

# Urban Branding and the Challenges of Place Quality (A Critical Reading of Contradictory Representations in Four Global Cities)\*

Fatemeh Baratzadeh<sup>a</sup>- Hooman Ghahremani<sup>b\*\*</sup>

<sup>a</sup> M.A. of Urban Design, Faculty of Architecture and Urbanism, Ferdowsi University of Mashhad, Mashhad, Iran.

<sup>b</sup> Assistant Professor of Urban Design, Faculty of Architecture and Urbanism, Ferdowsi University of Mashhad, Mashhad, Iran (Corresponding Author).

Received 15 June 2024;

Revised 21 May 2025;

Accepted 30 June 2025;

Available Online 21 September 2025

## ABSTRACT

In the context of globalization and urban competitiveness, cities are striving to develop strategies and initiatives to enhance their prominence on global and international stages. Urban branding is a tool that enhances a city's competitive advantage by presenting a positive image, which contributes to economic, social, and physical development, thereby improving the overall quality of life. This study aims to examine how tangible place qualities are influenced by urban branding within the context of globalization, and to analyze the contradictory impacts of these transformations on target stakeholders in space. Focusing on the experiences of four global cities, the research seeks to gain a deeper understanding of the mutual influence between tangible place qualities and urban branding strategies. Following the data collection phase, selected projects in four cities—New York, London, Shanghai, and Hong Kong—were examined to identify the place qualities shaped by urban branding. The actions taken in these projects were analyzed through content analysis using MAXQDA software (version 2018), based on relevant documentary sources. The findings of this study are derived from certain place qualities emphasized by scholars in the field of urban design within the framework of urban branding, as well as from an analysis of the transformations observed in selected urban spaces across four global cities—New York, London, Shanghai, and Hong Kong, aimed at achieving urban branding goals. The results highlight specific place qualities that have been influenced by urban branding, encompassing eleven key attributes: intangible cultural heritage, identity and sense of place, building with symbolic architecture, tourism receptivity, efficient access and public transportation network, sociability, flexibility, heritage acceptance and local architectural values, pedestrianization, eventfulness, functional diversity and mixed uses. In what follows, the manner in which these qualities are influenced and interpreted within the context of branding is explained, showing that in an asymmetric balance, some place qualities have been enhanced while others have declined. Since urban branding is an ambivalent issue that emerges under the influence of both endogenous and exogenous forces, its focus on enhancing the city's image has paradoxically transformed spatial qualities. However, some of these qualities—such as eventfulness and buildings with symbolic architecture—are affected by other mediating variables.

**Keywords:** Urban Branding, Globalization, Challenge of Place Quality, Representation of Urban

\* This article is taken from the first author's master's thesis entitled "Urban Design to Improve the Spatial Quality of Chaharbagh Neighborhood in Mashhad through Urban Branding," which was completed with the guidance of the second author in 2024.

\*\* E\_mail: hghahremani@um.ac.ir

## 1. INTRODUCTION

In recent years, cities have been actively seeking new ways to promote themselves within the global network of cities, benefiting from its associated advantages. Urban branding has emerged as a key strategy for enhancing global competitiveness and can play a pivotal role in the development of urban areas (Hanna and Rowley 2007).

Within the context of urban branding and the economic growth generates, urban spaces and their qualities have undergone contradictory transformations. While, for centuries, the quality of the urban environment was considered a consequence of economic development, today the tangible quality of urban space has become a prerequisite for cities' economic advancement (Gospodini 2002, 62). In this new paradigm, urban spaces function like magnets, serving as a core element in the main structure of cities and playing a significant role. Not only are these urban spaces shaped by branding, but they also have the capacity to shape it in return. This reciprocal relationship introduces several challenges for urban spaces and places (Ghahremani et al. 2021, 3) including neglect of place identity and local assets, gentrification, social inequality, the commodification of place, and the multiplicity of stakeholders, which creates a contradiction between the preferences of external and internal audiences. When poorly managed, such dynamics can disrupt the social structure of a place and, in the absence of a rational balance among economic, social, and environmental dimensions, turn branding into a mere seductive tool for attracting investors, tourists, and external audiences (Gospodini 2002; Ooi and Stöber 2008; Collins 2021; Yazdanpanah Shahabadi, Sajadzadeh, and Rafieian 2019).

Going beyond the dominant perspectives that mainly emphasize the positive impacts of branding on enhancing urban competitiveness, this study aims to critically examine the influence of branding on place qualities—an influence that, in many cases, reveals itself in conflicting ways for internal and external actors. Accordingly, the central research question of this study is: How does urban branding influence place qualities, and how are they in turn influenced by it? The structure of this research is organized into three main sections: a review of the literature on urban branding, an investigation of spatial transformations in selected urban spaces within four global cities—New York, London, Shanghai, and Hong Kong—and an analysis of the place qualities shaped through this process. The study focuses on interpreting the findings and identifying the key place qualities influenced by urban branding, along with the challenges that arise from them.

## 2. RESEARCH METHOD

This study adopts a qualitative research methodology. To achieve its objectives, the study utilizes a comprehensive literature review in the theoretical section. It utilizes MAXQDA software (version 2018) for content analysis, coding, and inference, drawing on successful global experiences in other countries. In the first step, to establish a theoretical approach regarding place quality, a systematic review was conducted using library and documentary research methods. Relevant studies and articles were examined from two major academic databases—Google Scholar and Scopus—by searching with research-related keywords within the time span of 2005 to 2023. A total of 194 articles were initially identified across both databases. Through successive filtering, the scope of studies was narrowed. After eliminating duplicate results, irrelevant data, and weak sources, 40 articles were selected based on alignment with the research objectives and keywords. From these, 11 place qualities were extracted. What proved crucial in this process was the derivation of place qualities based on three core criteria: fundamental relevance, practical applicability, and appropriate scale. These criteria were grounded in the theoretical perspectives of several scholars and guided the selection of place qualities in this study (Trip 2007; Carmona, De Magalhães, and Hammond 2008; Durmaz 2015; Golkar 2001). Ultimately, this led to the identification of eleven key place qualities.

To deepen the analysis and refine the findings, four selected projects located in New York, London, Shanghai, and Hong Kong were chosen as case studies. The selection criteria for these projects were based on the global ranking of cities in the GaWC classification and a focus on developed countries with significant roles on the world stage. These cities—recognized as international centers of leisure, culture, finance, or economic power—have been grappling with visible challenges and contradictions in enhancing certain place qualities while deteriorating others within the context of urban branding. Textual data related to these projects were collected from credible sources and analyzed using MAXQDA software (version 2018) through a qualitative content analysis approach. The open coding process, structured in three levels and presented in Table 1, was based on themes derived from the literature and contributed to the clarification and extraction of relevant place qualities. Ultimately, the comparative analysis of place qualities across the selected projects provided a deeper understanding of the reciprocal relationships between urban imagery, place identity, and audience preferences.

### 3. RESEARCH THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS

Considering the nature of the research topic, the following theoretical discussion provides a concise examination of the concepts of place quality and city branding, along with the articulation of city branding strategies, which are deemed essential within the existing body of literature.

#### 3.1. Place Quality

Place quality is a multidimensional concept that encompasses the integration of various physical, functional, and semantic dimensions. A high-quality place provides the greatest value to its users in terms of social interaction, healthy lifestyles, and economic productivity (Carmona 2018, 35). Urban competitiveness is not only associated with enhancing economic performance and productivity, but also contributes to social, cultural, environmental values, and spatial dimensions. In the competition among cities and regions, the quality of place and the creation of attractive urban environments are considered key success factors (Esmailpoorabi et al. 2016, 19).

The connecting link between place qualities and urban branding is the existence of a shared image among internal and external audiences. A unique and attractive image, as a filter influencing the quality of life, the provision of high-level services, enhancing the city's reputation, and increasing competitive capabilities (Prilenska 2012; Campelo et al. 2014; Ashworth and Bonakdar; Audirac 2019; Bellini, Lofredo, and Pasquinelli 2010). Therefore, beyond shaping unique images and supporting place development, urban branding may also facilitate the improvement of place infrastructure, such as transportation systems, walkability, and economic growth sectors, as well as the enhancement of urban performance (Masuda and Bookman 2016).

