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R E V I S T A

Urban Brand: Implications of Legal Management, Branding, and Urban Icons in the Decentralized Autonomous Government of the Municipality of Ambato

Marca Urbanista: Implicaciones de la Gestión Legal, el Branding y los Iconos Urbanos en el Gobierno Autónomo Descentralizado del Municipio de Ambato

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ABSTRACT

Currently, the development of a city brand represents a key strategy for governments interested in boosting tourism within their borders. However, improper use of this resource can be counterproductive. The purpose of this study is to determine the criteria for assessing the effectiveness of the city brand and its tourist appeal, applying the Anholt Hexagon model. A mixed-methodological approach was adopted, analyzing the six dimensions of the model as a theoretical framework, and complementing it with a quantitative study based on surveys about the perception of tourists, both local and international, with a sample of 384 participants. The research aimed to establish a relationship between the hypothetical factors and each of the evaluated dimensions (presence, pulse, place, people, potential, and prerequisites) to identify the key elements for the success of a city brand, such as its architecture, climate, natural reserves, and promotional strategies. It is concluded that the effective development of a city brand requires careful consideration of these factors to enhance tourist retention and complement the sustainable development of the city of Ambato.

Keywords: Urban brand; public policy; city brand; urban icons.

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Resumen

En la actualidad, la creación de una marca ciudad representa una estrategia clave para los gobiernos interesados en fomentar el turismo dentro de sus fronteras. Sin embargo, el uso inadecuado de este recurso puede resultar contraproducente. El propósito de este estudio es determinar los criterios para evaluar la eficacia de la marca ciudad y su atractivo turístico, aplicando el modelo del hexágono de Anholt. Se adoptó un enfoque metodológico mixto, analizando las seis dimensiones del modelo como marco teórico y complementándolo con un estudio cuantitativo basado en encuestas sobre la percepción de los turistas, tanto locales como internacionales, con una muestra de 384 participantes. El objetivo de la investigación fue establecer una relación entre los factores hipotéticos y cada una de las dimensiones evaluadas (presencia, pulso, lugar, gente, potencial y prerequisites), con el fin de identificar los elementos clave para el éxito de una marca ciudad, tales como su arquitectura, clima, reservas naturales y estrategias de promoción. Se concluye que el desarrollo efectivo de una marca ciudad requiere una consideración cuidadosa de estos factores para mejorar la permanencia del turista y complementar el desarrollo sostenible de la ciudad de Ambato.

Palabras clave: Marca urbana; política pública; marca ciudad; íconos urbanos.

Introduction

City branding is an important activity for cities around the world. Around 12 different countries revealed that the average per capita urban marketing budget allocated to the city's brand was 400,000 euros per year. Not only is there a significant increase in the number of cities branding projects in South America, but also a change in the way they are executed (Braun, 2012; Kavaratzis & Ashworth, 2005).

At the same time, the criticisms against the research area as such are harsh, arguing that the city brand has developed in the most fragmented way. In addition, there seems to be little exchange of ideas between different parts of the research field between conceptual frameworks, or as Skinner (2008) puts it, there is little consensus on what kind of marketing and branding applies to places. Others claim that the area is professionally led, that it lacks scientific rigor and that more detailed analyses of the effects of marketing strategies are needed (Kavaratzis, 2004; Parkerson & Saunders, 2005). Others argue that cities are commonly based on several rankings, but the methodology of those rankings is dubious (Braun, 2012; Kavaratzis & Ashworth, 2005).

However, based on the findings of previous studies, critics of the field can, in turn, be criticized for relying on a limited number of studies, for applying a monodisciplinary perspective in a field that is essentially multidisciplinary, and for not attempting to develop a mode of analysis in which the results of different disciplinary backgrounds can be compared (Evans, 2003; Northover, 2010). Therefore, for obvious reasons, there is a need to take stock of the research domain of the city's brand, in other words, identify, delineate and critically review the domain as such to find common ground for future research activities (Kavaratzis & Ashworth, 2006; Zhang & Xiaobin, 2009).

