



## FROM BARCELONA TO COMILLAS Gaudí's Legacy in the Cantabria Brand

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### ABSTRACT

*Gaudí's 2026 Centenary offers an opportunity to reconsider the territorial reach of his legacy. Although public, academic and cultural narratives construct a Barcelona-centred canon that often eclipses his works outside Catalonia, this study examines how Gaudí's non-Barcelona architecture, particularly El Capricho and Gaudí's footprint in Comillas, contributes to territorial identity through user-generated content (UGC). Using over 500 TripAdvisor reviews, the analysis shows that UGC positions Gaudí as an identity reference in Comillas, extending his cultural reception beyond Barcelona and demonstrating how non-central locations actively participate in shaping the contemporary meaning of his legacy.*

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## 1. Introduction

**A**ntoni Gaudí's architecture stands as a prime example of how a creator can become a key element of brand identity and place branding. Iconic architecture acts as a symbolic element capable of articulating urban narratives, generating territorial differentiation, and consolidating recognizable cultural brands (Al-Betawi & Abu Ehmaid, 2025; Belando et al., 2012; Ciuculescu & Luca, 2024).

In this context, Gaudí's work represents an exceptional case and has been interpreted as a set of floating icons (Illas, 2014). These icons transcend their physical location and become cultural artifacts that multiple actors use to project identity, constructing Barcelona's international narrative as a unique and creative city.

However, Gaudí's centrality to the Barcelona city brand has often overshadowed the role of his early works outside Catalonia, among which El Capricho (1883–1885), located in Comillas (Cantabria), takes on a particularly relevant and interesting significance for understanding the links between place branding, iconic architecture, and identity. Unlike his mature works in Barcelona, El Capricho reflects an early phase of Gaudí's formal experimentation and is situated within a distinct socio-historical context: the modernization process driven by the Indian elite and the Marquis of Comillas in the 19th century.

The year 2026 marks the 100th anniversary of Antoni Gaudí's death, an anniversary declared an Official Commemoration under the name Gaudí Year 2026. Beyond all the commemorative events, the centennial is an opportunity to generate knowledge about the architect, serving as an event of academic, collective, and international interest. This milestone is supported by all the works built by the architect, among which is El Capricho in Comillas, Cantabria. Its conversion into a museum (2009), its contemporary cultural programming, and its inclusion in collaborative projects such as the so-called "Camino de Gaudí" reinforce its ability to project a local identity based on creativity, the heritage of the Indian community, and technical innovation.

In this sense, El Capricho and the town of Comillas present themselves as a paradigmatic case for analyzing how a historic building can be revitalized as a brand artifact, integrating heritage, emotion, and aesthetic experience, and contributing to the creation of a distinctive and competitive territorial identity and image in the 21st century. The study of digital reviews allows us to understand how visitors participate in the co-creation of this identity, positioning Gaudí as a central element of the tourist experience and the heritage narrative of Comillas and Cantabria.

## 2. Gaudí's Legacy

Antoni Gaudí (1852–1926), internationally recognized as the leading exponent of Catalan Modernism, left a unique and innovative architectural legacy. With a distinctive style that fuses Gothic, Oriental, and Baroque influences with organic forms inspired by nature, he has become synonymous with the identity of Barcelona and Catalan Modernism. His legacy is visible throughout the city (Barcelona.com, n.d.; Lahuerta, 2003) and attracts millions of tourists each year.

Gaudí's creations demonstrate his exceptional creative contribution to the development of architecture and construction techniques in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Proof of this is that seven of his works were inscribed on the World Heritage List in 1984 and 2005. These seven works are: Park Güell, Güell Palace, Casa Milà, Casa Vicens, the Nativity Facade and the crypt of the Sagrada Família, Casa Batlló, and the crypt of Colonia Güell (UNESCO, n.d.).

As a tribute to him, the Sagrada Família will reach a historic and significant milestone with the completion, more than 140 years later, of the central tower of Jesus Christ, making it the tallest church in the world and the tallest building in Barcelona. For its part, Casa Batlló has a new look following seven years of restoration work, which included the renovation of the façades and the restoration of 85,000 porcelain tiles.