#### 3.2. Urban Branding Concept

The concepts of "brand" and "branding" originated within the field of marketing, primarily as tools for promoting products and services in a capitalist-driven global economy. Over time, these concepts have been adopted and utilized across various other disciplines (Anholt 2007, 18). Since the early 1990s, the concepts of place marketing and branding strategies have been increasingly applied from the commercial world to the realms of urban development and urban regeneration (Zenker and Braun 2010, 6). Numerous definitions have been proposed for urban branding, most of which converge on the idea that it entails a set of strategic actions aimed at highlighting a city's unique characteristics, creating a strong and positive image of a place, and establishing communication through visuals, narratives, and events targeted at different audience groups. In essence, urban branding is a process through which a city's physical structures,

values, and distinctive assets are internationally recognized, with the ultimate goal of enhancing its image and boosting its competitiveness on the global stage (Gonzalez and Gale 2021; Florek 2021; Asadi and Mohammadi 2021).

#### 3.3. Urban Branding Strategies

The competition among cities to attract higher levels of investment has led urban authorities to adopt various strategies and actions aimed at branding their cities. Today, branding strategies are increasingly utilized to distinguish cities, regions, and even countries in their pursuit of competitive advantage across various urban dimensions (Demirbag Kaplan et al. 2010, 1288). Numerous branding strategies have been introduced in different studies, some of which will be outlined in the following sections.

##### - Personality Association or Personality Related Branding

Places use celebrities to gain a unique identity, hoping that internationally renowned individuals and designers will add to the reputation of the place. This practice is exemplified by what is often referred to as the "Gaudí strategy" in the branding of Barcelona during the 1890s, with a very distinctive and famous architect and designer, whose current image of the city is inseparable from the creative work of this artist. In fact, the apparent successes of this technique have led to its almost universal application, with the belief that it is a sure and relatively easy path to successful city branding. In this area, more unique creative works or prominent individuals with more memorable architecture and designs will bring prestige (Ashworth 2009; Radosavljevic and Kuletin Culafic 2019).

##### - Development of Flagship Projects and Avant-garde Designs

In recent decades, innovative spatial design and the development of flagship projects have attracted significant attention. During this period, innovative spatial designs and landmark projects have gained considerable importance, and modern societies utilize iconic buildings as a tool for urban branding and city development. Avant-garde architectural projects play a substantial visual role in shaping and enhancing the city's image. They may indirectly influence the perceived well-being and satisfaction of both residents and visitors—though in some cases, they may also adversely affect urban quality of life (Riza, Doratli, and Fasli 2012; Zhao, Edelenbos, and Jong 2025; Rehan 2013).

Flagship projects, often characterized by unique architectural forms and elements, tend to contrast sharply with their surrounding urban contexts. This visual dissonance, however, frequently draws substantial attention and urban tourism capital, as exemplified by internationally renowned sites such as the Centre Georges Pompidou in Paris and the

Guggenheim Museum in Bilbao (Gospodini 2001, 2007).

In general, the success of such projects appears to rely on two interrelated factors:

**First**, the architecture must be visually and conceptually prominent to generate a distinctive international image.

**Second**, the artistic creator of the building must be as significant as the building itself (Ashworth 2009, 14-15).

#### - Organizing Prominent and Unique Events

Places increasingly utilize events as strategic tools to position themselves across local, national, and global scales—to attract tourism, generate employment, increase revenue, and enhance their urban image. Events are spatial phenomena that, in addition to occupying spaces for their formation, have significant spatial effects. The formation of events in a place is made up of three essential components: first, the physical and spatial characteristics of the place itself, second, the live, dynamic experience shared among stakeholders and users, and third, the creation of symbolic meanings and representations associated with the event, which contribute to urban renown and branding (Richards 2017, 5).

Rehan (2013), in his research, has introduced one of the key strategies of urban branding as the “brand city life,” within which events and cultural activities play a central role. For events to be effective in urban branding, they must contribute meaningfully to the sense of place and be contextually aligned with the city’s capacities and identity. In other words, a strong connection must be established between lived space (identity) and imagined space (image) (Ashworth 2009; Prilenska 2012; Richards 2017; Zhao, Edelenbos, and Jong 2025).

#### - Media-Generated Images

Another key strategy in urban branding involves developing a distinct logo, slogan, and unique narrative. These elements should ideally be selected collectively and collaboratively, serving as tools for establishing secondary communication. Secondary

communication refers to a formal and intentional interaction typically conveyed through recognized marketing techniques such as advertising campaigns, graphic design, logos, and other visual branding mechanisms. Logos and slogans act as interfaces between producers and consumers—i.e., the city and its target audiences contributing to enhanced recognition, perception, and mental imagery of the place (Yazdan Panah Shahabadi, Sajadzadeh, and Rafieian 2019; Zhao, Edelenbos, and Jong 2025; Clevel and Arku 2014). In this context, the role of social media platforms and digital transformation has become increasingly indispensable. Through content marketing, influencer partnerships, and user-generated content, digital media fosters dynamic interactions that play a pivotal role in shaping urban brands. Platforms featuring short videos and live streams, in particular, have emerged as central tools for promoting urban imagery and narrative construction in contemporary city branding practices.

## 4. REVIEW OF URBAN BRANDING EXPERIENCES

This section examines selected urban branding projects at the Intermediate scale and within urban public spaces. Initially, highly cited sources related to each of the selected projects in four global cities were identified. Subsequently, relevant textual data aligned with the study’s objectives were extracted. Finally, applying the qualitative content analysis method, the authors reviewed all data associated with each project, coding the most prominent and explicit place qualities using MAXQDA software (version 2018). It is essential to note that the case studies were examined comprehensively; however, to avoid an unnecessary extension of the article, the results have been summarized and presented in Content Analysis Table 1. Within this section, a concise overview of the spatial quality influences for each case study is provided. The locations of the selected projects are illustrated in Figure 1.

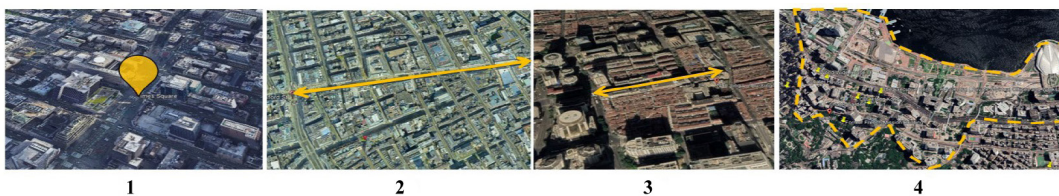


Fig. 1. Locations of Selected Projects: 1. Times Square, New York 2. Oxford Street, London 3. Nanjing Road, Shanghai 4. Central Business District, Hong Kong

(Google Earth 2025)

### 4.1. Times Square, New York

Times Square, a world-renowned intersection located in Manhattan, serves as a vibrant commercial hub in New York City, famously adorned with a dense array

of billboards, making it one of the most expensive advertising spaces in the world. At the beginning of World War 1, Times Square was recognized as the center of New York City’s theater and

entertainment. However, in contemporary times, it has transformed into a global crossroads, surrounded by multinational corporations and functioning as a major tourist attraction. Times Square represents a unique amalgamation of art, commerce, and history. Each year, it becomes a pedestrian-only zone during significant events such as New Year's Eve celebrations and Broadway performances (Makagon 2003; Azmudeh 2012).

One of the plans presented in the United States in the 1980s aimed at revitalizing the negative image and disreputable past of Times Square. The proposal sought to reclaim it as a public theater and entertainment district, repositioning it as a tourist-friendly destination. In this regard, the New York City government, in collaboration with community-based organizations, embarked on a comprehensive plan to rehabilitate the surrounding area through real estate development and the implementation of flagship and avant-garde urban projects, as a means of enhancing the square's image and function (Kelleher 2005; Wollman 2002).