Several scholars have also made attempts in this direction. There have already been at least ten previous literature studies on city marketing with different perspectives, research interests and disciplinary backgrounds (Evans, 2003; Kavaratzis & Ashworth, 2006; Zhang & Xiaobin, 2009). Some approached the field by adopting the general concept of place branding, making conceptual summaries, a terminological review, or a general review. Others have implemented the concept of place marketing, through a broad and focused conceptual review, or a review based on some practice-based techniques (Braun et al., 2013; Lucarelli & Berg, 2011). Finally, others have been more specific adopting the concept of city branding and marketing when conducting a general regulatory review, a conceptual review or a thematic bibliography.

The present review attempts to break with these common features by presenting a systematic analysis of the different features of the research domain (not only conceptual, but also empirical) by employing many studies. For this reason, the objective of the study is to analyze a contemporary and concise review of the state of the art of the city's brand domain. The contribution aims to develop a common and general understanding among scholars of the city's brand, belonging to different disciplines.

Literature Review

The literature review is organized into three themes. First, the differences between place brand and place marketing are recognized. Second, it examines the importance of involving a variety of local stakeholders in the place-marking process. Finally, a discussion on developing policies to address social issues and developing a place brand is presented.

City brand

City branding is generally concerned with how the tangible attributes of a place, such as important buildings, are combined with intangible aspects, such as culture, how people perceive a place, and ensuring that these perceptions are fulfilled in the way people experience a place (Caldwell & Freire, 2004; Gaggiotti et al., 2018). There is a consensus that place-marking is theoretically limited in general, there is a gap between theory and practice, there is limited research that focuses on the branding process of cities in general, and that place-marking thought and practice is dominated by the views of Western nations (Braun et al., 2013).

The place brand is a concept closely related to the city brand; however, it tends to subordinate a place to the tactics and strategies of commercial marketing practices, such as promotional strategies and slogans (Kavaratzis & Ashworth, 2005). Marketers can often focus on the tangible and intangible attributes a place can offer potential customers. For example, the construction of the Guggenheim Museum in Bilbao, Spain, provided an important attribute for communicating to potential clients how the city had shifted from a manufacturing and industrial economy to a service and cultural one. However, scholars of place branding have criticized the marketing

approach to qualify the branding of places as something superficial, artificial, far from reality and false. For example, when analyzing how Liverpool renamed itself, (Northover, 2010) described the process as something like giving sex to the city in the international beauty contest. (Zhang & Xiaobin, 2009) criticized how a top-down approach to the place branding process can have a lack of accountability and transparency and, more recently, (Kavaratzis & Ashworth, 2006) argued that this approach has a lack of democracy and even effectiveness.

Throughout the literature on place branding, the importance of collaboration of local stakeholders, such as residents, local businesses, and policymakers, in the development and implementation of a place brand is recognized. For example, (Caldwell & Freire, 2004; Gaggiotti et al., 2018) argued that this collaboration is important, as it provides the space for a place's identity and, ultimately, the brand to emerge.

Some scholars have argued that this collaboration is a fundamental practice that can ultimately provide a more legitimate and sustainable place branding and that place branding campaigns that do not reach local stakeholders generally fail, as there may be a lack of understanding of the links, relationships, and networks in a given place (Braun et al., 2013; Gaggiotti et al., 2018; Kavaratzis & Ashworth, 2006).

While the importance of stakeholder collaboration in the place-marking process is recognized, it is often limited in practice. For example, not all local stakeholders have the same possibilities for participation, conflicts of interest often exist between stakeholder groups and powerful stakeholder groups may have the power to shape the narrative and image selection of a place (Iñiguez & Tusa, 2017). As an example, (Calvento & Ochoteco, 2016) they identified how place markings were often determined top-down by local government and local authorities, with generally irregular and ad hoc resident consultations. More recently, Zhang (2009) explained how the place branding process will always retain its selective nature that emphasizes the opinions of some stakeholders and minimizes those of others.