In this context, Gaudí Year 2026 provides a unique opportunity to reexamine his works outside of Catalonia, especially those that, like the Capricho de Comillas, have received less attention despite their heritage, symbolic, and architectural value.

### ***2.1. Gaudí's Capricho: From Urban Barcelona to the Fishing Village of Comillas***

The fishing village of Comillas, located 750 km from Barcelona, has, by a twist of fate, always been closely linked to Barcelona. Thanks to Antonio López y López, the first Marquis of Comillas, the town began to flourish in the 19th century. The Marquis initiated a sweeping process of modernization and a quest for social distinction in Comillas, alongside the "Indian" elite connected to the Catalan bourgeoisie. The installation of electric street lighting in 1881 with 30 lanterns (Comillas City Hall, n.d.), making it the first place in Spain to have this service, and the construction of iconic buildings such as the Pontifical University or the Palacio de Sobrellano demonstrate the desire to transform an old fishing village into an aristocratic summer resort. In this context, the choice of Gaudí, backed by Martorell, Güell, and the marquis, takes on significant symbolic value: architecture becomes a tool for generating distinction, modernity, and cultural cohesion between Cantabria and Catalonia. Gaudí's mark is present in Comillas at El Capricho, in the furnishings of the Palacio de Sobrellano, in the Chapel-Pantheon, and in the so-called Puerta de Moro, a reproduction of the Puerta de los Pájaros from the Graner villa, commissioned by Paulino Moro y Quijano, a relative of the owner of El Capricho (Bellesguard Gaudi, n.d.).

El Capricho or Villa Quijano (1883–1885) represents one of Gaudí's first major commissions and one of the architect's few works outside Catalonia. It was designed before his iconic works in Barcelona, in parallel with Casa Vincens (Casa Vincens, n.d.). El Capricho displays Neo-Mudejar influences with a green and white brick façade, a cylindrical tower decorated with sunflower-patterned ceramics, and ornamental wrought-iron details characteristic of the emerging Gaudí style (Lahuerta, 2003). Although the name suggests improvisation (in music, a "capricho" is understood as a free and fanciful piece), this villa constitutes an early example of the compositional rigor, functional experimentation, and geometric control that would later define the architect's language (Bassegoda Nonell, 1989). El Capricho was created as a summer villa for the Indian Máximo Díaz de Quijano to accommodate his two great passions: music and botany.

According to the Basilica of the Sagrada Familia (2024), the monument received more than 4.7 million visitors. El Capricho attracts a substantially smaller number of tourists, approximately 200,000 per year (Government of Cantabria, n.d.).

The literature on tourism heritage shows a pronounced bias toward larger, centrally located, and heavily visited sites (Leask & Fyall, 2006; McKercher et al., 2005). However, given that the literature on tourism has documented how excessive visibility and overcrowding degrade both visitor experiences and the well-being of the local community (Koens et al., 2018; Milano et al., 2019), the profile of El Capricho and Gaudí's other works in Comillas suggests that their relatively lower visitor numbers could facilitate more authentic and intimate experiences, constituting an asset of immense value for the identity and image of the Comillas brand, and by extension, of Cantabria

## **3. Place Branding, Iconic Architecture, and UGC**

### ***3.1. Place Branding***

Over the past 30 years, place branding has established itself as a central tool in territorial management, and at the same time, the specialized literature on the subject has grown significantly (Vuignier, 2017). Places can become brands and be marketed as products and services (Martin & Capelli, 2018). Place branding refers to the development of a brand for geographic locations, such as regions, cities, or communities, with the aim of creating positive associations and distinguishing the place from others (Eshuis et al., 2013; Vuignier, 2017). There are several definitions of place branding. A generally accepted definition understands it as a set of images of the place, a mental representation of the place filled with meaning (Zenker & Rutter,

