenge from Nordic peers

Nordic success poses choices for Stockholm about how it teams up and stands out

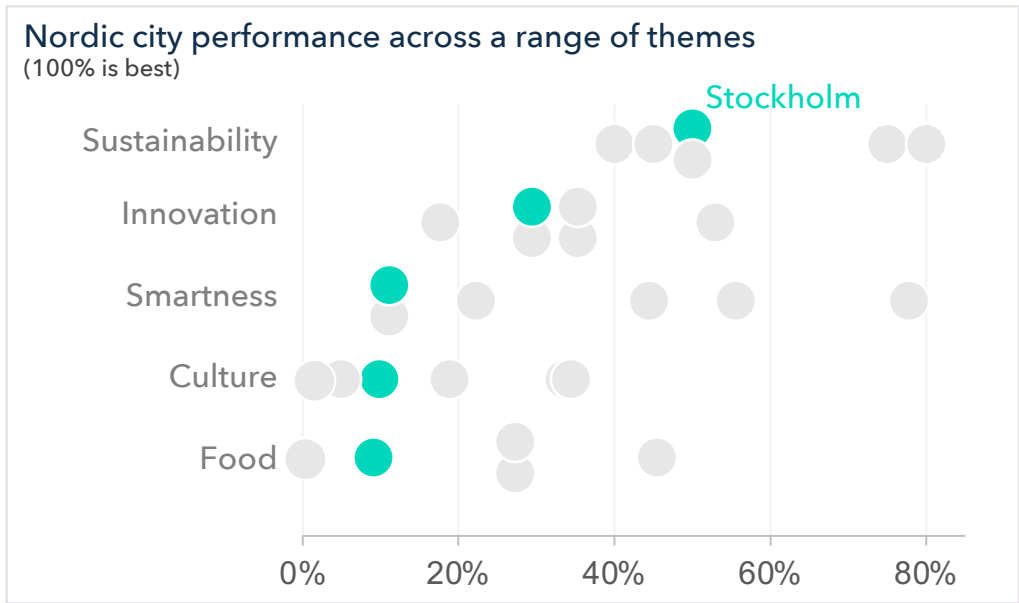
Copenhagen has recently gained much more visibility for its climate ambitions, future plans, food and design strengths, and more hospitable attitudes to visitors.

Copenhagen, Helsinki, and Oslo currently tend to lie ahead of Stockholm in the liveability benchmarks and local satisfaction. These three cities are also gaining more praise in global media for their liveability and sustainability efforts.

For smart and digital outcomes, Oslo has carved its niche alongside the likes of Zurich and Seoul, with Helsinki and Copenhagen close behind. Here Stockholm does not always get the same recognition.

"In Copenhagen, the dream of a carbon-free city."
Le Monde, 6 September 2024

"Copenhagen's 24 Michelin stars spread over 14 restaurants"
The Daily Telegraph, 13 February 2024



19th

Overall across liveability benchmarks, behind **Oslo, Helsinki & Copenhagen**

-60%

less distinctive recent coverage of the city's attributes compared to Copenhagen

+43%

more positive media sentiment about Stockholm's sustainability efforts than other peers.

10. Limited depth to city identity & new negative narratives

Stockholm's urban fabric is more positively perceived than most, but its neighbourhoods and regional centres have limited resonance. Berlin, Vancouver and Amsterdam all receive around 2x as many references to specific parts of the city. Over half of all Stockholm's media mentions of specific places are limited to three locations: Gamla Stan, Östermalm, and Södermalm.

Berlin and Copenhagen enjoy more focused coverage of their trendsetting neighbourhoods as well as a broader set of references across the wider region.

Negatively-slanted stories about Stockholm's safety or housing strains have become more common, and currently exceed Helsinki or Copenhagen. International media has focused more on crime, inequality, and cost concerns.

Stockholm is still framed more positively than most cities globally, but clear response.

"A Swedish system of rent-controlled apartments has created a years-long waiting list in Stockholm and a sublet market where reports of bribes and sexual harassment are not uncommon."

The Straits Times, 14 November 2024

"Stockholm is a city where you can easily get into a bad mood, even though it is so beautiful here. "

Die Zeit, 20 May 2024

"The city that allows you to reconcile work ambitions with the dream of a family will be Stockholm" but "social life is poor, asphyxiating: people only hang out in small, closed groups, in which they have been included since childhood"

La Repubblica, 19 July 2023

"In London... no one was shot dead in the six months leading up to spring last year. In the next six months, four were shot dead in Södertälje, a city half an hour's drive south-west of Stockholm."

The Daily Telegraph, 2 February 2023

-29%

Less often referring to a specific neighbourhood, compared to other cities

-50%

less frequent praise for Stockholm's liveability advantages than in Copenhagen.

-52%

less positive tone to Stockholm's character & attitudes in global media.

Summary – strategic implications

In a fractured world Stockholm is a stand out performer in many of the areas the world cares about. It has every reason to be even more confident in communicating its strengths and using its acquired soft power.

Stockholm's profile is at a point where admiration is growing from outside, but needs to broaden, deepen and also connect locally. A fuller account of the Stockholm experience can both amplify its appeal and reinforce belonging and belief in the city's direction.

The international analysis suggests that there is now a strong case for Stockholm to be even more purposeful, resourceful and coordinated. Priorities to do so include:

1. Continue building up familiarity and affinity with Stockholm, including beyond Europe.
2. Develop a clearer sense of Stockholm's identity and DNA, both for external communication and internal pride and belonging.
3. Draw on Stockholm's scale as a region and ecosystem in order to pull together and partner more deeply.
4. Address weaknesses and correct misperceptions with clear evidence.