

CITY BRANDING

Strategies and Objectives in City Staging

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ABSTRACT

Cities have long served multiple roles, functioning as demonstrations of power, symbols of progress and innovation, engines of economic growth, and laboratories for new forms of urban life. In recent decades, the concept of city branding has introduced a major shift in how cities are understood. Rather than being seen merely as physical backdrops, cities are now recognised as bearers of identity, whether inherent or socially attributed. This perspective goes beyond tangible features such as buildings, façades, or urban layouts, embracing cultural, social, and symbolic dimensions instead. Such a multidimensional approach is increasingly relevant amid rapid urbanisation, the projected growth of megacities, the rising preference for urban living, and growing competition between cities. This study offers a concise overview of the evolution of city branding and presents illustrative cases, highlighting both common and distinctive elements across existing models, their economic, social, and political aims, and key insights emerging from the analysis.

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1. Introduction

Cities have always served as the backdrop for historical events, yet they have also frequently acted as symbols and representations of broader social, political, or cultural issues. This study explores the practice of city branding, which has been used for decades to understand or actively construct urban identities. At its core, city branding is closely connected to marketing, a link that is unsurprising given its origins in earlier conceptual frameworks, which are examined in the body of this paper.

City identities have been shaped through major events, political decisions, and other interventions. For instance, as Kolotouchkina (2018) notes, cultural and sporting mega-events often act as catalysts for urban regeneration and international rebranding. While these practices may reflect interests that transcend time, they are not always tied to the specific territorial, social, or political contexts of each city. Despite this, there are sufficient elements to warrant detailed analysis, which will be addressed in the following section, alongside the specific objectives and analytical focus of this study.

To situate the study, we can look at some representative examples. In the political sphere, François Mitterrand's term in France provides a paradigmatic case through the initiative known as *Les Grands Projets*, or, more generally, architectural icons (Kolotouchkina, 2018). This programme sought to extend if not amplify the architectural legacy of emblematic works with the aim of projecting an image of power, monumentality, and leadership, particularly in Paris. While this strategy drew criticism from architects and intellectuals for objectifying the city (Bois et al., 1999), for the French state it was a deliberate symbolic measure consistent with the nation's tradition of showcasing a powerful capital.

Paris has long been celebrated for its image, the City of Light since the 19th century, the city of lovers, and the capital of fashion. Today it is also Paris 2024, host of the Olympic Games, a case that will be discussed further.

Figure 1: Magazine excerpts with reports on the *Les Grands Projets* operation in France in the 1980s



Source: Fuente: Revista Le Point, article Les chantiers du Président. 1983.

If we go back to the mid-19th century, World's Fairs began to be held in carefully chosen cities, gaining global prominence and, with it, the country itself. These occasions served to showcase the latest advances, the best, and all kinds of displays which, although not expressed as such at the time, were clearly a marketing ploy at multiple levels. It was equally valuable to highlight the best of a country, its ability to make an impact through urban planning or architecture, evident in the great example of the construction of the Eiffel Tower in 1889 (Kolotouchkina, 2018), or any display of innovation, tangible efforts that coexisted with other interests, such as promoting tourism or investment (El Messeidy, 2019; Zenker & Martin, 2015). Another striking feature of these events, which still occurs today, is the ephemeral nature of the constructions, as many were subsequently removed.

Common to all these cases is the application of creativity as a fundamental tool, which takes the form of architecture or design, and also operates at a strategic level, seeking to activate the appropriate resources to generate the desired attractive effect capable of fostering a memorable memory. Not far from this perspective, we find the use of iconic buildings for cities, such as the Sydney Opera House or the Guggenheim in Bilbao, which provide a visual narrative through such landmarks (Blanco-Gómez, 2024; Kolotouchkina, 2018).

If we start from these most obvious cases, given the notable presence of architecture and its enduring format, one need only look at the latest major international exhibition, Expo 2025, recently held in Osaka, it is possible to understand the city as a stage for all kinds of representative events, a kind of creative tapestry that has served different purposes. Or, seen from the opposite perspective, cities could have absorbed the potential of other external impulses, welcoming relevant transformations, both tangible, such as

modifications in layout or some type of formalisation, and intangible, such as symbolic associations or changes in perception. In both cases, the association between events and cities is common, and therefore, depending on the context and nature of the event, certain attributes of these conditions will necessarily be associated with the identity of the cities involved.

This link between events, strategies, and cities belongs to a family of interventions that either support cities or transform them, and which do not only take the form of fairs or events. To understand the significance of these actions, it is essential to take a broader view, a more extensive awareness with a historical perspective on how, over time, the objectives of similar actions have varied or, perhaps rather, improved from a strategic point of view, to arrive at a more contemporary concept such as city branding.

1.1. Theoretical Framework

As a definition, this concept is most often referred to as marketing for cities, as if they were saleable and promotional objects. This is indeed the case, with well-known examples featuring catchy and evocative slogans. This is true of I Love NYC for the city of New York, or *Cantabria Infinita* (Infinite Cantabria), in this case for a region. The closest concept to it before its emergence is a much more widespread term, called “place branding” or even “place marketing”, which emerged in the 1990s (Ashworth and Voogd, 1990; Evans, 2015; Kavaratzis and Ashworth, 2005; Kotler, 1993). These terms are more generic, since it is also possible to work on the identity of natural spaces, a region, an ocean, or more manageable scales such as a neighbourhood. Similarly, the concept of city marketing has been used in relation to optimising the opportunities of the city, although it is often stated that this must take into account residents, visitors, and investors alike (Liouris and Deffner, 2005).

Although the main use of these concepts was undoubtedly to promote productive interests such as tourism or investment, essentially with specific meanings such as “destination branding” (Blanco-Gómez, 2024; Morgan et al., 2004), their evolution has transcended to encompass more symbolic associations. These may be oriented towards aspects such as the protection of cultural assets or natural spaces, or the repopulation of rural areas, highlighting diverse situations. Some authors even suggest that comprehensive communication strategies for city branding processes could contribute to transforming territories, rather than being limited to specific contributions (Gómez Navas y Salinas González, 2017).

An example of this can be seen in the selection of cities as capitals of culture or world heritage sites (Evans, 2015; European Communities, 2009). Such events allow territories to position themselves with value propositions, differentiate themselves from others, or lead to protection regulations, national or supranational subsidies, and in Europe specifically, the activation of funds. For example, the Ministry of Culture in Spain provides aid for properties declared World Heritage Sites. A specific recent case is the allocation of more than 200 million euros in 2024 to 92 heritage improvement projects, directly related to their impact on tourism, as outlined on the recovery plan website at gob.es. This highlights the clear links between branding purposes and the potential for creative transformation of urban space (Kolotouchkina, 2018).