2014), as well as a set of tangible and intangible attributes and values (Kavaratzis & Ashworth, 2005). Place branding management has evolved from territorial marketing toward a broader perspective that integrates governance, public policy, heritage, and the symbolic projection of the place. Being competitive is key for places to be promoted as brands (Zenker and Braun, 2017). Places around the world compete with one another to achieve economic goals, attract investment and trade, and build a strong identity (Kavaratzis, 2005; Kavaratzis & Ashworth, 2005). Simon Anholt (2007) introduced the concept of “competitive identity”, emphasizing that the place brand is not an isolated communicative operation, but rather the cumulative result of strategic decisions that articulate urban policies, culture, and infrastructure. Complementarily, Kavaratzis (2004) proposed that place branding is constructed through “layers of communication” where institutional communication, urban experiences, and symbolic meanings interact, resulting in a complex system where image, identity, and experience are continuously co-produced (Kavaratzis, 2005). Consequently, the effectiveness of place branding depends on successful interaction among the various stakeholders and the dialogue between them. Along these lines, Lucarelli and Berg (2011) argue that place branding management should be understood as a relational process, where residents, institutions, and visitors contribute to the construction of a shared identity.

### ***3.2. Iconic Architecture and Place Branding***

A place brand is supported by a broad set of attributes such as history, culture, architecture, heritage, landscapes, activities, and social values that enable the construction of a distinctive and competitive image (Dinnie, 2011; Kalandides, 2011; Kavaratzis & Hatch, 2013). Within place branding, cultural heritage functions as a catalyst for territorial development, generating benefits that extend beyond the tourism sector (Smith, 2006; Timothy & Boyd, 2003), and in this context, architecture plays a fundamental role in the differentiation process: distinctive buildings, monuments, and urban landscapes become visual elements capable of communicating identity, symbolizing values, and distinguishing the city from others (McNeill, 2009; Sklair, 2017). Architecture is particularly relevant to place branding because it functions as an identity definer and a narrative vehicle (Al-Betawi & Abu Ehmaid, 2025; Castillo-Villar, 2016; Muratovski, 2012). Many places around the world have benefited from possessing iconic architecture that is an integral part of their culture, identity, and image (Al-Betawi & Abu Ehmaid, 2025). Jencks (2006) coined the term “iconic building” to describe those structures capable of acting as “architectural brands” due to their formal and media power. Sklair (2017) expanded this perspective by considering iconic architecture as part of a global system of producing urban symbols associated with competitiveness, modernity, and cultural consumption, as in the case of the Guggenheim Museum in Bilbao (Evans, 2003).

In this sense, emblematic architecture functions simultaneously as a visual sign, a tourist attraction, and an identity marker (Urry & Larsen, 2011). In practice, architecture operates as a “branding device”: it conveys values, generates appeal, and acts as a catalyst to reinforce the city’s personality (Castillo-Villar, 2018; Govers & Go, 2009), combining major cultural projects with narratives of creativity, innovation, or sustainability (Evans, 2003; Green et al., 2016). According to Castillo-Villar, this depends on its level of recognition (local, national, or global), the type of recognition (professional or public), and the historical stage of creation (pre-global or global).

### ***3.3. Digital Co-creation of Place Identity: UGC***

User-generated content (UGC) has become a fundamental component of digital marketing strategy, particularly within the tourism industry, demonstrating how it influences the way destinations acquire meaning (Gretzel & Yoo, 2008; Tussyadiah & Fesenmaier, 2009). Defined as various forms of publicly accessible media content generated by users themselves, ranging from blogs, videos, photography, and reviews (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010), UGC has revolutionized the way travel-related information is created and consumed. The proliferation of social media platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, and TripAdvisor has democratized the production of

narratives about places, transforming visitors from passive consumers into active producers of discourse about destinations (Munar & Jacobsen, 2014; Tussyadiah & Fesenmaier, 2009; Xiang & Gretzel, 2010).