Due to the broad nature of place branding, some studies have analyzed the participation of political actors in the place branding process (Cruz, 2014; Nevada et al., 2011; Red, 2008). For example, from an analysis of the development of a place marketing strategy for the capital city of Colombia, Bogotá, which had suffered a negative international image, (Tinto, 2008) argued how place branding is a useful tool to improve the image of a place. image, if understood as a possible policy-making tool and not as an isolated strategy (Cruz, 2014; Nevada et al., 2011). Place branding studies do refer to the development of public policies to address social issues and the development of a place brand. For example, from a systematic review of case studies focused on current strategies and place-branding proposals for places with a negative brand image based on social issues, (Valenzuela, 2014) they identified how policy development was considered the main strategy (Regalado et al., 2013), and how few studies refer to the combination of social issues and positive place branding. For example, studies in the Latin American cities of Rio de Janeiro and Medellín looked at the use of informal settlements as part of the place branding campaign by giving a different meaning to the perceived social problem. The findings of these case studies

revealed how local governments were reluctant to incorporate the successes of particular neighborhoods into the city's overall branding efforts, highlighting the importance of participation and support from all political actors in the place-branding process. More recently, when analyzing the development of policies to address social problems in Rio de Janeiro, (Aimacaña, 2019; Olga Kolotouchkina & Arráez, 2015) investigated the social and economic improvements following the implementation of the aerial cable car system in the poorest neighborhoods. They concluded that this investment in high-cost infrastructure has been officially promoted as an indication of development and progress to the international community; However, it transported only a few residents to a few sparsely located stations in densely populated neighborhoods and was generally not supported by members of the local community.

Urban icon

A city not only exists as a physical space, but also as a symbolic space formed by the visual and cultural perceptions of the people who visit or live in the city (Ostio, 2012). Both spaces have a dialectical relationship, that is, physical space and symbolic space coexist in the same city despite their opposite natures. The direct and indirect experiences that people have with their urban environment produce a set of representations and perceptions of the city. Therefore, there is a physical city and also a symbolic city built in the mind of each person. This relationship helps explain why different urban forms (buildings, streets, parks, bridges, and others) can contain diverse social, cultural, historical, and political meanings (Albán, 2016).

This brief preamble introduces the concept of the urban icon as an element of the landscape capable of influencing people's urban identities and experiences. (Calvento & Ochoteco, 2016) situate the study of urban icons within the field of urban visual history. This area of study focuses on analyzing how people see and perceive the urban world. A city is a complex and multifaceted entity, so people seek to reduce this complexity to an image that allows them to understand and relate to the city. Faced with this process, (Tinto, 2008) argue that urban icons have proliferated as a solution to the challenge of the immensity of urban knowledge, because it transforms the chaos of urban experience into knowledge and meaning through representational practices.

Methods

This study is based on data collected from October to December 2022 and includes 40 studies from the period 2016 to 2022 that in one way or another refer to city branding, urban icons, implementation policy. Research design consists of five steps: (1) an iterative search and retrieval of research studies; (2) a categorization of the nature and content of these studies; (3) a selection of studies based on the types of designs; (4) a quantitative codification of these studies; and (5) a multivariate analysis of the variables coded in the studies. Therefore, (Moher et al., 2016) argue the importance of using strategies such as persistent observation in the field, accessing multiple data sources, and conveying findings through strong descriptions to improve credibility.

The iterative search and retrieval procedure began with the development of a set of search concepts related to the city brand, thus relating different ways of conceptualizing a city (city, destination, region, place, metropolis, municipality, urban, icons.), as well as branding and branding (sell, communicate, market, promote, make, regenerate, transform).

These concepts were then used, in different combinations, as entries (abstracts and keywords) in the search of the following main online databases: Google Scholar, SciELO, Sage, Elsevier, Springer Link and Emerald. The search was limited to the period 2016 to March 2022, that is, the start date corresponds approximately to the time when studies using the branding tag began to appear. This is a partial limitation because the brand phenomenon had been discussed extensively previously, for example in the area of tourism research.

Study sample

The sample generated gives us evidence that; gender, age, academic level and estimated expenditure. For this, it was determined that the male sex agreed to answer more surveys than the female sex, since it had 52%. Of these, 48% are between 25 and 30 years old with a higher academic level that represents 53%. However, 41% of the estimated spending in the city of Ambato is \$301 to \$600.