Illustrative examples of city branding in practice include:

- Santiago de Compostela, Florence, and Krakow, among many others, as cities of culture, where heritage and tradition become the core of the brand.
- Bilbao, which repositioned its international image through urban regeneration and the Guggenheim effect (Seisdedos, 2014).
- Amsterdam with its *I Amsterdam* campaign, which emerged as a top-down initiative and activated the pride of its citizens (EURIB, 2009).
- London and Paris, which use major sporting and cultural events, including the Olympic Games, world exhibitions, and fashion weeks, as catalysts for branding and urban regeneration (Zimbalist, 2016).

- Medellín, which transformed its global image through narratives of social innovation, sustainable mobility, and citizen participation.

The common factor in all of these cases is competitiveness and indirect work on the city itself, generally aimed at improving it. These efforts help cities not only to attract external flows of tourists, investors, or talent, but also to consolidate an internal sense of belonging that begins with pride in being part of a highly praised enclave. Theories that distinguish city branding from city marketing emphasise the importance of moving beyond a simplified association between city and image, in order to develop a more in-depth understanding of what the city intrinsically represents and all its potential (Kavaratzis, 2004).

Currently, city branding is a fundamental aspect of urban management, as it allows cities to position themselves in a highly competitive global arena. This includes attracting tourism, foreign investment, creative talent, and major international events (Al Shaalan & Durugbo, 2024). Cities no longer need to wait for a major five-yearly exhibition, but can instead take advantage of events as they arise or even initiate them themselves. City branding is not limited to communication actions or marketing strategies; it requires coordination with other areas depending on the desired positioning. These areas may involve public policy, urban planning, or a specific cultural projection based on a cohesive narrative.

Unlike place marketing, which tends to focus on the specific promotion of a destination through campaigns or products (Morgan et al., 2004), city branding involves deeper, longer-term identity construction. It contributes to goals such as strengthening local identity, improving international reputation, and aligning public and private actors around common development objectives. The duality between local identity and connection with visitors or investors stands out as a fundamental attribute (Kavaratzis, 2004). Considering all stakeholders, especially residents, is essential in these strategies (Kavaratzis & Ashworth, 2004). These variants of city marketing are often related to corporate models and can be understood as multifactorial, as represented in the Place Branding Hexagon (Anholt, 2003). From this perspective, the projected image and the success of branding efforts depend not only on tourism or investment, but also on people, culture, policies, and brands (Anholt, 2003; Gómez Navas y Salinas González, 2017).

An approach that focuses excessively on external perception risks neglecting the internal situation of the city (Muñiz Martínez & Cervantes Blanco, 2010). As Gillis notes in a review of models applied to place marketing (Gillis, 2018), the evolution of these concepts led to the Strategic Place Brand Model (SPBM) by Hanna and Rowley. This model incorporates a greater number of variables, including infrastructure and brand experience (Hanna & Rowley, 2011), elevating place brand management to a long-term strategic level. While multiple approaches exist, they highlight the latent opportunity in generating comprehensive models, which few authors have fully addressed. In other words, there is often a lack of holistic vision in the practice of place branding.

The vision most closely aligned with city branding is the City Brand Management model (Gaggiotti et al., 2008), which focuses on long-term prosperity (Hanna & Rowley, 2011). This approach begins with four guiding questions: What are we now? What are our options? What do we want to be? What do we need to do?

Over time, it has become evident that city branding is a highly complex phenomenon that has evolved rapidly since its emergence in the midst of globalisation in the 1990s. Understanding these operations in isolation obscures the evolutionary nature of the practice, including its sophistication, implications, and objectives. This study will therefore attempt to shed light on these issues while addressing the objectives described below.

2. Objectives and Methodology

The objective of this article is to explore the concept of city branding in greater depth through various analyses, taking into account previous conceptualisations such as place marketing and place branding, including models that do not explicitly use these terms. The study does not aim to provide a detailed discussion of theoretical models, but rather to

examine different angles, cases, and variables, supported by relevant theory. The purpose is to establish or interpret connections between practices and models in order to assess whether a consistent methodological thread runs through them or if substantial differences exist, and, if so, to identify the key activation levers in each situation from a predominantly practical perspective. This reflection extends beyond urban design to include other activating factors, whether social, political, or contextual in nature.

The specific objectives of the study are as follows:

- To investigate the existence and relationships of determining factors among a diverse selection of cases in which the indicated practices have been decisive within the specified time frame.
- To observe in general terms the transformations in the use of cities for symbolic purposes that have occurred as a result of their historical evolution and development, considering motivations, causes, and repercussions.
- To identify patterns that facilitate a deeper understanding of the key factors, relationships, and differences between cases.
- To draw conclusions that clarify changes and trends, highlighting successes, failures, and opportunities for both current and future contexts.

To achieve these aims, the research adopts an essentially qualitative approach, although it also generates numerical and comparative data, for which the categorisation of elements is essential. The study is exploratory in nature, drawing on case studies, bibliographical sources, and references from the press or publicly available materials, reflecting the significance of the cases and the exposure of cities through promotional activities. Ultimately, the conclusions will emphasise insights that can inform future research and practical applications.

3. Analysis and Results

This section presents different analyses to ensure that the conclusions are as unbiased as possible and to provide sufficient information for comparison, recognising that the selection of representative cases is inevitably influenced by media coverage and other contextual factors. The proposed structure is as follows:

- Historical comparative analysis, listing key representative events in Europe and the United States, selected for their commonalities in development as well as for significant cultural differences to enable comparative analysis.
- Examination of two common strategies associated with city branding: the creation of logos and slogans, and the association of major events with cities or nations, allowing for comparison of strategies and events that can be cross-referenced.
- A brief inductive exercise based on the preceding analyses, preceding the discussion of the conclusions.

3.1. Historical Comparison

In a first exercise, a brief review was undertaken of the profile of city promotion operations by decade, beginning in the 1920s. In this process, it was necessary to consider whether it was appropriate to focus solely on the most representative trends, regardless of their context. However, this approach risked producing a generalisation that did not fully address the search for representative cases, necessitating the selection and exclusion of relevant circumstances present in other territories. For this reason, following an initial survey, it was ultimately decided to produce a summary of the most representative examples per decade. This summary then facilitated a comparative analysis between Europe and the United States (Figure 2), identifying notable cases in each region and highlighting the motivation or objective behind each promotion model.

The cases were selected for their transformative impact and local or national significance, with the category of event or action considered more important than the individual case itself. Regarding sources, the constraints of an article preclude a detailed

account; however, the analysis draws on a combination of visual documentation, archives, books and magazines reviewing the cases, press articles, and various websites. Many of the events examined are of historic or decisive importance at key moments of the past century, with prior historical knowledge also informing the analysis. Following this sequence, the subsequent table presents the predominant approaches by decade and region, focusing on the most essential cases without implying the absence of other important actions in either territory.