This content shapes the destination's image, which is a key element in tourism because it directly influences tourists' attitudes, preferences, and travel intentions (Pike, 2002). This image combines cognitive components (beliefs and perceptions about the destination) and affective components (associated emotions, such as enthusiasm or nostalgia) (Baloglu & McCleary, 1999). At the collective level, UGC can strengthen the destination's brand identity by increasing its visibility (Chemin, et al., 2025). Since tourism is experience-based, the subjective nature and digital narrative generated by UGC make it a key tool for influencing potential tourists when perceiving and choosing a destination, as it increases consumer confidence, especially when travelers seek to minimize the perceived risks associated with unfamiliar destinations (Xiang et al., 2017) In the tourism industry, user-generated content typically conveys personal, real-time experiences and is perceived as more authentic than traditional marketing material (Ayeh et al., 2013).

Research on UGC in tourism has extensively documented how social platforms mediate tourist experiences even before physical visits, shaping expectations and interpretive frameworks (Tussyadiah & Fesenmaier, 2009). However, most UGC studies focus on mass-tourism destinations with a substantial institutional presence (Dioko et al., 2011). Consequently, the case of Comillas represents a great opportunity to contribute to these studies.

#### 4. Objectives

Based on the conceptual framework described above, which links place branding, iconic architecture, and the digital co-creation of meaning through UGC, this study aims to analyze how visitors construct, interpret, and communicate the heritage identity of the Comillas monumental complex—specifically the monuments El Capricho, the Palacio de Sobrellano, and the Chapel-Pantheon, as well as the “Puerta de Moro”—through digital content generated by users in Spain. The research focuses on understanding the unique role played by El Capricho as a symbolic resource, tourist attraction, and central hub for digital narratives about Comillas and Cantabria as a destination, in line with what Kavaratzis and Hatch (2013) describe as a process of co-construction between identity, image, and experience. Specifically, the following hypotheses are examined:

Hypothesis 1: The presence of Antoni Gaudí in Comillas, through El Capricho, acts as the main tourist attraction and constitutes the central axis in the construction of the destination's identity as reflected in digital reviews. This statement is based on the studies by Kavaratzis and Hatch (2013) on identity, image, and place experience, as well as on the symbolic effect that certain iconic buildings exert in attracting tourist flows to spaces that would otherwise have less visibility (Evans, 2003; Govers & Go, 2009).

Hypothesis 2: The tourist value of the Palacio de Sobrellano, the Chapel-Pantheon, and the Puerta de Moro is interpreted and reinforced in relation to El Capricho; consequently, the figure of Gaudí articulates and unifies the perception of the monumental complex. This approach is based on the idea that heritage functions as a relational system, where meanings are not constructed in isolation, but rather through contrast, association, and symbolic proximity (Ashworth & Graham, 2005; Poria et al., 2006).

#### 5. Methodology

A mixed-methods design was adopted, based on quantitative and qualitative analysis of user-generated content (UGC). This approach is ideal for examining how visitors construct meanings, attribute heritage value, and articulate a destination's identity through their evaluations and narratives (Kavaratzis & Hatch, 2013; Marine-Roig, 2017).

The research is structured in three phases: (a) data collection and cleaning, (b) descriptive and semantic analysis, and (c) comparative synthesis focused on the interpretive identity of Comillas' architectural resources.

The analyzed corpus consists of 570 public reviews from TripAdvisor, collected in October and November 2025 through direct scraping using Python tools such as BeautifulSoup. The data were processed exclusively for academic and research purposes, following the recommendation of Gretzel and Yoo (2008). These reviews correspond to four monuments in the municipality of Comillas (Cantabria, Spain). The choice of TripAdvisor as a data source is justified by its status as one of the most influential platforms in tourism decision-making and in the construction of digital reputation. Various studies show how reviews on this platform are perceived as authentic (Ayeh et al., 2013; Filieri, 2015; Xiang & Gretzel, 2010), in addition to combining narrative and quantitative content.

For El Capricho de Gaudí and the Palacio de Sobrellano, whose TripAdvisor listings each exceed 3,000 reviews, a chronological sampling method was applied by selecting the most recent reviews, as they more accurately reflect visitors' current perceptions while avoiding historical or management biases (Mariani et al., 2016; Xiang & Gretzel, 2010). A time period between 2021 and 2025 was selected, and a theoretical saturation criterion was applied, selecting 200 reviews for El Capricho and 190 for the Palace; this volume ensures the representativeness of the tourism discourse without compromising the reliability of the coding process (Guest et al., 2006; Neuendorf, 2017). In the case of the Chapel-Pantheon (n=150) and the Puerta de Moro (n=60), all existing comments were included, given that the number of reviews was limited and allowed for a census analysis without compromising statistical reliability.