Times Square, in the context of globalization, has undergone profound transformations and has become a contested urban space marked by tensions between multiple forces—such as the conflicting interests of developers and local communities, the tension between commercial goals and public needs, and the dichotomy between historical preservation and spatial commodification. These contradictions have simultaneously enhanced and diminished various aspects of place quality. Therefore, an urban space must be branded in a way that takes into account the interests of all stakeholders, respecting their needs and desires, and is attractive, inviting, and meaningful to both investors, tourists, and residents, so that the people support the brand.

#### 4.2. Oxford Street, London

Oxford Street is one of the most famous streets in London and is considered one of the busiest commercial streets in Europe. It was initially the exit road from London to Oxford, and is therefore called by this name. The street is distinguished by its multicultural character and diverse urban elements, setting it apart from other streets in London. Notable features include Oxford Circus, prominent artificial landmarks, Christmas lighting, and a strong social life that is situated between global and local phenomena. (Abusaada and Elshater 2021; Block 2017).

The application of branding strategies through avant-garde urban projects, including the development of numerous luxury retail stores, internationally renowned brands, and high-profile events, has transformed Oxford Street into one of London's premier shopping destinations and tourist attractions. This elevated status has enhanced a variety of environmental qualities (including both natural and built aspects), special attractions, and public

amenities. It has also fostered positive interactions between visitors and the host community, contributed to the local economy's growth, and reinforced Oxford Street's image as a lively and dynamic urban center (Mercieca et al. 2011).

One of the most significant challenges in urban branding is understanding and articulating a place's unique identity. In the case of Oxford Street, the overwhelming influx of visitors has gradually diminished its traditional local character and authenticity. Moreover, the far-reaching effects of globalization on urban context and public spaces are undeniable. On Oxford Street, the development of national and international flagship projects has compromised the local context and eroded some of the qualities of place, including identity, sense of place, and local architectural values.

#### 4.3. Nanjing Road, Shanghai

Nanjing Road, stretching over 1,030 meters, is recognized as one of the most prominent and expansive commercial pedestrian districts (CPDs) in China, as well as an international symbol of leisure, fashion, gastronomy, and culture. As one of the busiest streets in the world, it has become a significant destination for both domestic and international tourists (Yang and Xu 2009, 89).

Taking inspiration from successful global streets such as the Champs-Élysées in Paris and Oxford Street in London, and employing urban branding strategies based on personality and the development of flagship projects, has attracted international institutions to the central business district (CBD) and mushroomed skyscrapers and famous international brands (Miao 2011; Gaubatz 2004). In 2000, the local government banned vehicular traffic on the road, transforming it into a fully pedestrianized space. This intervention has reinforced the street's status in terms of commercial vitality, public usability, heritage historical conservation, building layout, the establishment of international corporate offices, and the display of famous brands, ultimately crafting a unique commercial identity aligned with global economic aspirations (Yang and Xu 2009, 89).

According to the above explanations, Nanjing Road faces notable challenges and limitations in the context of urban branding and globalization. The international image of the street often prioritizes multinational corporations and global brands, pushing out local retailers and small businesses. Consequently, the benefits of branding strategies tend to favor tourists and affluent property owners, with relatively less consideration for the well-being of residents. The overemphasis on an "international image" has weakened the street's connection to its contextual and cultural roots. Ultimately, the deep penetration of commercialization into urban space emerges as one of the critical challenges facing urban branding efforts on Nanjing Road.

#### 4.4. Central District of Hong Kong, Hong Kong

Hong Kong has long been recognized as a leading global city, consistently performing well in global city rankings over the past three decades, and emerging as one of the world's foremost financial and commercial hubs. The Central Business District of Hong Kong, formerly known as Victoria, is uniquely situated along Victoria Harbour and its distinctive waterfront. Today, it functions as one of the largest international financial service centers. Victoria Harbour is one of the major attractions of Hong Kong, due to its beautiful skyline, unique landscape, and the location of skyscrapers, and is a famous tourist area in the world (Chan and Peters 2011; Shirzadi 2014).

In 2000, the Hong Kong Executive Committee on Strategic Development stated that "Hong Kong should promote its unique position as one of the most international and vibrant cities in Asia to a wide range of international audiences" (Yiu and Chu 2011, 46). Hong Kong's unique identity as a metropolis lies in its unusual hybrid of "Chineseness" and "internationalism." In the context of globalization, there has been a growing impetus not only for the expansion of commercial sectors

but also for the design of signature urban districts that are internationally recognizable—comparable to Nanjing Road in Shanghai, Wall Street in New York, or the Champs-Élysées in Paris (Gaubatz 2004, 92). Globalization has played a significant role in elevating Hong Kong's profile as Asia's cultural and creative capital, fostering the emergence of creative industries, entertainment markets, global advertising platforms, tourism promotion, and new architectural design. As a result, Hong Kong has become a premier destination for affluent international tourists, business travelers, and global consumers (Shirzadi 2014, 44). However, the intensive focus on branding has, paradoxically, led to the erosion of Hong Kong's intrinsic distinctiveness. The fusion of global and local elements into a new hybridized culture has diluted the city's unique urban character. While cosmopolitanism is a point of pride for Hong Kong, the dominance of transnational corporations in the Central District has, to some extent, monopolized the area's cultural values—redirecting them primarily toward tourists and external forces rather than residents.

Table 1 illustrates the method of content analysis and the coding process used to identify place qualities within the framework of urban branding.

**Table 1. Extraction of Place Qualities based on Content Analysis**

Level 3 Concepts (Categories) Place Qualities	Level 2 Concepts (Subcategories)	Level 1 Concepts (Codes)
Eventfulness	Hosting Local and International Events aimed at Enhancing Prominence	Experience Economy, Supporting Street Life, Organizing Street Theatres and Performances, Providing a Platform for the Formation of Social Activities, Attracting Creative Classes:
Tourism Receptivity	Providing Adequate Services and Facilities for Tourists	Presence of domestic and international tourists, availability of tourist-attracting places, Existence of entertainment destinations, Enhancement of tourism services, and High visitor frequency
	Tourism Industry Support Tourism Industry Support	Neglect of place authenticity, economic-oriented perspective on tourism, attraction of investments, creation of multicultural environments, emergence of the gentrification phenomenon, and increase in capital flow
Building with Symbolic Architecture	Designing Flagship and Avant-Garde Projects	Presence of innovative and unique architectural forms, extensive presence of international brands, utilization of advanced technologies in project design and construction, creation of artificial signs and symbols for cities, design of skyscrapers, transformation of physical structure, and visual aesthetics
	Collaboration and Partnership in the Design of International Spaces	Utilization of prominent international architects and designers, formulation of unique slogans to highlight architectural elements, creation of appealing external and international images, urban area revitalization, participation in both public and private sectors