Results

Social urbanism: politics

There is a general consensus that Medellín's transformation began under the leadership of Sergio Fajardo, who had been elected mayor in December 2003. The Fajardo administration set the agenda of reducing socioeconomic inequalities in the city through policy programs called Comprehensive Urban Programs, which soon became known as "social urbanism" (Ledo et al., 2016; Velez, 2016). Social urbanism policies involved increasing public investment and extending public services to the poorest neighbourhoods and consisted of improving public spaces, encouraging community participation and policy development. The agenda of social urbanism was based on a form of collaborative, consultative and participatory policy. For example, to promote greater participation and ownership of social urbanism projects by the local population, the administration specified that all public works contractors must hire a significant component of local labor (Gutiérrez Andrade, 2009; Trueman et al., 2007). The administration also further developed the participatory planning and budgeting program, with the aim of bringing governance and planning closer to citizens and civil society, as well as legitimizing local government and promoting transparency. In the local planning process, projects such as community kitchens and soccer fields were completed, and funds were made available to finance 1,200 scholarships for young people for university studies.

Social urbanism: the mark of place

Throughout the 1990s and early 2000s, the city of Medellín was known internationally as a place of “violence and conflict” (Evans, 2003). For example, in 1991, the New York Times ran a headline “In Colombia’s Tortured City,” and the LA Times reported “On the Squalid Streets of Medellín’s Drug Capital “There Is No Law.” But, by 2007, the city had become known internationally as a “model of social urbanism.” By 2013, headlines such as “Medellín, Colombia: Reinventing the World’s Most Dangerous City” and “Medellín: How Colombia’s Second City Overcome Its Drug Cartel Past” were common in the international media. In general, positive media attention focused on urban transformation and how Medellín was a “model of social urbanism” (Braun, 2012; Northover, 2010).

International politicians and urban planners conducted study tours of the intervention neighborhoods to understand the Medellín experience. In 2013, the city was even selected as the World’s Most Innovative City by the Wall Street Journal, Citigroup, and the Urban Land Institute. In awarding this award to Medellín, the Wall Street Journal spoke of the importance of local government working with businesses, community organizations and universities to “modernize Medellín.” This positive change in the way the international community perceived the city resulted in an increase in international events organized by the city, including the General Assembly of the Inter-American Development Bank in 2009 and the South American Games in 2010, and an increase in the number of international visitors from 95,089 in 2006 to 187,552 in 2013 (Braun et al., 2013; Evans, 2003; Zhang & Xiaobin, 2009).

The urban icon and the city brand: dynamics and dilemmas

The city brand has been established as an effective means to achieve a competitive advantage that allows a city to increase the attraction of investments and tourism, as well as strengthen the local identity and the identification of citizens with their city (Caldwell & Freire, 2004; Gaggiotti et al., 2018). This competitive advantage is achieved through the management and communication of a unique and attractive image of the city. Therefore, the city brand aims to control various means through which it is possible to transform and communicate the desired image of the city in a more effective way.

The management of the image of the city is the point of intersection between the city brand and urban icons. Urban icons have become important elements for the transformation and revitalization of the city’s image. (Lucarelli & Berg, 2011) argue that iconic buildings contribute to the creation of an attractive and unique image of the city, which generates an increase in tourism and satisfaction of residents. In addition, (Kavaratzis & Ashworth, 2006) recognizes that world-renowned cities have benefited greatly from urban icons such as Big Ben (London), the Eiffel Tower

(Paris), the Statue of Liberty (New York) and Christ the Redeemer (Rio de Janeiro). An emblematic case is the city of Barcelona, which has become one of the most popular cities in Europe and the world, largely due to the great projection that local authorities have given to its urban icons, such as the Sagrada Familia, Park Güell, the Communication Towers and the Fish Sculpture.

However, the dynamics between city brands and urban icons also present strong dilemmas. It could be said that the great interest of several cities to gain international recognition through the creation of new urban icons has caused the homogeneous reproduction of these structures and the dissolution of the urban character. One of the causes of this phenomenon is the worldwide imitation of successful formulas for the transformation of the image of the city. A clear example of this practice is the Bilbao Effect, a term used to describe the effect of the Guggenheim Museum on the positioning of the image of Bilbao (Spain) internationally. (Northover, 2010) argue that the Guggenheim Museum in Bilbao is not adapted to the local context from a visual and spatial approach, so this building can be randomly located in any other city in the world.