Once the corpus was constructed, the textual analysis followed a two-stage procedure. First, text preprocessing was performed using Python (normalization, tokenization, removal of stop words, extraction of frequencies and co-occurrence patterns) via Python (Pandas, Unidecode, WordCloud). Second, an inductive thematic qualitative analysis was conducted using NVivo 14.

## 6. Results

### 6.1. Analysis of Reviews of El Capricho de Gaudí

An analysis of 200 reviews collected from TripAdvisor shows a very positive rating. Sixty-seven percent of the reviews give it the highest rating (5/5), and the remaining 33% assign a rating of 4/5. There are no intermediate or negative ratings. This suggests high satisfaction and a solid, consistent tourist experience over time, ruling out the possibility that this is a one-time trend.

Regarding the visitor profile, the overall data shows a balanced distribution among families, couples, groups of friends, and solo travelers. This cross-sectional nature across different segments highlights that it is a cultural attraction that generates value for all diverse audiences without specializing in a specific visitor profile. A widely distributed geographic origin is observed, with visitors coming from major cities such as Barcelona, Madrid, Seville, Málaga, and Bilbao, as well as cities in the north and coastal areas. This pattern demonstrates that El Capricho is a tourist attraction with national reach, establishing Comillas within Cantabria and northern Spain.

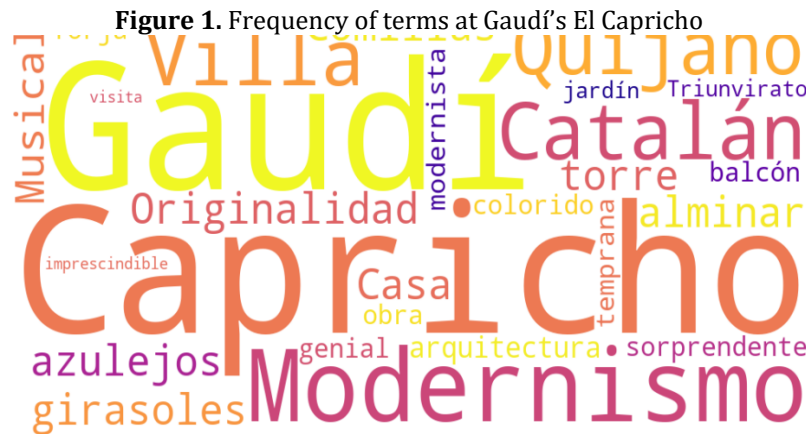
Text analysis identified five main narrative themes with varying frequencies ranging from 12% to 78%. Table 1 summarizes these themes, their frequencies, keywords, and representative examples drawn from the reviews:

**Table 1.** Themes identified in Gaudí’s El Capricho.

Topic	Frequency	Keywords	Example excerpts
Gaudí and his Modernist legacy	78%	Gaudí, legacy, Modernism, Gaudí’s touch	“Gaudí never disappoints—a true gem”; “Gaudí’s legacy in Comillas”; “You can really see Gaudí’s touch”
Uniqueness and Distinctiveness	64%	unique, peculiar, different, original, spectacular	“Unique architecture and beautiful gardens”; “A different kind of place”; “The style is very peculiar and original”
Heritage and Symbolic Value	52%	jewel, treasure, masterpiece, marvel	“A Modernist gem”; “A treasure in the north”; “A marvel that must be visited”
Gaudí-Comillas-Cantabria connection	58%	Comillas, Cantabria, north, symbolic place	“A Modernist gem in Cantabria”; “The best building in Comillas”; “A piece of Modernism in Cantabria”
Tourist experience and sentiment	61%	magical, dream, unforgettable, highly recommended, we fell in love with it	“A magical place in the north”; “An unforgettable experience”; “We fell in love with it”; “Highly recommended”
Criticism of tourism management	12%	price, expensive, lots of people, too many people	“Too many people, but I liked it”; “The price could be lower”

Source: Own elaboration, 2025.