Level 3 Concepts (Categories) Place Qualities	Level 2 Concepts (Subcategories)	Level 1 Concepts (Codes)
Heritage Acceptance and Local Architectural Values	Emphasis on Historical Elements and Local Assets	Importance of heritage and historical sites, emphasis on the identity and past of urban spaces, preservation of traditional architectural patterns, and uniqueness of local architecture
Efficient Access and a Public Transportation Network	Enhancement of Public Transportation Infrastructure	Diversity of transportation modes, development of public transportation networks, enhancement of accessibility to various destinations, equipping urban spaces for tourist mobility, and fast and convenient movement of users
Intangible Cultural Heritage	Protection and Attention to Intangible Cultural Heritage	Holding festivals and traditional ceremonies, utilizing cultural elements to enhance fame and identity, providing cultural facilities, and preserving local customs and ancient traditions.
	The Globalization of Culture	The eradication and destruction of cultural heritage, the globalization of culture, an increased emphasis on the commercial dimension of culture, the diminishing significance of cultural values, and the emergence of new cultural patterns.
Functional Diversity and Mixed Uses	The Provision of Diverse Facilities and Services at a Global Scale	The establishment of diverse land uses, changing characteristics and functions of applications in the context of globalization, the presence of branded stores, restaurants, and hotels, the provision of high-level services for both domestic and international users, and the development of prominent businesses.
Pedestrianization	Enhancement of Walkability	Traffic reduction, elimination of motorized transport, creation of safe spaces for pedestrians, pedestrian freedom, and high pedestrian volume.
Identity and Sense of Place	Emphasis on Local Identity and Authenticity	Revitalization and reuse of identity-bearing elements, preservation of historical and cultural identity, enhancement of civic pride, promotion of place attachment, attention to the authentic values of the place, and emphasis on the functions and uses of the past.
Sociability	Preservation of Social Patterns and Characteristics	Enhancement of social life, presence of diverse age and gender groups, increase in social capital, increased vitality, changes in the social structure of urban spaces, social segregation, and displacement of local populations and residents.
Flexibility	Utilizing Urban Design as a Tool to Enhance Spatial Attractiveness	The presence of urban squares and public spaces, physical transformations within urban areas, the emergence of free and spontaneous activities, the provision of venues for events, and the development of multifunctional spaces.

## 5. RESULTS FROM THE CASE STUDY

In the case study section, the main themes in urban branding projects were examined, ultimately identifying how place qualities are influenced by urban branding within these spaces. This process highlights the key factors involved in transforming these spaces within the context of urban branding and globalization. Table 2 presents the challenges

and contradictions of urban branding in relation to place qualities in selected urban spaces. Finally, these impacts are illustrated through a diagram based on the selected case studies. Some of these qualities have been enhanced while others have deteriorated, a process depicted with varying color gradients (Figure 2).

**Table 2. Challenges of Urban Branding in Relation to Place Qualities Extracted from Selected Projects**

Name	Challenges of Urban Branding in Relation to Place Qualities
Times Square New York	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Creation and design of new buildings at a superhuman scale</li> <li>- Disconnection from and removal of the square's historical past by demolishing old buildings and elements</li> <li>- Focus on the interests of investors and foreign tourists</li> <li>- Prominence of standout buildings in the square individually, with disregard for previous architectural style</li> </ul>
Oxford Street, London	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Low street safety due to the conflict between vehicular and pedestrian traffic, and the reduction of walkability</li> <li>- Establishment of supralocal and global-scale land uses along Oxford Street</li> <li>- Commercial gentrification as a negative phenomenon undermining the street's former commercial functions</li> <li>- Weakening of the street's previous functions and decline in identity within the context of urban</li> </ul>
Nanjing Road, Shanghai	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Marginalization of local businesses due to the dominance of international brands, mega-stores, and large retail chains on this street</li> <li>- Excessive emphasis on international symbols or imagery with weak connections to the street's contextual elements</li> <li>- Physical restructuring of the street in line with globalization and the development of large-scale projects aimed at serving international brands</li> <li>- Drastic physical transformations to attract tourists and foreign investors</li> </ul>
Central District of Hong Kong	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Excessive emphasis on Hong Kong's international image and neglect of local architectural heritage and values</li> <li>- Establishment of skyscrapers and iconic buildings with diverse architectural styles in this area</li> <li>- Dominance of economic and tourism values over local values and contextual characteristics</li> <li>- Reduction of residents' role in the area due to the dominance of multinational corporations</li> </ul>

Based on the analysis of the case studies, it can be concluded that urban branding pursues different objectives in each context, including attracting investment and tourism, creating an appealing external image, eliminating negative past images associated with urban spaces, improving both internal and external perceptions of cities, and fostering economic development. Each of these goals encounters its own set of challenges and contradictions within this framework. According to Fan (2014) and Yazdanpanah Shahabadi et al. (2019), what connects place development and place branding is the image produced over time by both internal and external audiences. Therefore, in the process of creating a unique city image, two types of representations emerge: first, the image perceived by internal audiences, and second, the image constructed in the minds of external audiences. Moreover, urban

branding inherently has an initial connection with exogenous transformation as opposed to endogenous transformation and functions as a tool for economic development, reflecting the city's attractiveness to external audiences. In this context, the primary focus is on external audiences (visitors and tourists) rather than the preferences of internal audiences (local communities, including residents, local authorities, and business owners). Figure 2 illustrates a recurring and noteworthy pattern. The urban branding process tends to emphasize enhancing physical and functional qualities rather than focusing on perceptual and identity-related qualities. This pattern underscores the need to revisit urban branding approaches, particularly in cities seeking to strike a sustainable balance between international appeal and local authenticity.

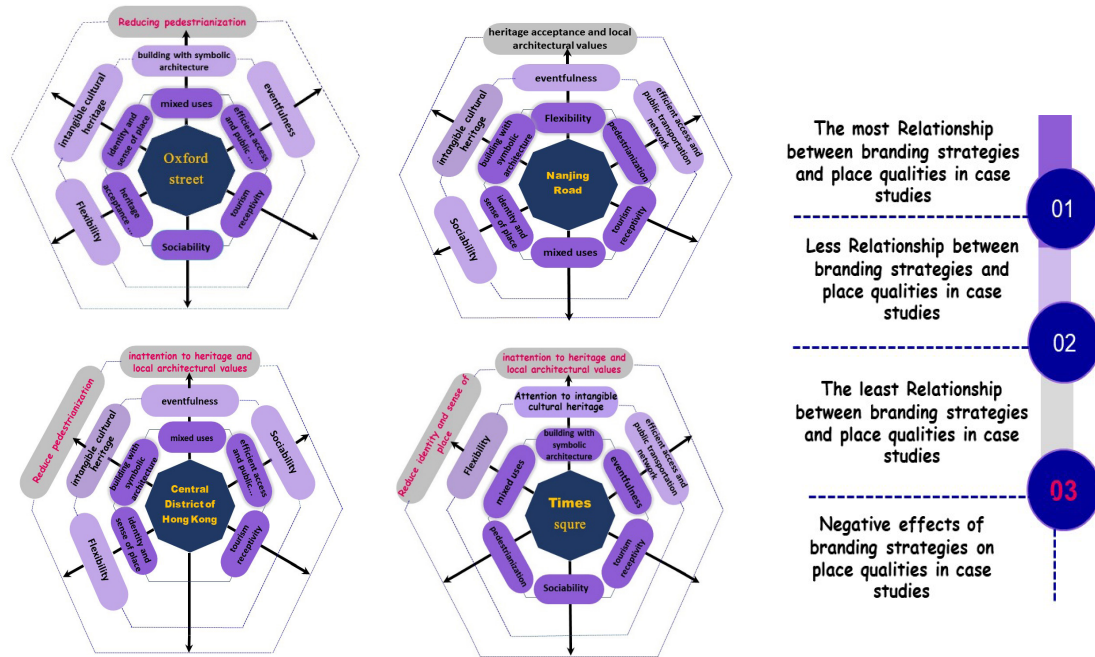


Fig. 2. The Intensity of the Effects of City Branding Strategies on Place Qualities in Selected Global

In the comparative analysis of the case studies, two distinct types of impact can be identified. First, each urban branding strategy tends to influence different dimensions of place quality. For instance, qualities such as tourism receptivity, eventfulness, pedestrianization, functional diversity, and mixed uses have been enhanced in most cases. These qualities are generally aligned with investment logic, visitor attraction, and the experience economy, and thus show the greatest overlap with the expectations of external audiences. In contrast, qualities such as identity, intangible heritage, and local architectural values have often declined, particularly in projects dominated by commodification strategies or avant-garde architectural interventions, as observed in Times Square and the Central District of Hong Kong. Second, in the case studies, urban branding may have enhanced the tangible qualities of a place; however, it has challenged the intangible attributes of a place, which are more related to the perceptual and mental aspects of a place, for domestic audiences. Most local people were searching for the identity of a place before its popularity and strategies, which have changed due to the process of globalization. At the same time, foreign audiences were faced with a new face of that place.