Figure 2: Relevant place marketing milestones by decade and territory Europe – USA

Década	Europa	Frase aclaratoria (Europa)	EE. UU.	Frase aclaratoria (EE. UU.)
1920s	Exposiciones universales y arquitectura moderna (Bauhaus, París 1925)	La ciudad se proyecta como símbolo de vanguardia y cultura mediante ferias y diseño.	Inicio del skyline como identidad urbana (Chicago, NYC)	El paisaje vertical comienza a asociarse con poder económico y modernidad.
1930s	Monumentalismo, propaganda en regímenes totalitarios (Berlín, Roma)	La identidad urbana se vincula a ideologías políticas y poder estatal.	Campañas patrióticas y visuales (New Deal, posters)	Se refuerza el imaginario de ciudad fuerte, trabajadora y americana.
1940s	Reconstrucción y funcionalismo urbano (Londres, Rotterdam)	La ciudad se convierte en símbolo de resistencia y esperanza.	Boom suburbano e ideal de ciudad próspera (Levittown, LA)	Se impone un modelo residencial y de consumo como emblemático de éste urbano.
1950s	Modernismo estatal, renacer empoderado de capitales (Berlín Este, Oslo)	Se impone el urbanismo como herramienta de control y modernidad.	Marca industrial de ciudad moderna (Detroit, Houston)	La ciudad se identifica con la potencia industrial y tecnológica.
1960s	Identidad turística básica (Costa del Sol, Riviera francesa)	Aparece el branding turístico basado en clima, paisaje y hospitalidad.	Promoción visual y slogans iniciales ("I ♥ NY")	Nace el branding emocional con un enfoque masivo.
1970s	Rebranding tras crisis urbanas (Glasgow: "Miles Better")	El city branding surge como forma de revertir reputaciones negativas.	Branding postindustrial (NYC, Pittsburgh)	Se redefine la ciudad como espacio cultural tras la decadencia industrial.
1980s	Revitalización urbana con eventos y cultura (Barcelona, Berlín)	Se usa la cultura como herramienta estratégica de regeneración urbana.	Cultura pop y regeneración (Seattle, LA)	La cultura juvenil y los festivales empiezan a formar parte de la identidad urbana.
1990s	Marca-ciudad y competencia global (Ámsterdam, Londres)	Las ciudades compiten como marcas para atraer talento e inversión.	Reposicionamiento global (Atlanta '96, Miami)	El branding se convierte en herramienta de política económica.
2000s	Diseño e identidad visual estratégica (Porto, Helsinki)	El diseño se institucionaliza como clave en la construcción de marca.	Imagen corporativa urbana (Chicago, Boston)	Las ciudades adoptan manuales de estilo visual similares a las empresas.
2010s	Co-creación y storytelling local (Helsinki, Turín)	El ciudadano se convierte en narrador y actor del branding urbano.	Narrativas identitarias y creativas (Detroit, Austin)	Se promueven identidades alternativas frente al mainstream.
2020s	Branding como política pública (Oslo, París post-Covid)	La identidad urbana se alinea con sostenibilidad, diseño y políticas sociales.	Smart cities y resiliencia urbana (San Francisco, NY)	Se combinan innovación digital y estrategias de comunicación.

Source: Own elaboration, 2026.

From this overview, a cross-summary can be drawn, highlighting differences horizontally across decades and vertically between territories.

- 1920s: In Europe, world fairs and architecture projected avant-garde images, while in the United States, skylines emerged as symbols of identity and economic power. Architectural modernity defined urban competitiveness. It should be noted that Europe was undergoing an initial phase of reconstruction in the interwar period, whereas in the United States the impact was more prominently economic.
- 1930s: Europe continued its reconstruction for a time, and totalitarian regimes used this period to promote monumentalism and propaganda. In the United States, visual campaigns associated with the New Deal legitimised political and economic action.
- 1940s: Reconstruction and local pride marked European urban life. In the United States, suburban expansion defined a new residential model, representing a non-urban quality of life. At the same time, urban identity became linked to resilience and prosperity.
- 1950s: Both territories shared a focus on modernisation and industrial progress, guiding global urban planning. The remodelling and promotion of capitals, manufacturing areas, and urban projects reflected control, modernity, and efficiency.
- 1960s: Tourist identity and city slogans became consolidated. Europe promoted destinations associated with sunshine and hospitality, while the United States experimented with its first iconic slogans, such as I Love New York.
- 1970s: Urban marketing responded to industrial and reputational crises. Campaigns sought to reverse negative perceptions, and the first elements of city branding were introduced, although not yet fully consolidated.
- 1980s: Post-industrial revitalisation was supported by events, festivals, and pop culture. Barcelona and Berlin led the way in Europe, while Seattle and Los Angeles integrated youth culture into their urban identity in the United States.

- 1990s: City branding became a consolidated tool for global competition. European governments and agencies sought international positioning, attracting investment, talent, and tourism. In the United States, urban branding was linked to economic repositioning and large-scale events, such as Atlanta 1996 hosting the Olympic Games, and Miami, becoming a tool for economic policy and international visibility.
- 2000s: Design and visual coherence gained prominence, allowing for more thorough work on branding. In Europe, heritage and culture formed part of this approach, supported by European Union initiatives such as City of Culture projects, which highlighted each city's unique characteristics through centuries of history. In the United States, the city was treated more explicitly as a product, adopting a corporate-inspired perspective focused on generating wealth and attracting investment, supported by style guides and studies on logos and visual consistency.
- 2010s: Priority shifted to participation and local storytelling. Co-creation processes involved citizens as central actors in the urban brand. This change was influenced in Europe by the 2008 financial crisis and the social movements that emerged as a result, while in the United States the main drivers were the rise of the creative economy, technology, and the economic revitalisation of cities aiming to achieve a stronger economic position.
- 2020s: The Covid-19 pandemic and the 2030 Agenda are shaping city branding in Europe, now understood as a component of urban public policy, integrated with sustainability, accessibility, and digitalisation, transforming branding into a strategic framework for governance, design, and technology, without abandoning previous approaches. In the United States, similar trends exist, but there is more continuity, with efforts to highlight the strengths of less traditional cities, such as Austin, for start-ups, or Boston, for its high quality of life.

Briefly, and by way of illustration, we can mention some examples with different attributes. In Europe during the 1930s, the context was complex due to geopolitical circumstances. Architecture became the object of symbolic association through monumental or rationalist projects representing power, as seen in cities such as Rome and Berlin.

In contrast, the 1980s in the United States took a very different approach. There was an explosion of pop culture, particularly on the west coast, with festivals, urban regeneration initiatives, youth culture, and the emergence of a creative economy. In this context, culture acted as both an attractor and an economic asset for cities.

Comparing these two approaches reveals that over the course of half a century, strategies have polarised between an insistence on architecture to convey important messages and a more flexible, intangible approach to identity. Cities such as Los Angeles and Seattle were positioned as friendly, creative, and open places. These renewed visions do not exclude architecture or urban design, as there is no city without them. Rather, the city is constructed in layers, where immaterial aspects overlap the underlying built environment.

This layering highlights the importance of seemingly anecdotal but striking events in consolidating urban identity, such as the creation of MTV. The broadcast audiovisual format triggered a boom in music videos, enabling the creative exploitation of the city as a stage. Cinema produces a similar effect, though the audiovisual medium is more agile. In all these formats, unique spaces, objects, or landmarks, such as yellow taxis or the New York skyline, have become indelible components of the urban repertoire. Ultimately, the choice of settings was intended to create aesthetic associations while consolidating the link between specific attributes and the city or space represented.