Figure 1 below shows the frequency of the most commonly used terms to describe their experience at El Capricho



Source: Own elaboration, 2025.

### 6.2. Analysis of reviews of the Palacio de Sobrellano

The analysis of 190 reviews for the Palacio de Sobrellano shows a satisfaction pattern similar to that identified at El Capricho. Ratings are concentrated at 4 and 5 stars, with no negative or intermediate reviews. This confirms high tourist satisfaction, reinforcing the idea of a consistently positive heritage experience throughout Comillas.

As for the visitor profile, it varies slightly: couples and families account for 60% of the total, compared to 50% at El Capricho, while the remaining segments are distributed evenly. This suggests that the Palacio de Sobrellano may hold greater appeal for family visits and shared cultural experiences.

Unlike what was observed at El Capricho, where the figure of the architect is a central element of the discourse, only 10% of the opinions explicitly mention the architects Doménech i Montaner

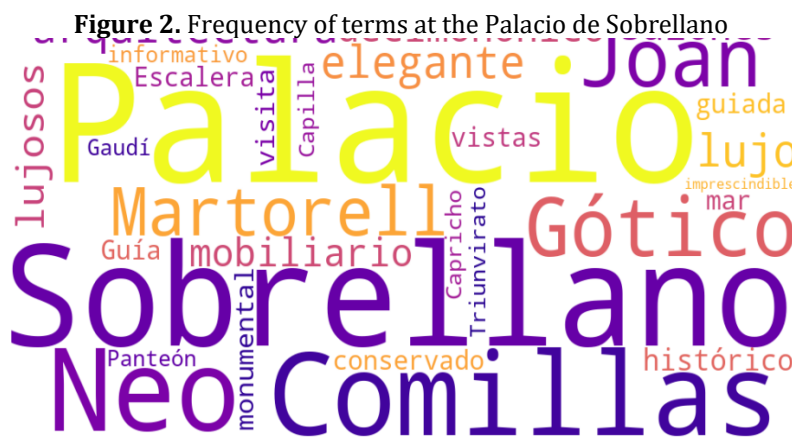
or Martorell. In this case, the narrative focuses more on the architectural style, the type of building, and the historical setting.

Text analysis identified six main narrative themes with frequencies ranging from 50% to 70%. Table 2 shows these themes. Figure 2 highlights the most frequently used terms:

**Table 2.** Themes extracted from the Palacio de Sobrellano

Topic	Frequency	Keywords	Examples excerpts
Neo-Gothic / Gothic architecture	70%	Neo-Gothic, Gothic, chapel, mausoleum, stained-glass windows, architectural details	“A Neo-Gothic masterpiece”; “The Gothic design is spectacular”
Palace and bourgeois residence	60%	palace, mausoleum, chapel, 19th-century bourgeoisie	“A dream palace”; “A slice of 19th-century bourgeois life”
Heritage value	55%	jewel, treasure, masterpiece, marvel, historic, architectural	“An architectural jewel”; “A historic marvel”
Historical and cultural dimension	50%	History, culture, tour, learning history	“Perfect for learning about Comillas’ history”; “Ideal for a cultural outing with the kids”
Aesthetics and atmosphere	64%	spectacular, luxurious, understated, beautiful, opulent, elegant, impressive,	“Opulent and meticulously maintained architecture”; “Wonderful and very luxurious”
Tourist experience	60%	must-see, recommended, magical, worth it, unique,	“The Palace is a magical place”; “A must-see in Cantabria”

Source: Own elaboration, 2025.



Source: Own elaboration, 2025.

### 6.3. Analysis of reviews of the Chapel-Pantheon

The analysis of 120 reviews of the Chapel-Pantheon also confirms ratings centered around 4 and 5 stars, with no negative reviews. The visitor profile is similar to that of the Palacio de Sobrellano, as is their geographic origin.