## 6. FINDINGS

Recent research indicates that, in the context of globalization and urban competitiveness, cities have increasingly adopted urban branding strategies to create more attractive places for living, working, shopping, and other activities (Masuda and Bookman

2016; Yazdanpanah Shahabadi, Sajadzadeh, and Rafieian 2019; Demirbag Kaplan et al. 2010). The objectives of these branding strategies vary across regions; for example, American cities primarily aim to stimulate economic growth, while European cities pursue more comprehensive development goals that emphasize both financial and social well-being. As Prilenska (2012) and Kavartzis argue, the ultimate objective of all branding initiatives should be to improve residents' quality of life and enhance place-based infrastructure.

Figure 3 illustrates the complex and multilayered relationships among place qualities, urban branding strategies, and different audience groups across four globally recognized case studies. The diagram demonstrates that place qualities are not only shaped by branding strategies but also act as influential variables in determining the success or failure of a place brand. According to the research model, urban branding strategies affect all eleven identified place qualities. For instance, methods such as organizing prominent and unique events influence multiple qualities simultaneously—such as flexibility, sociability, and pedestrianization. In this regard, due to the dominance of hegemonic ideologies in urban branding and the diversity of both internal and external user groups, these strategies have produced contradictory impacts on certain place qualities. Specifically, several intangible place qualities have deteriorated from the perspective of internal audiences, particularly under the pressures of globalization and place branding. In contrast, these same qualities may have been enhanced in the perception of external audiences. As a result, the manifestation and perception of the

eleven place qualities among internal and external audiences remain contested and are consistently subject to challenge.

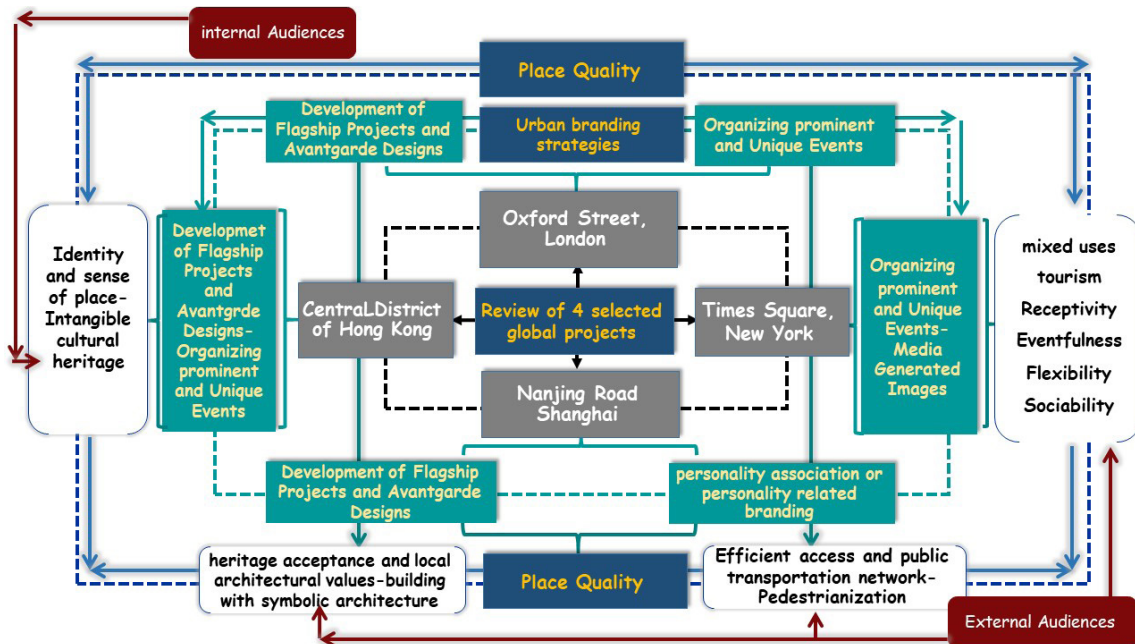


Fig. 3. The Conceptual Model of the Research: Relationships between Place Qualities, Urban Branding Strategies, and the Needs of Internal and External Audiences

In general, most existing studies on urban branding have primarily focused on branding strategies and their positive outcomes within the broader context of globalization and urban competitiveness. These strategies are often associated with the potential for economic, social, and spatial development through the enhancement of both physical (tangible) and non-physical (intangible) urban dimensions. However, the present study aims to investigate the specific ways in which place qualities are influenced by urban branding, adopting a more focused and detailed approach. This aspect has often been addressed only in a general manner in previous research. The distinct contribution of this paper lies in its emphasis on place qualities and the articulation of a cause-and-effect relationship between these qualities and urban branding strategies. This approach allows for the potential reinterpretation and reconceptualization of place qualities within the branding context. The following section introduces and discusses these qualities in detail. It is important to note that the eleven place qualities examined in this research have been derived from existing literature<sup>1</sup> and subsequently analyzed through content analysis within selected case studies.

#### Q1: The Influence on the Quality of Eventfulness

From the perspective of several urban theorists, cities are increasingly viewed as platforms or stages for the experience economy. This experience-based economy necessitates the delivery of unique and desirable experiences to audiences and consumers who seek novel engagements within the global marketplace.

Within this framework, eventfulness is recognized as a causal factor in urban branding, aiming to provide distinctive, place-specific experiences that enhance the city's mental image and contribute to its global visibility and recognition. Events, as spatial phenomena with distinct temporal and experiential dimensions, are consciously curated and staged within urban spaces. Urban branding through a variety of events—religious, cultural, sports-related, political, and more across local, national, and international scales has garnered significant attention. Such event-led strategies have generated substantial economic revenues for cities, elevated their international profiles, attracted large numbers of visitors, and contributed to the construction and reinforcement of the city's brand identity (Fallah Mehrjerdi, Hosseini, and Mansourian 2022; Rehan et al. 2019; Scaramanga 2012; Greenop and Darchen 2016).

Case studies from New York, Shanghai, and London clearly demonstrate how the occurrence of events (cause) contributes to the prominence and renown of urban environments (effect). The New Year's Eve celebrations, historic theaters, and presidential election events at Times Square draw approximately one million visitors, making the area a magnet. Although such events do not necessarily generate direct economic benefits for the locale, they often contribute significantly to its global recognition. Similarly, theatrical performances and street shows in the central area of Nanjing Road provide an excellent stage for the formation of public events and street

performances. Shanghai annually hosts national and international holidays such as the October National Day, Christmas, and New Year's celebrations. By showcasing the region's unique cultural identity during these events, Shanghai offers distinctive experiences to its audiences, which not only enhance the city's prominence but also effectively attract diverse social groups and classes (Ecadi Team 2019; Yang and Zu 2009).

#### **Q2: Influence on the Quality of Tourism Receptivity**

Today, tourists seek destinations that offer unique experiences within the global market. In this context, urban branding and innovative design approaches serve as causal factors in shaping a marketable image, aiming to enhance the tourist presence (Asadi and Mohammadi 2021, 19).

Tourism has been recognized as a source of income for several cities and countries since the twentieth century. Today, urban branding strategies have been employed to construct positive and distinctive urban images, attract global tourism flows, and foster investment opportunities. Accordingly, cities have capitalized on their cultural infrastructures, architectural heritage, and historical buildings and spaces to create sites with a distinctive urban image, resulting in increased tourist attraction (Mohammadi and Marofi 2018; Kavratzis 2004; Warnaby and Medway 2013; Vonolo 2008). Tourism, as a key component of urban branding, often facilitates the creation of multicultural environments. However, some critics argue that the influx of tourists through urban branding processes transforms local communities and alters residents' relationships with place in favor of visitors. This transformation often leads to gentrification, characterized by the displacement of local populations and the influx of new socio-economic groups (Ooi and Stöber 2008; Collins 2021).