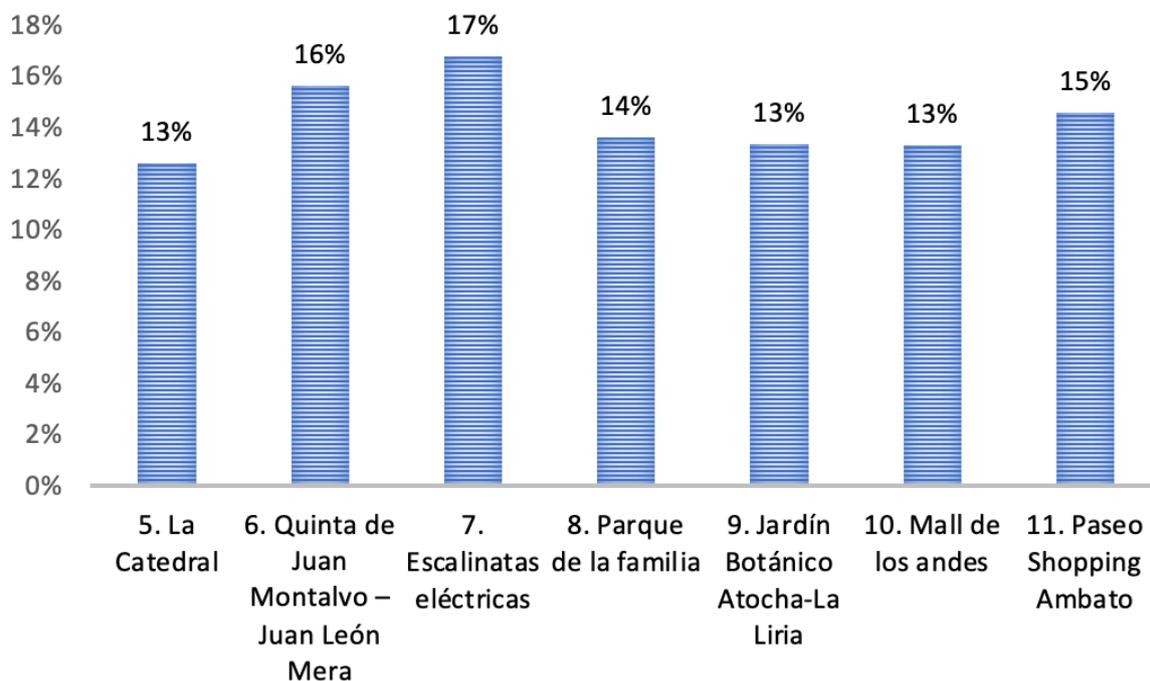
The brand-city strategy consists of identifying the differential properties of an area or region with very close and almost adjacent areas, to stimulate positive perceptions of community properties, the main element is to clarify the position of regions, countries, and cities in terms of attraction created by brands and references (Valenzuela, 2015). Thus, products, icons, places, characters, art, culture, business, and society are effectively synthesized into a series of attractive and consistent messages that seek to promote the exterior and interior, under the responsibility of some communities and the public. Meanwhile, Williamson and Mark (2015) assume that, in highly specialized functions and groupings of activities. An important point of EMC is to understand the attributes of the community to consider and then discuss the advertising implications of the appropriateness of EMC's policy design and the attractiveness of the destination city.

Table 1. Tourist preferences.

Tourist preferences	N	Media	Average	Deviation
5. La Catedral	384	3,44	13%	1,122
6. Quinta de Juan Montalvo – Juan León Mera	384	4,26	16%	0,834
7. Escalinatas eléctricas	384	4,58	17%	0,730
8. Parque de la familia	384	3,72	14%	1,014
9. Jardín Botánico Atocha-La Liria	384	3,64	13%	1,056
10. Mall de los andes	384	3,64	13%	1,131
11. Paseo Shopping Ambato	384	3,97	15%	1,001

So, it's repetitive to hear about tourism variables these days. In this way, we have a flow of ecotourism, commerce, medicine, culture, sports and conferences. Just a few things to mention. All these types of tourism require rethinking positioning tools to facilitate the management of promotional resources, guide public policies and above all, identify the meaning and decisions of a visit. The decision of a potential traveler is always at the limit of choice and can choose one or another alternative for the same city.

Figure 1. City-brand preferences.