The qualitative analysis reveals a distinct narrative compared to the other two sites, particularly regarding the presence of elements associated with Gaudí. Unlike the Palacio de Sobrellano, where architectural authorship plays a marginal role, significant attention is paid to Gaudí’s furniture. This finding gives the Chapel-Pantheon a particular symbolic value, which is



**Table 4.** Themes extracted from the Puerta de Moro

Topic	Frequency	Keywords	Example excerpts
Gaudí's work	65%	Gaudí, by Antonio Gaudí, Bird Gate, legacy in Comillas	"Also known as the Bird Gate, it's worth noting that it's by Gaudí..."; "In a town already blessed with Gaudí's El Capricho, this gate is a must-see"
Heritage value	60%	beautiful gate, hidden gems, very pretty, lovely	"We came across this gem"; "Beautiful entrance gate"; "Hidden gems in rural Cantabria"
Uniqueness	62%	three doors, cars, people, birds, special opening, stone remnants, design	"It consists of three parts: a door for people, another for vehicles, and a small one for birds"; "The plaque... explains how Gaudí built this gate using stone remnants"
Experience of passing through and integration into the historic route	65%	must-see stop, walking through Comillas, historic route, final surprise	"A must-see stop on a walk through Comillas"; "The final surprise as you follow the historic route"; "Walking... we came across this gem"
Integration into the urban landscape	46%	toward the town, toward the beach, next to,	"in the middle of the town..."; "It's surprising to find this 'Bird Gate' while walking toward the beach"; "In the heart of rural Cantabria, these hidden gems exist"
Moderate expectations and some disappointment	40%	not essential, not worth it, "meh", little else	"Going just to see this gate isn't essential"; "It leaves you pretty cold; it's no big deal and not very interesting"; "We went because it looked good, but it's not worth going out of your way for"

Source: Own elaboration, 2025.

**Figure 4.** Frequency of terms at the Puerta de Moro



Source: Own elaboration, 2025.

## 7. Discussion and Conclusions

An analysis of the reviews shows that Gaudí's El Capricho, the Sobrellano Palace, the Chapel-Pantheon, and the Puerta de Moro together form a distinctive place brand in which Gaudí emerges as the central pillar of Comillas's tourist identity. Visitors construct a coherent narrative in which Gaudí's modernist creativity, the bourgeois and neo-Gothic heritage of the Palace and the Chapel-Pantheon, and small urban landmarks that reinforce Gaudí's symbolic imprint on everyday spaces coexist. The construction of a place brand is based on identifying and communicating elements of uniqueness capable of differentiating the destination.

*In the case of Comillas, this uniqueness is organized around three pillars. First, El Capricho functions as a primary architectural icon, systematically described as a "jewel", "whim" and "Modernist masterpiece", in line*

with the literature on iconic architecture (Sklair, 2017), according to which certain buildings retain a symbolic power capable of shaping perceptions, emotions, and tourist decisions. Second, the complex comprising the Palacio de Sobrellano and the Chapel-Pantheon provides a historical, aristocratic, and spiritual dimension, where the Neo-Gothic style and Gaudí’s furnishings function as markers of authenticity and historical depth. This confirms the contribution of studies on heritage meaning-making (Poria et al., 2009), which emphasize interpretive value beyond materiality, as well as the literature on authenticity. Third, the Puerta de Moro, a reproduction linked to Gaudí, plays a seemingly minor but symbolically relevant role. Reviews describe it as a discovery along the urban walk, a Gaudí-esque detail that appears by surprise. This small landmark intensifies Gaudí’s presence along the route and reinforces the reading of Comillas as an “iconic landscape”, where architectural objects distributed throughout the territory create symbolic anchor points that sustain the narrative of Comillas as a destination.

**Table 5.** Summarizes how visitors attribute distinct identities to each monument, but always in relation to Gaudí, who serves as the interpretive framework for the whole.