Over the past few decades, Times Square has undergone significant morphological and functional transformations, evolving into an accessible and ideal location for investors, developers, tourists, and residents. By serving a diverse range of racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic groups, it has fostered a multicultural environment (Warren 2006, 307). Similarly, the geographical location and rich history of Nanjing Road have supported its retail-driven commercial development, prominently showcasing international brands and thereby contributing to increased tourist arrivals. This iconic commercial corridor attracts more than one million domestic and international visitors annually (Ecadi Team 2019). The spectacular tourist presence along Oxford Street—driven by its abundance of retail stores and festive Christmas lighting has turned it into one of the most popular tourist attractions in London (Afshar Bakeshloo and Griffiths 2021, 145). In Hong Kong, the strategic position of its central district, coupled with its provision of financial and commercial services at both international and global levels, has

also succeeded in attracting investors and tourists alike (De Jong et al. 2018, 533). These case studies demonstrate that a strong urban brand not only enhances the city's tourist appeal but also consolidates its global standing and stimulates tourism-related investment. At the same time, this causal relationship can generate a positive feedback loop; success in attracting tourists reinforces the city's brand, which in turn contributes to the consolidation of the city's international reputation.

#### **Q3: Influence on the Quality of Building with Symbolic Architecture**

Over the past three decades, the design of flagship and symbolic architectural projects by internationally renowned architects and designers has been strategically employed as a key component of urban branding. These projects have played a significant role in shaping the brand identity of cities through innovative and distinctive architectural forms that contribute to the recognition of a city's or place's image (Riza, Doratli, and Fasli 2012, 295).

Symbolic architectural buildings act as catalysts, attracting new investment, driving development, and producing distinctive and unique images that are often recognized as global spaces by international audiences. (Ellisa 2011, 3). In this regard, iconic buildings, while displaying their creative personality and unique architecture, act as the primary cause in strengthening place identity and creating powerful images of cities (Rausch 2009). However, avant-garde architectural projects are not without challenges. Among the most significant are the high costs associated with their design and construction, as well as, in some cases, the morphological inconsistency of such structures with their surrounding urban or historical context (Gospodini 2007, 230).

An examination of case studies illustrates how this causal relationship materializes in practice. The presence of landmark buildings such as: Times Tower as one of the Symbolic Tower of New York with 47 floors and 221 meters high, the Marriott Marquis Hotel which John Portman built with a unique design and the use of advanced technologies, as well as the McDonald's building with its extensive glass walls that provide customers with attractive views of the heart of Times Square, all play a role as strong urban symbols in establishing the identity and enhancing image of New York City (Cottle 2017). In another example, the Royal Meridien Building, constructed in 2004 as a 333-meter-high twisting tower at the entrance of Nanjing Road, has been criticized for blocking the façades of the street's historic buildings and is considered a symbolic structure that conflicts with its surrounding context (Wu 2000, 351). In London, projects such as the Centre Point Tower, a tall office building on Oxford Street, and flagship stores of global brands like John Lewis and Debenhams are among the most important flagship projects in the city (Hammond 2022). In Hong Kong, the establishment

of the International Finance Centre (IFC) in 2003, which is recognized as the tallest building on Hong Kong Island, has become a prominent symbol of the city. Additionally, the Bank of China Tower, designed by the renowned architect I.M. Pei, stands out for its asymmetrical design, which resembles the shoots of a growing bamboo plant, symbolizing both modernity and cultural identity in Hong Kong's urban brand (Fisher 2019).

#### **Q4: Influence on the Quality of Heritage Acceptance and Local Architectural Values**

Internal assets of a place, such as valuable architectural heritage, historic buildings, and monuments, can serve as fundamental drivers of success in urban branding. Urban branding based on tangible heritage and historic assets aims to reflect the authenticity of indigenous architectural values and the unique identity of cities at the international level (Yazdan Panah Shahabadi, Sajadzadeh, and Rafieian 2019; Mengi et al. 2020).

Brand identity, as a crucial dimension of urban branding rooted in buildings, monuments, and other historic assets, contributes to the societal values and fosters an enhanced sense of place. These assets not only provide valuable resources for urban branding but also constitute part of the economic capital that attracts financial flows and generates economic returns (Bellini, Lofredo, and Pasquinelli 2010; Daldanise 2020; Rehan 2013). In this context, the preservation and enhancement of historic heritage and architectural values serve as causes that lead to effects such as the creation of an authentic, renowned, and economically productive city brand.

In many selected case studies, heritage and architectural values have been overlooked within the context of urban branding. For example, the historic buildings in Times Square, such as the Apollo Theatre, Imperial Theatre, and Lyric Theatre, have lost their prominence amidst the square's redevelopment, overshadowed by avant-garde and new constructions (Cottle 2017). Similarly, the historic and neoclassical architecture along parts of Nanjing Road, including the old Phoenix Jewelry Shop, which has been selling jewelry since 1848, and the famous Wu Liang Cai building, known for its variety of eyeglasses, represents enduring links to the past. A stronger connection to the historical context for these elements and buildings could have been considered during the redevelopment of Nanjing Road, significantly contributing to the creation of a distinctive urban image (Wu 2013, 520). Overall, the preservation of historic buildings and the integration of historical elements with contemporary architecture are critical determinants in the urban branding process. However, in some selected projects, such as those on Oxford Street and in Hong Kong, many historic sections have been diminished and their original authenticity weakened due to high-rise urban development and the establishment of Towers with modern architecture.

#### **Q5: The Influence on the Quality of Efficient Access and Public Transportation Network**

An efficient public transportation network is a crucial component of a global city, which must establish a unique position to influence the movement of people and goods effectively. Efficient public transportation acts as a driver and causal factor in the economic development of a region, where environmental benefits, social equity, and economic efficiency must also be considered (Spirin, Zavyalov, and Zavyalova 2016; Cidell 2006).

Urban branding is accompanied by the improvement and strengthening of public infrastructure, including a multimodal and efficient public transportation network, innovations in transportation systems, economic viability of transit operations, and accessibility for diverse user groups in accordance with high global standards (Prilenska 2012; Dinnie 2004; Vonolo 2008; Farag 2019). Overall, the benefits of access to public transportation systems outweigh the challenges; however, it is crucial that efficient and adequate transportation not only attracts significant investments but also prevents conflicts of interest. The formation and distribution of the transportation network should avoid creating negative socio-economic impacts on specific social groups (Spirin, Zavyalov, and Zavyalova 2016, 2078).

Referring to various case studies, Nanjing Road, one of the most central streets in Shanghai, has been equipped with nearby metro, bus, and taxi stations to facilitate convenient access for users. It is easily reachable via Shanghai Metro Line 2 (Yang and Xu 2009, 92). In Times Square, the presence of eleven intersecting subway lines, spiraling beneath the street, has made it the busiest station within New York City's public transportation system (Goldwyn 2014). Similarly, the Central District of Hong Kong, as one of the world's major international financial hubs, benefits from a high-capacity public transit system supported by a multi-level pedestrian network and well-connected metro stations (Siu, Lau, and Lee 1996, 3). Along Oxford Street, various modes of public transportation are available, offering easy access to different areas and ensuring connectivity for a wide range of users (Mercieca et al. 2011, 2).

#### **Q6: The Influence on the Quality of Intangible Cultural Heritage**

Intangible cultural heritage is a key driver in place branding campaigns. Heritage-based place branding involves exploring the local cultural characteristics of a place, identifying its distinctive features, and finding effective ways to articulate and enhance those features to reveal the brand identity (Daldanise 2020; Fan 2014; Mengi et al. 2020; Scaramanga 2012).