Figure 3: Analysis broken down by category

Década / Contexto	EUROPA	Diseño urbano y arquitectura relevante para city branding	Identidad y Cultura	Economía y Atracción	Comunicación y Branding	EEUU	Diseño urbano y arquitectura relevante para city branding	Identidad y Cultura	Economía y Atracción	Comunicación y Branding
1920s	Exposiciones universales, arquitectura moderna (Eisenstein, París 1925)	Exposiciones universales, arquitectura moderna (Eisenstein, París 1925)	Identidad de modernidad y cultura		París, vanguardia	Inicios del skyline (Chicago, NYC)	Skyscrapers como símbolos de poder económico y modernidad	París como símbolo de poder		
1930s	Monumentalismo y propaganda en regímenes totalitarios (Berlín, Roma)	Monumentalismo y propaganda en regímenes totalitarios (Berlín, Roma)	Imágenes públicas, identidad cultural	Poder estatal		Campañas visuales del New Deal	París - Arquitectura moderna central, la ciudad visual más que urbana	Ciudad transpirable, servicios		Poder y comunicación pública
1940s	Reconstrucción y funcionalismo urbano (Londres, Rotterdam)	Reconstrucción y funcionalismo urbano (Londres, Rotterdam)	Revolución de modernidad y modernismo			Boom suburbano (Levittown, LA)	Skyscrapers suburbanos, refugio de seguridad y estilo de vida urbano	Planificación, especulación de propiedad		
1950s	Modernismo estatal, nuevas capitales (Berlín Este, Chandigarh)	Modernismo estatal, nuevas capitales (Berlín Este, Chandigarh)	Cultura y modernidad, herramientas de tecnología			Marca industrial de ciudad moderna (Detroit, Houston)	Skyscrapers industriales y productivos, edificios como símbolos de progreso	Poder de la industria y tecnología		
1960s	Identidad turística inicial (Costa del Sol, Riviera francesa)	Identidad turística inicial (Costa del Sol, Riviera francesa)		Branding turístico, hospitalidad		Promoción visual y logotipos iniciales ("I NY")	NY - Branding visual en edificios en construcción, reconocimiento	Atención masiva de turistas		Branding visual de ciudad y marca
1970s	Rebranding tras crisis urbanas (Glasgow "Helen Butler")	Rebranding tras crisis urbanas (Glasgow "Helen Butler")		City branding, regeneración		Branding postindustrial (NYC, Pittsburgh)	París - Reconstrucción urbana con elementos arquitectónicos, pero más cultural	Reconstrucción urbana cultural		
1980s	Revitalización urbana con eventos y cultura (Barcelona, Berlín)	Revitalización urbana con eventos y cultura (Barcelona, Berlín)	Cultura, patrimonio	Horizontes estratégicos de regeneración		Cultura pop y regeneración (Seattle, LA)	París - Algunos espacios urbanos rehabilitados, enfoque más cultural y creativo	Cultura juvenil, festividad		Identidad urbana vinculada a lifestyle
1990s	Marca-ciudad y competencia global (Ámsterdam, Londres)	Marca-ciudad y competencia global (Ámsterdam, Londres)	Ciudades como símbolo	Atención de talento, inversión		Reposicionamiento global (Atlanta, Miami)	París - Infraestructura de eventos y deportes como símbolo de branding	Branding como símbolo económico		
2000s	Diseño e identidad visual estratégica (Porto, Helsinki)	Diseño e identidad visual estratégica (Porto, Helsinki)	Identidad urbana, arquitectura	Construcción de marca institucional		Imagen corporativa urbana (Chicago, Boston)	París - Diseño urbano incorporado, foco en modernidad y branding visual	Marketing de actividades visual		Branding tipo corporativo
2010s	Co-creación y storytelling local (Helsinki, Turín)	Co-creación y storytelling local (Helsinki, Turín)	Ciudadanos como narradores		Branding urbano participativo	Narrativas identitarias y creativas (Detroit, Austin)	París - Equilibrio entre modernidad y tradición, pero más simbólico	Identidad alternativa, contemporánea	Atención inversores otros sectores	Comunicación estratégica de imagen creativa
2020s	Branding como política pública (Oslo, París post-Covid)	Branding como política pública (Oslo, París post-Covid)	Identidad urbana alineada con sostenibilidad		Integración de políticas y comunicación	Smart cities y resiliencia urbana (San Francisco, NY)	Skyscrapers como símbolos de resiliencia integrados en la marca de la ciudad	Interacción digital, tecnología	Atracción de talento y economía creativa	Estrategias de comunicación digital y global

Source: Own elaboration, 2026.

Breaking down the analysis further (Figure 3) and categorising all the items into sections, four key axes have been proposed on which to establish commonalities and differences.

- **Urban design and architecture (in relation to city branding):** As the comparative tables show, Europe has consistently used urban planning and architecture as central instruments of city branding, from the world's fairs themselves, through functionalist reconstruction in London and Rotterdam, to the institutionalised design of Porto and Helsinki, and sustainable regeneration in post-COVID Oslo and Paris. Wars were a key differentiating factor that necessarily led to reconstruction, which was seen as an opportunity. The idea of the city is more consolidated in Europe, with less emphasis on isolated suburbs and car use, combining denser and more open models depending on the country and the size of the city. Additionally, the existence and use of European funds has shaped the course of regeneration and transformation in recent decades. In the United States, rather than cities in general, the skyscrapers of New York and Chicago have served as iconic symbols of economic power, modernity, and urban dynamism, becoming globally recognisable elements of identity. Historically, branding in the United States has tended to rely more on culture, events, and strategic communication. Major architectural landmarks such as the skyline have been an indirect but powerful means of building city brands, drawing on the iconic representations discussed in the introduction. Today, with Smart Cities such as San Francisco and New York, architecture and urban planning are more explicitly incorporated as branding tools, integrating sustainability and technology.
- **Identity and culture:** The tables indicate that Europe has integrated identity and culture into city branding in a more intrinsic way. Cities such as Barcelona, Berlin, Turin, and Helsinki use cultural events, co-creation, and storytelling to strengthen both internal and external perceptions of the city, as analysed by some authors (Blanco-Gómez, 2024). In the United States, examples such as Detroit, Austin, and Seattle show that cultural identity is constructed primarily to project an external image of resilience, creativity, or modernity, focusing on pop culture, alternative narratives, and post-industrial revitalisation. This represents a formalised approach to rebranding, projecting a renewed and different image. Europe tends to combine heritage and citizenship, while the United States emphasises strategic projection

towards investors, tourists, and talent, objectives that in Europe are generally more subtle.