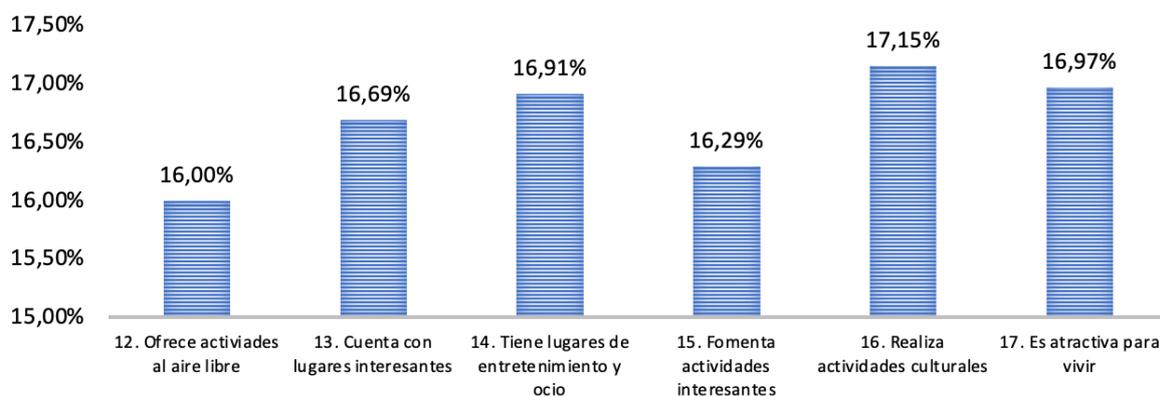
In the future, the city's brand value will play a role similar to that applied to products and services in today's business environment. In fact, the city has become a highly competitive market, a social product that demands propagation in tourism. Whereas, Cruz, Ruiz, and Zamarreño (2017), agree that this approach reevaluates the role of the brand, since the life of the brand is so important that it has a short shelf life, lacks loyalty to consumers and does not provide credibility for brand building. The degree of optimization of the perceived quality, considering that, there is no type of quality, but if the perceived quality, the value of the brand is not integrated.

Table 2. touristic activities.

Dimensión 2	N	Media	Average	Deviation
12. Ofrece actividades al aire libre	384	3,71	16,00%	0,932
13. Cuenta con lugares interesantes	384	3,87	16,69%	0,898
14. Tiene lugares de entretenimiento y ocio	384	3,92	16,91%	0,959
15. Fomenta actividades interesantes	384	3,77	16,29%	0,986
16. Realiza actividades culturales	384	3,97	17,15%	0,970
17. Es atractiva para vivir	384	3,93	16,97%	0,994
N válido (por lista)	384	23,17	100%	

In this way, city brands support the development of positioning strategies, which can create perceived value that can improve differentiation from competitors. In other words, the location of the city is the image we want to recognize and can differentiate it from its competitors. This is how identity begins.

Figure 2. touristic activities.



Dimension 3–Infrastructure

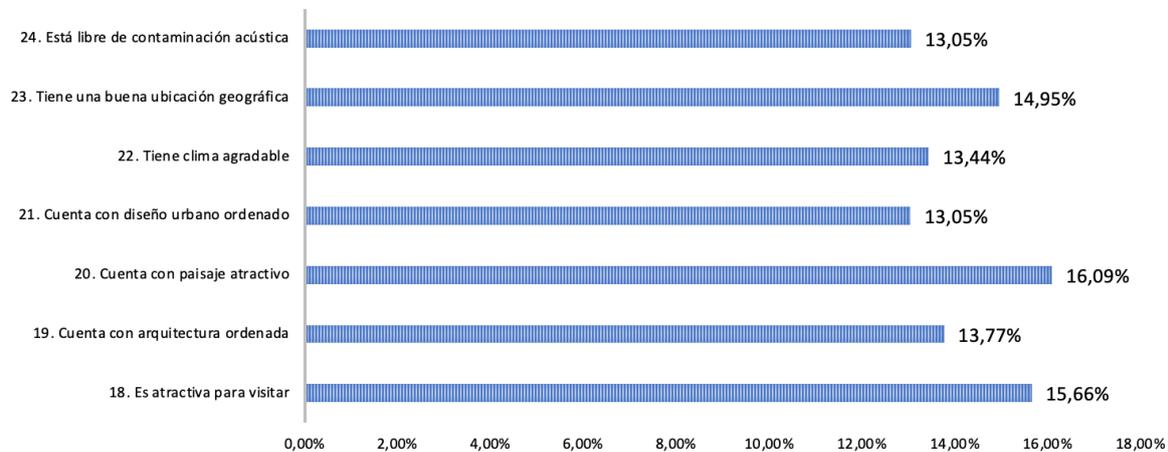
Therefore, social life is not connected with residents, cultural cohesion of social, replaces the components established by the place where tourism exists and region-cultural identity, Reck, Gunther; Martinez (2009), asserts that, in this vision of complete change in the city must be considered in all aspects and with all intentions of a true change. Cities can think from a pragmatic point of view. It is better to look at reality, excluding cities from consumption levels and global requirements, practically see the possibilities that we can approach during the day, you need a being that expresses the feeling of crossing a street and crossing an existing city.