To assert the uniqueness of their cultural heritage, cities employ elements such as legends, myths, cultural traditions, imaginations and beliefs, artistic activities, local festivals, archaeology, gastronomy, dialects, and rituals. When these elements are

effectively integrated, they yield outcomes such as the revelation of a place's distinctive features, clearer brand perception, and ultimately, a set of positive images that reinforce cultural values. However, cultural globalization has both short-term and long-term negative consequences, such as the erosion of cultural heritage, privatization, the rise of consumer culture, and an overemphasis on commercial and economic values. These impacts tend to diminish the cultural significance of place and may threaten the identity and diversity of various ethnic groups and communities (Ooi and Stöber 2008; Yazdan Panah Shahabadi, Sajadzadeh, and Rafieian 2019). For example, the annual New Year's Eve celebration in Times Square and the performance of Tarawih prayers, one of the traditions observed by Sunni Muslims during the holy month of Ramadan, have attracted considerable public attention. Similarly, the Garba dance, a traditional folk dance from the Indian state of Gujarāt, was performed in the heart of Times Square in early 2023 following its inscription on UNESCO's Intangible Cultural Heritage list. This event attracted large crowds of New Yorkers and international tourists as men and women dressed in vibrant traditional Garba attire performed the Gujarati dance amidst the glowing billboards, with the rhythm of Garba music resonating across the square (Iqbal 2022; Sengupta 2023). The annual New Year's celebrations and the festive Christmas illuminations along Oxford Street, as part of London's intangible heritage, have also enhanced the city's image and global recognition (Quayson 2011).

#### **Q7: The Influence on the Quality of Functional Diversity and Mixed Uses**

In the contemporary era of globalization, cities aspiring to position themselves as prime investment hubs must attract financial capital and compete with their counterparts by offering a diverse range of attractions and land-use functions. Place branding serves as a strategic tool that transcends conventional marketing approaches, aiming to deliver a comprehensive range of globally competitive facilities and services to diverse user groups (Willer 2021, 16).

Within the context of urban branding, mixed-use development is predominantly oriented toward providing high-quality services and amenities, such as hotels and hospitality complexes, large-scale retail centers featuring internationally recognized brands, and a variety of restaurants designed to cater to tourists. However, a notable adverse outcome of urban branding is the onset of gentrification, often accompanied by a transformation in the character and function of land uses. In such cases, both the physical environment and the associated activities are reconfigured to attract investment and stimulate economic growth, ultimately aligning with the preferences and expectations of international audiences (Montgomery 1998; Rūveyda and Aktaş 2021; Yazdan Panah Shahabadi, Sajadzadeh, and

Rafieian 2019).

For example, Nanjing Road is a prominent tourist destination characterized by a variety of shopping facilities and mixed uses, including jewelry and watch stores, silk fabric shops, restaurants, and internationally renowned brands of apparel and luxury goods, all of which attract a substantial number of visitors (Wu 2000; Jian 2019). Similarly, the central district of Hong Kong offers a comprehensive range of high-quality hotels, serviced apartments, retail outlets, dining establishments, multiple modes of transportation, as well as commercial and financial institutions, thereby creating a high-quality urban environment for both local users and international tourists (Wan 2007, 2).

#### **Q8: The Influence on the Quality of Pedestrianization**

In the context of urban competitiveness, the built environment must deliver the highest quality standards for its audiences. According to Carmona, pedestrianization, as one of the fundamental and primary qualities of the urban environment, is an essential tool for maximizing place values (Carmona 2018, 36). Pedestrianization assessment is a method used to evaluate the built environment to determine how well a space is adapted to the needs of pedestrians. In general terms, pedestrianization indicates the degree of desirability of the built environment for people to attend, meet, spend leisure time, shop, and enjoy an urban area; a factor that will pave the way for the formation of diverse activities for different users. (Rezazadeh, Zebardast, and Latifi 2010, 322).

In developing flagship projects, planners and designers strive to create pedestrian-friendly spaces and attractive public realms, providing infrastructure that enhances pedestrian capability for local residents and tourists, and attracts people to the area like a magnet. Meanwhile, walkable regions act as a key factor in promoting urban health, economic, social, and health goals, and not only encourage pedestrian activity, but also enable equitable access to urban goods, services, and facilities (Grodach 2008; Prilenska 2012; Nogueira and Carvalho 2022; Talen and Koschinsky 2013).

The Times Square redevelopment project has become a successful example of the gradual reduction of vehicle traffic and the redesign of public spaces. It is recognized as an international model for transforming busy, car-filled streets into highly utilized public spaces. In 2009, parts of this square were officially closed to vehicular traffic to encourage pedestrian movement amid a dense concentration of shops, restaurants, and theater entrances. From a safety and pedestrian volume perspective, the implementation of this project was convincing, resulting in an overall reduction in pedestrian and cyclist injuries from 75% to 46%. Statistical data indicate that the number of pedestrians in the area increased by 11%, equivalent to 2,000 individuals (Goldwyn 2014;

Cottle 2017). Similarly, in Nanjing Road, following the government's announcement of a pilot scheme to restrict vehicles on weekends, visitor numbers increased by 30%, and the turnover of shops and shopping centers rose by 90%. Consequently, the government's decision to fully pedestrianize this street, one of the largest pedestrian zones worldwide, was finalized (Yang and Xu 2009; Jian 2019).

#### **Q9: The Influence on the Quality of Identity and Sense of Place**

A brand is the perception held in an individual's mind of a product, place, or service, encompassing all tangible and intangible elements, as well as psychological and sociological characteristics, which are primarily linked to the anticipated identity and perceived images through communication and experience (Ashworth 2011, 56).

Identity and a sense of place within the framework of place branding are deeply rooted in a place's local identity and authentic values, drawing on its history to enhance users' attachment. Otherwise, a superficial and deceptive brand may emerge (Yazdanpanah Shahabadi, Sajadzadeh, and Rafieian 2019; Kavartzis 2004; Campelo et al. 2014; Rausch 2009). However, urban branding can have multiple negative consequences for a city's identity, including the privatization and commercialization of public spaces, the destruction of both tangible and intangible heritage, and ultimately the erasure of its former identity. The processes of globalization and urban branding may lead to the formation of new identities and cultures that conflict with local heritage and the authentic identity of the place, and are primarily shaped to meet the economic and commercial needs of the present era (Sarvari and Majedi 2012, 70).

The analysis of selected case studies in this research suggests that the identity and sense of place within the framework of place branding have evolved, diverging from the historical character of these spaces. For instance, Times Square, which before the twentieth century served as a venue for films, plays, and theaters, transformed New York's social, economic, and racial crises, becoming an urban center marked by social problems such as theft, corruption, and drug-related activities. In subsequent years, through the efforts of the government, private sector, and real estate developers, a new identity emerged for the square, associated with different social groups, and today it has become one of the most vibrant urban centers worldwide (Warren 2006; Goldwyn 2014). Similarly, in the central district of Hong Kong, formerly known as Victoria Harbour during British colonial rule, economic transformations and increased migration have generated a new identity marked by distrust between former residents and newcomers, creating an ethnic and social class divide. Such an identity crisis, which often begins with the destruction of place, leads to a change in social hierarchies and ultimately the weakening or elimination of certain social classes.

#### **Q10: The Influence on the Quality of Sociability**

Emphasizing branding strategies in many cities serves to present an image of vitality, sociability, and creativity for these places. It has been used as a tool for competing in the global capital market and attracting tourists. Sociability is a quality that distinguishes successful urban areas from others and depends on the number of people present and the pedestrian flows at different times of the day, as well as the availability of facilities and the frequency of events and celebrations (Chang and Huang 2008; Montgomery 1998).

Sociability within the framework of place branding, based on the implementation of its strategies through participation in events, visitation, and reception of flagship and avant-garde projects, is closely related to tourism and vibrancy. The portrayal of people's presence in urban spaces during the branding process may resonate primarily with outsiders and hold little value or authenticity for residents, or vice versa. This is because, within the context of place branding, urban spaces are often presented as luxury commodities that become tourist destinations and accommodations, thereby altering the social structure of these places (Pasala and Hallowell 2019).