- Economy and attraction: In Europe, city branding has been used to attract tourism, cultural investment, or specialised talent, without the economic dimension overshadowing the cultural or urban aspects. In the United States, cases such as Atlanta 1996, Miami, Detroit, and Pittsburgh demonstrate a more explicit and pragmatic approach. The city brand is constructed to generate investment, tourism, economic repositioning, and global competitiveness, highlighting the role of events, infrastructure, and urban redevelopment as direct economic support.
- Communication and branding: Excluding the world's fairs, which have declined in media coverage over time, structured communication in Europe did not emerge as an explicit positioning tool until the 1980s, culminating in the institutionalisation of visual design as part of urban branding in the 2000s. In contrast, communication has been present much earlier and more clearly in the United States. Some campaigns set precedents for urban marketing that other cities later replicated. This early development explains why the United States consolidated a more corporate and strategic approach in the following decades, using slogans, manuals, and graphic imagery as primary tools of city branding, whereas in Europe this field was reached later and was generally linked to urban design or cultural policy. It should also be noted that rebranding allows cities to reshape their image, rather than build it from scratch, either to present themselves in a better light or to counter situations that generate rejection or fear, such as crime or suboptimal quality of life.

As a result of this initial analysis, several conclusions can be drawn. In general terms, the underlying idea of competitiveness between cities is evident, as strategies of all types are established with the aim of emphasising distinctive attributes that are unique to each city. This focus on differentiation is intrinsic to the concept of branding. Focusing on more recent decades, and with the aim of identifying trends, a number of reflections emerge.

Relating this analysis to theoretical references, Anholt explains how competition can manifest across a wide symbolic range, including the cultural sphere, reputation, and other dimensions, particularly in recent decades. The city with the best museums, the most events during the day or at night, or the finest gastronomy are all examples of triggers for competition that target the same actors: tourists, investors, and residents. Anholt demonstrates that competitiveness between cities in the twenty-first century operates across both economic and symbolic dimensions. For him, reputation management, or competitive identity, is the key element that integrates culture, sport, narrative, and global visibility as axes of attraction (Anholt, 2007). This approach reflects an intelligent and responsible use of brand management.

This is not the only means by which differences between cities are constructed. More recently, other attributes have become relevant, a notable example being security, either due to an image associated with violence or, more frequently, terrorism (Coaffee y Van Ham, 2008). Strategies aimed at changing perceptions in this regard are evident in a variety of cases (Avraham y Ketter, 2008), while conferences and architecture also address these concerns in a specialised manner (Center of Contemporary Culture of Barcelona - CCCB 2007).

In all cases, the idea of city branding has been present. There have been not only promotional efforts, but also symbolic associations and deeper reflection, even in the absence of a formally established conceptualisation of the term. Some of the strategies analysed may be less obviously linked to branding. For instance, in recent participatory processes, the narrative does not initially present itself as branding, but it can be interpreted in this light retrospectively. In other words, branding does not appear to be the origin of such practices, but is employed subsequently to convey that certain cities aim to be recognised today through social components and community engagement. This represents an alternative approach to city branding, one that is far removed from architecture or urban design as the primary focus, and from more corporate or economic expectations.

A further layer of complexity emerges from recent developments in urban planning. Design is no longer solely physical or material; it now encompasses participatory processes and a human-centred approach. From this perspective, it is possible to continue linking architecture and urban design with the actions of public authorities and private investors, but in a way that integrates social participation and citizen engagement into the branding process.

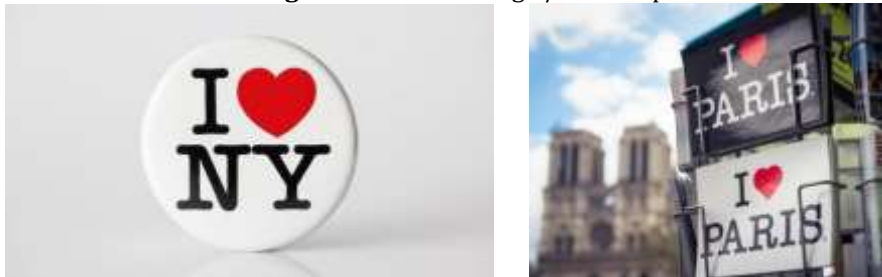
3.2. Strategies

This second analysis proposes an approach to two classic strategies in order to identify possible patterns through case comparisons and to understand the key differences that emerge. One of these strategies is the use of logos and slogans, which are often highly visible and attractive, but represent only the tip of the iceberg of more comprehensive and developed campaigns. The other strategy is the association of cities with major events. In both cases, examples will be provided, although the primary objective is not to develop each case in detail, but rather to offer a comparative perspective based on different parameters.

3.2.1. Logos and Slogans

The decision to focus on logos and slogans stems from the fact that, in the collective imagination, many endure over time, which by definition constitutes a success for their creators. Nevertheless, they represent only the surface of larger operations, similar to commercial and marketing campaigns. Even when the focus is not primarily corporate, efforts to differentiate territories almost invariably culminate in a visual identity and an associated phrase or message. The most important aspect is that the slogan is easy to remember and, where possible, adaptable for multiple applications, including merchandising and signage. One of the most significant and widely recognised examples is the 1977 I Love NY logo and message, a campaign initially created to improve the image of a city struggling with high crime rates, which has since become an iconic and extensively replicated slogan.

Figure 4: I Love NY logo / Paris replica



Source: Getty Images in Bigas, 2020.

In relation to the prominence of these slogans, it is often argued that cities cannot be treated as products, firstly because they do not have producers or consumers in the conventional sense, and secondly because their complexity exceeds that of a simple logo or brand. Nevertheless, Ashworth contends that the use of brands for cities is indeed possible (Kavaratzis & Ashworth, 2005), and in practice has been employed, consciously or otherwise, since cities compete for trade, residents, wealth, prestige, and power. The adoption of a brand provides a distinctive identity, which is precisely the objective of city marketing: to give a city a recognisable identity in comparison with others.

From this perspective, a survey of notable cases in the development of promotional operations through slogans has been undertaken, without initially considering whether a model resembling contemporary city branding was applied (Figure 5). The focus is on cases from 2000 onwards, with the exception of New York, selected from different territories to enable critical reflection on various aspects of city branding. Cases were prioritised according to the objectives pursued, the approach taken, and the institutions or entities responsible for the initiatives. Particular attention was given to examples that have become

widely recognised or commonly referenced, such as Porto and New York, which have achieved significant prominence. Sources include strategic plans and reports, publicly available campaigns, online rankings, best practice sites, media coverage, and relevant academic and professional publications. Other cases could easily have been incorporated, as this practice is widely implemented across cities.

Initially, the analysis was intended to include only cities, but it was later extended to encompass several countries as well. This approach enables an assessment of whether similar conclusions can be drawn at both scales, while remaining mindful of potential bias arising from the selection of cases that transcend the traditional city or place branding framework.