Table 3. Infrastructure.

Dimensión 3	N	Media	Promedio	Desv. Desviación
18. Es atractiva para visitar	384	4,03	15,66%	0,889
19. Cuenta con arquitectura ordenada	384	3,55	13,77%	2,263
20. Cuenta con paisaje atractivo	384	4,15	16,09%	2,703
21. Cuenta con diseño urbano ordenado	384	3,36	13,05%	1,073
22. Tiene clima agradable	384	3,46	13,44%	1,108
23. Tiene una buena ubicación geográfica	384	3,85	14,95%	1,028
24. Está libre de contaminación acústica	384	3,36	13,05%	1,115
N válido (por lista)	384	25,77	100%	

So, for the construction of an identity in the city, aspects of daily life must be considered, taking into account the regional recognition as antecedent and the quality that the visitor perceives in the city.

Figure 3. Infrastructure.



The city-brand for the tourism function

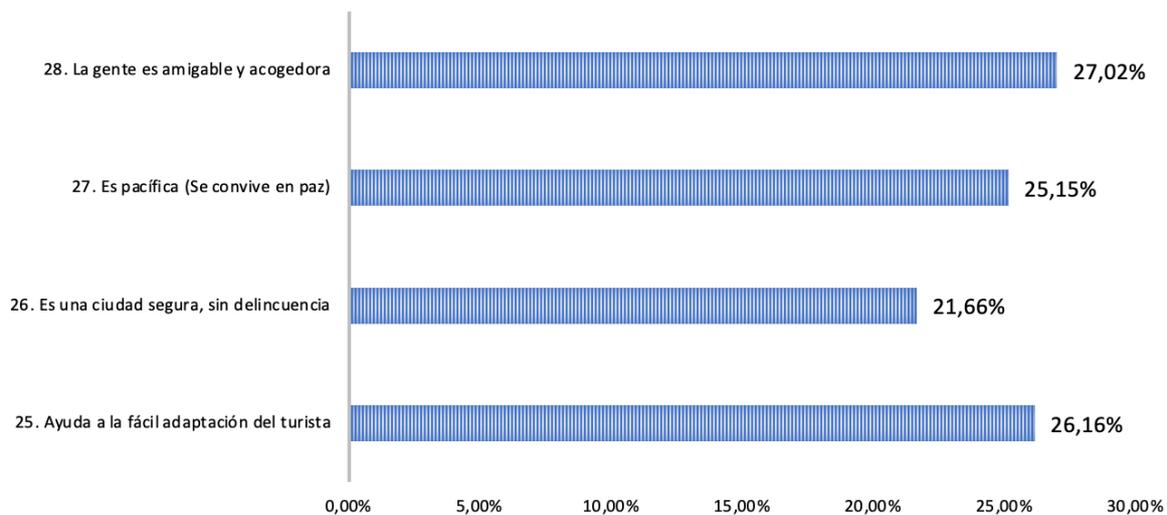
The design of the city brand for Cruz et al. (2017), must use a differential element that generates all the identifiable properties of the city in question, the objective is to achieve the first identity, therefore, the positioning, the characters, products, authorities and citizens become components of the basic promises of the city.

Table 4. The city-brand for the tourism function.