Topic	Keywords	Identity-based interpretation
Capricho	Gaudí, Modernism, “House of Sunflowers”, “masterpiece”, “Capricho”	Central Gaudí icon, emblem of Comillas/Cantabria
Palace	Neo-Gothic, “historic palace”	Bourgeois and aristocratic setting, monumental complement
Chapel-Pantheon	Gaudí’s benches and furnishings, chapel-pantheon, organ, stained-glass window	A space of remembrance and sacredness with “Gaudí-esque details”
Moro Gate	Gaudí’s gate, entrance, promenade, next to	A minor urban landmark that reinforces Gaudí’s presence along the route

Source: Own elaboration, 2025.

Reviews of El Capricho confirm that visitors perceive it as the great icon of Comillas, the piece that defines the destination and justifies the visit. It is the hub where the Gaudí brand is condensed and where the emotional narrative of the journey begins—a symbol that synthesizes creativity, modernism, and aesthetic uniqueness. When they move on to the Sobrellano Palace, the tone changes: terms such as “neo-Gothic” or “historic palace” appear, placing this building within an aristocratic narrative. For visitors, the Palace expands the cultural experience but does not compete with El Capricho; it complements it. The Chapel-Pantheon introduces another dimension to the identity of the place, offering a more intimate experience. Visitors speak of Gaudí’s benches and furniture, describing it as an intimate space laden with memory, where Gaudian detail is experienced almost as a privilege. Here, Gaudí appears in small gestures and specific pieces, but these details are sufficient to elevate the experience of the site. Finally, the Moro Gate occupies a different place: it is not a major attraction or a monumental work, but the words associated with it—“Gaudí’s gate, walk, entrance, next to”—evidence that it functions as a small urban landmark that extends Gaudí’s footprint through the streets of Comillas. Travelers discover it while walking, almost by chance, and this turns it into a sort of “wink” that confirms Gaudí is more present in Comillas than one might expect. In synthesis, there is not just one work by Gaudí in Comillas; rather, Comillas is read through Gaudí, even though each monument contributes from a different position and with a different intensity. Gaudí functions as an identity marker, an articulating axis of narratives, a catalyst for the tourist experience, an emotional symbol, and a bridge between the aristocratic-Indian past and emerging modernism. UGC plays a central role in the narrative of Comillas’ identity. Visitors recurrently associate the city with “Gaudí’s Capricho”. Even when the primary authorship of the Palace falls to other architects, reviews connect the palace-chapel complex with El Capricho, generating a Gaudian ensemble that transcends the individual building. Furthermore, it constructs a multidimensional experience of identity. At a micro level, comments on details (ceramic sunflowers, stained glass, benches, kneelers, ironwork) turn decorative elements into identity markers. On another level, reviews describe routes (Capricho-Palace-Chapel-Gate) and walking axes, reinforcing the perception of a cohesive heritage itinerary. At a macro level, Comillas is described as “one of the best places in Cantabria” or “essential on a route

through the north", inserting the municipality into the regional brand (Cantabria) and, by extension, the national brand. This links to the idea that effective place marketing is not limited to physical icons but incorporates co-created practices, stories, and experiences. The integration of reviews of the Puerta de Moro adds an important dimension to the conclusions. Although it is a smaller-scale resource, reviews describe it as a discovery linked to the walk between El Capricho and the Palace, highlighting that it is a work by Gaudí that many visitors find "by surprise". From the perspective of urban identity, these types of objects function as "points of symbolic density" that consolidate Gaudí's presence in the daily fabric of the town, not just in the major icons. In terms of branding, it reinforces narrative coherence: the visitor perceives that "Gaudí is everywhere", which makes it easier for Comillas to be mentioned and remembered as a "Gaudian place" beyond Barcelona.

This study presents some limitations. The use of TripAdvisor may introduce self-selection biases. Furthermore, this study is based solely on textual UGC, without integrating visual content or other social networks. The qualitative approach implies an inherent interpretation that can be questioned. Future research should incorporate multiple digital platforms, apply longitudinal analyses to observe the evolution of the narrative, compare the perceptions of visitors with those of residents and heritage managers, and explore comparisons with other destinations characterized by multiple iconic architectures.

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