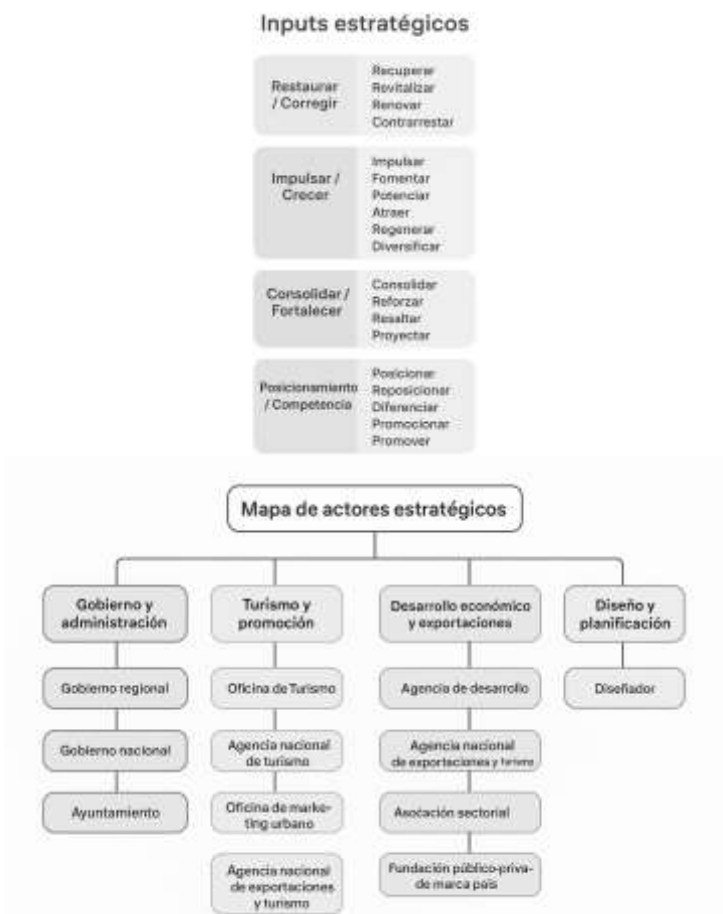
Figure 5: Comparative brand operations cities-countries

[illegible]

Source: Own elaboration, 2026.

The most notable findings of the analysis are as follows. Tourism emerges as a primary focus, which may be explained by the fact that many campaigns are created specifically for this purpose, or because other strategies target investment, meaning that this emphasis does not imply that tourism is the sole objective of branding actions. Well-known campaigns often highlight heritage or culture, although these tend to be less visible. Other applications, such as industry, innovation, or exports, reflect economic interests and are treated separately in the analysis, creating a more balanced overall picture. In other words, branding for both cities and nations is more functional for certain objectives, or at least they place greater emphasis on them, while remaining adaptable to other purposes. It should also be noted that tourism has gained prominence as part of the growth of the service economy over the past fifty years. Differences between cities and countries do exist, but they are not particularly significant, especially given that this study is not confined to the cases selected.

Figure 6: Summary of inputs and strategic actors



Source: Own elaboration, 2026.

Based on the above, and taking into account the relevant literature, this table (Figure 6) schematically represents how identity strategies are structured in the cases analysed. Initial motivations can vary substantially, influencing the driving forces and, consequently, the primary actions undertaken. This inductive result allows key differentiations to be understood. In terms of the driving forces, they can be broadly categorised as follows:

- Government and administration
- Tourism and promotion offices
- Economic development and export managers
- Design and planning areas, including architecture

3.2.2. Major Events

In the field of city branding, there are many different types of operations that can contribute to its success. Among them, major events that aim to attract visitors from different countries provide cities with an opportunity to position themselves. They benefit from both the marketing efforts deployed by organisers and the city's own mechanisms, which focus on shaping narratives and the city's identity, including through images and visual resources (Blanco-Gómez, 2024).

Notable examples include the venues for the Olympic Games, with the chosen cities being the subject of intense observation and transformation for several years, and even afterwards. The city of each edition is remembered from the previous one, and over time it is always linked to the year or its position in the sequence of chosen cities and, perhaps, to some particular successes of athletes, or positive or negative events that may have been noteworthy. For example, Berlin 1936, chosen before the Nazis came to power, was an opportunity for the regime to spread propaganda during a delicate period between wars

(Espy, 1979). Similarly, Munich 1972 is sadly remembered for the terrorist massacre of Israeli athletes (Clay Large, 2012).

In addition to these links, one of the most significant events associated with the Games is investment in buildings and public works. In particular, the renovation or construction of buildings and even the refurbishment of neighbourhoods is a major undertaking for the chosen cities, as it suddenly provides a pretext for this to happen. The Olympic Games are a catalyst that gives rise to an unwritten but widespread consensus that it is worthwhile. The Olympic Games brand itself is associated with the city's brand, with a link to the values of sport, which are always connotatively positive: "excellence, respect and friendship" (IOC). More specifically:

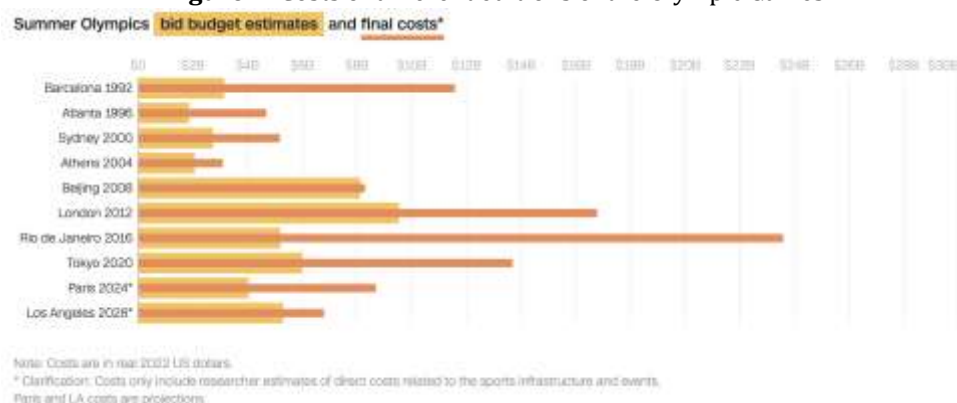
- Striving for excellence and encouraging people to be the best they can be.
- Demonstrate respect in many different ways: respect for oneself, the rules, opponents, the environment, the public, and so on.
- Celebrating friendship, something quite unique to the Olympic Games, an event that brings people together every few years.

The Olympic Games generate business, but above all, the Olympic Committee still manages to convey the idea of a "clean" event, despite generating billions each time, and this is because the backdrop to everything is sport, which is popularly well regarded and understood. Could a city propose to have an identity based on the three main Olympic values?

- Excellence: there is no capital city that does not want to be the best, or for its businesses and decisions in any field to be successful, with the best possible urban and architectural design.
- Respect: cities cannot be understood without regulations to be respected, which coexist between issues such as the environment, heritage and diversity.
- Celebrating friendship: especially today, if there is one cross-cutting theme in city matters, it is coexistence and diversity, with social, mobility and community projects among others, that echo the writings of Jane Jacobs (Jacobs, 1969).