Dimensión 4	N	Media	Average	Deviation
25. Ayuda a la fácil adaptación del turista	384	3,77	26,16%	2,335
26. Es una ciudad segura, sin delincuencia	384	3,12	21,66%	1,209
27. Es pacífica (Se convive en paz)	384	3,62	25,15%	1,789
28. La gente es amigable y acogedora	384	3,89	27,02%	1,111
N válido (por lista)	384	14,40	100%	

In this way, city brands support the development of positioning strategies, which can create perceived value that can improve differentiation from competitors. In other words, the location of the city is the image we want to recognize and can differentiate it from its competitors. This is how identity begins.

Figure 4. The city-brand for the tourism function.



The city-brand for the tourism function

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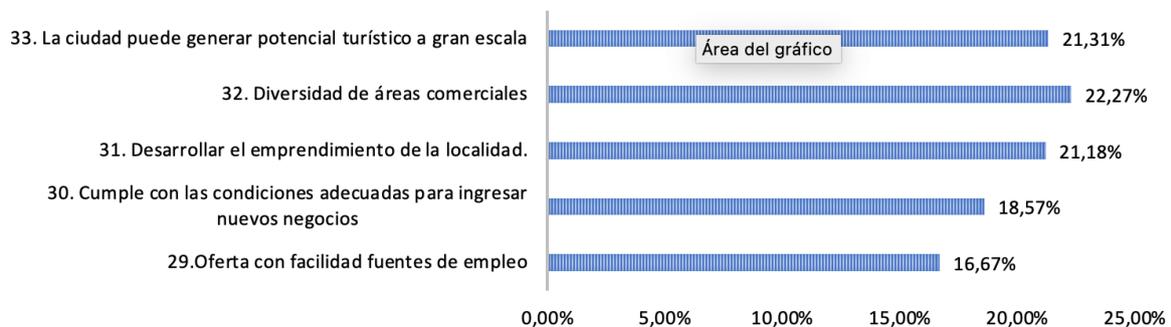
For their part, Calvento and Ochoteco (2009), ensure that, the way to provide by some means of positioning in the geographical, economic and social contexts that are offered to visitors and compete with other destinations on a global scale.

Table 5. touristic offer.

Dimensión 5	N	Media	Average	Deviation
29.Oferta con facilidad fuentes de empleo	384	2,94	16,67%	1,110
30. Cumple con las condiciones adecuadas para ingresar nuevos negocios	384	3,27	18,57%	0,874
31. Desarrollar el emprendimiento de la localidad.	384	3,73	21,18%	1,852
32. Diversidad de áreas comerciales	384	3,93	22,27%	0,892
33. La ciudad puede generar potencial turístico a gran escala	384	3,76	21,31%	0,99
N válido (por lista)	384	17,63	100%	

The evaluation of the country brand is quite complex, since it is difficult to generalize about it as a whole, because there can be wide discrepancies in climate, culture, people and infrastructure from one region to another. However, cities are simpler, smaller, easier to visualize, as a singular identity. When people evaluate cities, they often think in quiet details and practical terms, and concentrate on climate, pollution, transportation and traffic, cost of living, sports and use facilities, law, order, or cultural life (Fuentes-Martínez, 2007, p. 85).

Figure 5. touristic offer.



Conclusions

The original aim of the review was to identify and analyze the main features of the literature on city brands to contribute to a more concise understanding of the research domain. This has been carried out by adopting three research questions, design selection based on 40 studies (2016-2022) concerning icons, marketing, and branding of cities. In the analysis, the main characteristics of the current domain of the city's brand and the way in which they were investigated according to historical development, interdisciplinary composition, research approach and empirical and conceptual contexts were explored.

The findings underpinned that urban branding is a multidisciplinary area of academic and practical knowledge with scholars from a wide range of fields looking at the place-branding process and questioning what makes a place-branded sustainable. Throughout the place-marking debate, there is generally a lack of case studies of when a policy designed to address social issues, such as poverty, crime, instability, and security, becomes the mark of a place. Drawing from an analysis of the development and implementation of social urbanism policies, which were designed to address the high levels of socioeconomic inequalities in Medellín, this article contributes to the city branding debate by providing an example of how a public policy became the branding of a city.

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Statement

Conflict of interest

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Notes

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