However, hosting the Olympic Games has not always been easy for certain countries or cities when it comes to making the necessary investments. If we add to this the embellishments and gimmicks designed to ensure a striking and indelible memory, the figures skyrocket to 40 or 50 billion dollars, as was the case in China in 2008 and Russia in the 2014 Winter Games respectively (Zimbalist, 2015), not counting previous investments in positioning to be chosen or indirect costs.

Figure 7: Costs of different editions of the Olympic Games.



Source: Budzier & Flyvbjerg, 2024.

For some cities, this major event has signalled a moment of change, with cases such as Barcelona 1992, surely one of the greatest successes in terms of image change, renovation and utilisation. The city solved territorial connectivity problems in the north of the city and completely revitalised Poblenou (Caballero, 2017), a neighbourhood that was rejuvenated by hosting the Olympic Village. Although some cities have focused on renovations rather

than new construction, not all have opted for the former or a balanced combination. Specifically, editions such as Rio de Janeiro 2016 have been noted for the great difficulty they had in securing funding, despite not being among the most expensive, with a total of \$13 billion (Davis, 2017), partly because of uncertainty about what to do with the venues once the Games were over. The same is true of Athens 2004, a city where several newly constructed buildings have fallen into disuse and which subsequently had to face the additional cost of maintenance once the event was over, regardless of whether the building was used or not. One of the buildings is a stadium built by Santiago Calatrava (Papanikolaou, 2015). These situations represent a setback in terms of branding or a negative image.

In addition to problems with planning the future of infrastructure, striking situations arise during the events themselves, especially in cities with architectural heritage, which experience an over-decoration of historical elements for essentially scenographic purposes. It is not entirely clear whether the iconic buildings and streets that remain behind receive the attention they deserve, not to mention the fact that, due to the events being held, all these cultural and heritage attractions cannot be appreciated or visited. The city collapses, as happened recently in Paris 2024, even causing its inhabitants to flee during the Games in anticipation of congestion and price increases during the celebrations. In any case, the city reinforced the visibility of its great monuments and the River Seine in the opening and closing ceremonies, and used the Trocadero and the Eiffel Tower as key venues for the main events. The newspaper *Le Monde* (Lepeltier & Azimi, 2024) and other general and specialised media outlets covering culture and architecture echoed this, as well as the construction of new icons.

Figures 8 and 9: Installation of decorations for the Paris 2024 Olympic Games; view of ceremonies at the Trocadero at the foot of the Eiffel Tower



Source: Wallace y Matthews, 2024. Paris.fr, s.f.

Just as there are subsequent repercussions, candidate cities decide to begin work before the event, even without the winning city having been decided, as was the case for Madrid, which is well known for three consecutive unsuccessful bids. Progress, economic muscle, improvement and competitiveness are some of the symbolic associations derived, both in the official venues and in these cases, in which transformations take place, but there is no direct subsequent association with the Olympic Games because the link was not fully completed. On the other hand, other cities have abandoned the process during this preliminary stage. This happened recently with Italy for the 2024 edition (The Guardian, 2016), which withdrew its bid for the second time on the basis of responsibility criteria. This case and the crises that have arisen in winning venues confirm a tendency to question whether it is really feasible to host the Games (Wallace, Leeds Matthews, 2024), concluding that the return is not so obvious, either economically or in terms of the future of their architectural and urban commitment if it is not properly planned. Furthermore, it is also possible to work on the transformations, and if anything, what the Olympic Games can contribute differentially is the association with a positive image, in addition to unparalleled media exposure and very significant revenues.

When venues fail to achieve an adequate balance between investment and return, or due to a lack of resources, they do not reach the level set by others. This can mean that cities are

then left with a negative image and perception, leaving behind the remains or ruins of what was once a great project, usually entrusted to a renowned architect. These effects reveal something essential, which is that city or event branding does not always work out well, which is why models that advocate a more holistic and systematic approach to brand management make more sense, with the additional handicap inherent to cities, which is their high visibility, something that a large corporation or other entity subject to branding could conceal in most cases by remaining hidden for a while.

In addition to the cases of Rio de Janeiro and Athens, outside of the Olympic Games, recent Expos have suffered from this problem, for example, in the nearby case of Zaragoza in 2008, dedicated to water, which left behind highly criticised unused buildings (García Martínez, 2023). Other types of events, despite being high-profile, are not integrated into the city or leave it in second place. To highlight some current examples, the Mobile World Congress in Barcelona, described as the world's largest technology event, manages to associate the city with cutting-edge innovation in this field. However, beyond the income it brings to the city, it does not significantly change its image in relation to the main theme, because this new-generation technology does not remain in the city and does not bring about transformations of the same kind. It is more of an ephemeral phenomenon, similar to cities that become Formula 1 circuits, Fitur in Madrid, or other temporary or travelling championships or events. There may be some synergies, such as ARCO in Madrid, with the city being a benchmark for art galleries and museums, but it is more difficult to take advantage of this potential than events that are specific to the environment or associated with it, which in a more natural or established way do contribute to the city's brand in a more cross-cutting manner. In this sense, the Madrid brand is linked to these museums and leisure activities, just as San Sebastián is linked to its film festival, or Pamplona and Seville to their annual festivals, all of which are representative examples of non-corporate approaches, with a large international influx and strong identity attributes on which to continue building other nuances.

Even so, and returning to the Olympic venues, each of the cities will always be associated with the year of the celebration and the Games themselves (city-event-year), or the major event of another kind that is held there, provided that work has been done to establish a link, which in itself is a major city or place branding action that goes beyond the simple idea of promotion and advertising more typical of marketing.

3.3. Reading, Concepts, Results

In theoretical terms, the idea of city marketing is understood to be successful when all stakeholders, including workers, residents, and businesses, are satisfied with their conditions, and when tourists, new businesses, and investors fulfil their expectations in the city (Kotler, 1999). It is important to recognise that these stakeholders can represent opposing forces and require city resources, which are inherently limited. All of this necessitates strategic management and a marketing vision that allows for work on the differentiating elements between competing cities (Liouris & Deffner, 2005). The most relevant interpretation in this regard is that cities' efforts to distinguish themselves, or, in other words, their brand as a global entity if elevated to city branding, could be unpopular in other areas if they focus solely on one of the potential target audiences. In this sense, European cities have generally been identified as exemplary models for their combination of cultural and historical heritage, quality of life and therefore capacity for social influence, as well as their cosmopolitan character (Liouris & Deffner, 2005), insofar as they attract international talent, particularly in the case of capitals and cities of a certain size.

For all these reasons, and following the above analysis, it is clear that understanding cities as brands requires a multifactorial approach that allows for the coexistence of several objectives. Based on this, a synthesis exercise was carried out, attempting to relate types of branding that can be associated with cities with different objectives (Figure 10). This summary table also provides a cross-section of objectives and perspectives, breaking down

rigid approaches that categorise actions in a single direction, whereas the reality of city branding operations is generally more multifaceted. The aim is to synthesise, in contrast to the preceding discussion, how to induce perspectives that trigger identity processes, such as the existing concept of destination branding (Morgan, Pritchard, Pride, 2004).

Figure 10: Relationship between possible branding models and objectives, with representative examples

Typology	Active period*	Main characteristics	Economic objectives	Social objectives	Political objectives	Representative example
Event branding	1970s – present	Use of major events (Olympics, Expo, cultural capitals) to project a global image.	Increase tourism, attract specific investment.	Foster civic pride and temporary cohesion.	Project international leadership.	Barcelona 1992.
Branding through architectural icons	1980s – present	Creation of iconic buildings/spaces with star architects.	Revitalising areas, increasing property values.	Changing urban perception, providing symbols of identity.	Demonstrate modernity and ambition.	Bilbao (strategy since 1989, Guggenheim 1997).
Cultural and creative branding	1990s – present	Based on creative industries, heritage and cultural networks.	Attract creative economy and cultural tourism.	Strengthen local identity, revitalise cultural life.	Position the city as a creative benchmark.	Post-1990 Berlin.
Corporate city branding	1990s – 2010s	Strategies that adopt corporate branding logic: logos, slogans, user manuals.	Unify promotion, attract business.	Generate common visual recognition.	Communicate a centralised strategic vision.	New York, "I ♥ NY" (relaunched in the 1990s).
Experiential branding	2000s – present	The city as a comprehensive experience (gastronomy, culture, urban life).	Build tourist loyalty and attract new residents.	Improving quality of life and urban satisfaction.	Reinforce a consistently positive image.	Melbourne, "A city for people".
Participatory and co-created branding	Isolated cases since the 1990s; boom in the 2010s	Involves citizens and local agents in defining the brand.	Legitimise the proposal and improve implementation.	Empower the community, strengthen cohesion.	Align policies with local needs.	Helsinki, "We are Helsinki" (2017).
Digital branding and social media	2010s – present	Intensive use of digital platforms to build an	Increase global visibility at low cost.	Facilitate online participation and a	Counteract negative narratives.	Seoul, "I.Seoul.U" (2015).

		urban narrative.		sense of belonging.		
Regenerative branding with social impact	2020s – present	Brand linked to sustainability, social justice and climate resilience.	Developing a green and circular economy.	Promote well-being and equity.	Position the city as a leader of change.	Amsterdam, "Doughnut City" (2020).

Source: Own elaboration, 2026.

4. Conclusions

From all the results of the various analyses carried out, the following conclusions can be drawn. Firstly, despite the relatively recent creation of the term city branding, dating back to around the 1990s, previous practices analysed in cities and nations follow similar principles and are oriented towards comparable objectives. These take the form of a series of categories, but ultimately there is a search for change, creation, or the generation of an image, even though the objectives may differ. Similarities can be observed in how these practices are applied to cities or nations. Furthermore, the context is conditioned by historical, economic, and socio-political precedents and connotations, which strongly influence both the approach taken and the priorities established. The longevity of European cities, and by extension countries, compared with American cities, produces substantial differences in the promotion and construction of identities, and therefore in branding strategies.

The reflections made by some authors on the potential application of corporate branding theories to cities appear highly relevant in light of these examples, as the underlying codes and theories are in many cases similar. Without going into great detail, they share the fundamental essence of making an entity “marketable” through an image with defined attributes, which in these cases is a city or a country. This entails, among other things, a focus on analysing the target audience and establishing specific strategies to capture their attention.

It can also be deduced from various analyses that the effective application of place or city branding requires a systemic, more cross-cutting understanding if the objective is to achieve significant results. In addition, recent trends indicate greater involvement by both citizens and institutions, suggesting that combining both perspectives would constitute a more coherent practice when applied to cities or territories. A more or less corporate profile of the techniques or models employed may produce variations, but in essence it will always be present as long as the underlying approach retains marketing overtones, even when working within cultural or sporting domains. Taken to a systematic level, this represents a strategic paradigm shift.

Tourism is undoubtedly one of the fundamental drivers of all the initiatives selected for their relevance, above all others, until the turn of the century and especially from 2010 onwards, alongside new incentives such as the creative economy and the growing importance of quality of life. Nevertheless, it is also clear that, in all cases, there is a broader objective, namely generating wealth or stimulating the economy, even if the sector is highly specialised. Tourism remains a key sector with variations over time based on trends. However, given the challenges it now generates, it would be advisable to explore new differentiating factors for city branding in the coming years. In other words, the tourism curve appears close to changing direction, and many cities will need to react, as is the case with Barcelona. A clear example of this divergent strategy can be seen in cities that prioritise highlighting the quality of life they offer, as a reaction to excessive tourism or the oversaturation of stimuli in large urban areas. Malaga is a particularly illustrative case, conveying this focus alongside its identity as a major technological hub.

The application of creativity and design appears to be a recent trend, with decades of experience but no historical tradition. Its precursors can be traced in the historical uses of

architecture and, in the background, urban design, particularly through the construction of new urban spaces or current regeneration projects emphasising reduced car use.

Furthermore, city branding strategies tend to perform less effectively in cities that focus solely on a single event that does not adequately consider overall sustainability, particularly if such events generate debt without clear returns, or focus exclusively on social aspects without corresponding investment opportunities or with barriers to entry. Conversely, city branding is more successful when creative approaches, sound urban design, and integrated strategic management are combined. It is also important to recognise the undesirable effects that many of these strategies can produce. In numerous cases, the quest for international visibility has led to gentrification and social displacement, the construction of infrastructure that is difficult to reuse, or the uncritical adoption of foreign models of success, such as the so-called Bilbao effect, with outcomes that differ from those originally intended. Similarly, it is worth noting the frequent occurrence of greenwashing or brandwashing, where narratives of sustainability or inclusion are employed more as communication tools than as instruments of structural transformation. These risks demonstrate that city branding is not a neutral process, and its implementation requires a critical reading of local contexts and their potential long-term social impacts.

It is equally important to remain aware of the bias introduced by media exposure of the events described, which is uneven across territories and time periods, and influenced by the nature of the objectives. This represents one of the inherent difficulties of this research. In this regard, proposals such as the one presented in Figure 10 seek to enhance existing models by suggesting that categorising cases according to activation levers and types of objectives may prove useful. The emphasis on the striking nature of advertising claims and other factors can distract from the underlying reality and context. Therefore, in order to render city branding more competitive, strategic, and less anecdotal, such an approach may serve as a valuable starting point for further exploration.

5. Acknowledgements

This text is the outcome of various research projects indirectly related to the city and the concept of identity, conducted during and after my architecture and postgraduate studies at the Polytechnic University of Madrid, as well as through years of teaching at the University of Design, Innovation and Technology (UDIT). Here, in-depth study of topics such as marketing and branding has opened new avenues of research and, specifically, fostered an interest in the intersection of city, identity, and brand. We also wish to acknowledge UDIT for its support in the continued development of scientific output such as this work.

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