The examination of selected cases, including New York's Times Square, shows that this square, as a lively public space, has been able to meet the needs of a wide range of age and gender groups. Its prominent position in global city rankings has attracted various social groups, including tourists, shoppers, and foreign investors. In Nanjing Road, several factors—such as commercial activities, diversity of land uses, the design of the central square, and built environment elements—have played a significant role in increasing the presence of people on this street (Ecadi Team 2019). Oxford Street, known as Europe's busiest shopping street with approximately half a million daily visitors, has experienced a form of social isolation and exclusion due to the emergence of international brand stores, hotels, and restaurants, limiting access and shopping opportunities for individuals from various social classes (Bakeshloo and Griffiths 2021; Hammond 2022).

#### **Q11: The Influence on the Quality of Flexibility**

Flexibility within the framework of place branding must enable freedom and choice of functions in urban spaces by providing appropriate physical conditions for diverse users. The presence of flexible spaces is vital to ensuring the success of a place brand. An urban brand should encompass the varied interests of its target community and multiple users, both local and external, and be supported by the general public. Eventfulness strategies, as a key component of place branding, require flexible spaces that can at any time provide a suitable platform for the spontaneous activities of users, accommodating diverse functions with minimal physical alterations as the type of event changes (Hallowell 2019; Merrilees, Miller, and Herington 2013; Richards 2017).

For example, in 2000, Nanjing Street was transformed into a multifunctional and flexible street, catering to pedestrians with commercial, recreational, and entertainment activities. In addition to facilitating easy pedestrian movement, numerous street events and festivals are held there (Wu 2013, 513). Times Square, as a creative, vibrant, and attractive urban center, has undergone significant physical transformations in recent decades. The creation of aesthetically flexible spaces and street furniture has provided a platform for public art displays. Visitors experience unique activities in Times Square, which serves as a high-quality public space (Warren 2006).

## 7. CONCLUSION

Place branding has become a crucial strategy for cities aiming to enhance their image and competitiveness on a global scale. In the context of globalization, cities have increasingly turned to tools such as place branding to maintain their positions in regional and international competitions. Urban branding is a key approach through which cities can secure their rightful share in the globalization process by leveraging their strategies to create strong and positive images, thereby increasing their likelihood of attracting investment in competitive markets. This study, employing a qualitative approach and focusing on case studies from four global cities (New York, London, Shanghai, and Hong Kong), examines the impacts of place branding on place qualities and how these qualities are represented to both internal and external audiences.

The study's findings indicate that although urban branding strategies have been successful in enhancing international city images and attracting investment and tourism, they have often led to a decline in the identity, cultural, and social qualities of residents. While tangible qualities, such as pedestrianization, building with symbolic architecture, functional diversity, and mixed uses, have improved, intangible qualities like identity, sense of place, and cultural heritage have faced serious challenges. This contradiction reflects a fundamental duality in the logic of urban branding, which often prioritizes external audiences and, without adequate consideration of contextual factors (historical, cultural, social, economic, and physical), equips and upgrades places and place infrastructures according to the preferences of dominant stakeholders, sometimes conflicting with the authenticity and former identity of the place.

In response to the research question of how urban branding affects place qualities, it can be noted that urban branding, with its focus on enhancing the city's image, has induced dual and contradictory changes in place qualities. In fact, the relationship between urban branding and place qualities can be likened to the relationship between form and structure: urban branding (form) possesses unique and attractive

characteristics, while place qualities (structure) provide genuine experiential foundations for users and audiences. In this relationship, the form (brand) may be appealing. However, a good structure (place qualities) is what encourages people to return to the city and its urban spaces, thereby contributing to a positive experience for both residents and visitors. Therefore, findings drawn from theoretical foundations and case studies of selected global cities indicate that urban branding, through the application of multiple strategies, may exert varying degrees of influence on certain place qualities depending on the contextual requirements and potentials of each place.

In an asymmetrical balance, the enhancement of some place qualities may lead to the decline of others. For example, designing buildings with Symbolic architecture, while creating a unique image for a place, may simultaneously cause the marginalization and degradation of local heritage and architectural values. Similarly, the increase in tourist presence might come at the expense of a place's identity and sense of place, as residents are displaced. The study of selected cases, such as the redevelopment of Times Square, Nanjing Road, and the Central District of Hong Kong, also revealed that urban spaces have been subjected to excessive commercialization and standardization. Importantly, the qualities placed within the context of urban branding undergo changes that may manifest differently outside this sphere. Some qualities, such as symbolic building design, attention to intangible cultural heritage, and eventful activities, operate more independently, whereas others, like vitality, flexibility, sociability, and identity, function dependently and are influenced by the former group. This study demonstrates that the relationship between urban branding and place qualities is dynamic and reciprocal, with each influencing the other. Therefore, it is recommended that, instead of solely focusing on flagship projects and the commodification of space, attention be given to redefining intangible place qualities, such as sense of place, local narratives, and contextual cultures, to establish a meaningful balance between international appeal and regional authenticity. Many urban branding strategies continue to prioritize economic growth, often at the expense of broader social and environmental objectives. This necessitates a balanced approach that integrates multiple dimensions of value.

Successful branding often requires a comprehensive and participatory approach that involves multiple stakeholders. Urban brands, due to their diverse target groups and place offerings, are inherently complex. The involvement of various stakeholders in guiding the branding process and shaping policies that impact urban development is significant. The perception of urban brands can vary considerably among different target groups. Cities must continuously innovate and adapt their branding strategies to remain competitive on the global stage, leveraging digital tools to attract

investment, talent, and tourism. Future research should focus on interdisciplinary approaches, integrating insights from urban studies, digital media, and marketing to develop comprehensive urban branding strategies. Consequently, cities are expected to achieve sustainable urban competitiveness, an approach that entails a balanced and satisfactory integration

of multiple physical, economic, social, perceptual, and environmental dimensions. Appropriately identifying strategies and their associated qualities, alongside consideration of contextual issues, can help urban planners and designers better understand the complexities of urban spaces.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This article wasn't supported by any financial or spiritual sponsors.

## CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors have no conflicts of interest to declare.

## MORAL APPROVAL

The authors commit to observe all the ethical principles of the publication of the scientific work based on the ethical principles of COPE. In case of any violation of the ethical principles, even after the publication of the article, they give the journal the right to delete the article and follow up on the matter.

## PARTICIPATION PERCENTAGE

The authors state that they have directly participated in the stages of conducting research and writing the article.

## ENDNOTE

1. The spatial qualities influenced by urban branding in this study were systematically searched, identified, selected, and evaluated through other sources and the scientific theories of scholars. The relevant articles were identified and assessed by searching two reputable scientific databases, Google Scholar and Scopus, using keywords related to the research topic, including “place quality and urban design”, “place branding and urban design”, as well as the two main research variables, “place quality and place branding”.

The search process was carried out under the following conditions:

1. A time span between 2005 and 2023, limited to review articles;
2. Exclusion of articles presented at conferences and symposia, government reports, theses and dissertations, books, or book chapters;
3. Exclusion of articles unrelated to the study objectives or published in journals and fields outside of urban design.

Ultimately, by applying these filters and based on the stated criteria, 40 articles consistent with the objectives and keywords of the research were identified, reviewed, and summarized. These include:

Carmona (2018), Durmaz (2014), Sanchez et al. (2020), Yigitcanlar et al. (2020), Yazdanpanah Shahabadi (2019), Richards (2022), Trip (2007), Greenop & Darchen (2015), Julier (2005), Ashworth (2009), Scaramanga (2016), Punter (2010), Vuignier (2017), Beck & Storopoli (2021), Gregory (2019), Lucarelli & Berg (2011), Edensor & Bille (2017), Pps (2007), Nogueira & Carvalho (2022), Moulay et al. (2017), Aydoghmish & Rafieian (2020), Richards (2017), Shamsuddin & Ujang (2008), Taha (2012), Ntounis et al. (2019), Madanipour et al. (2018), Brokalaki & Comunian (2021), Rosnan et al. (2021), Esmaeilpoorarabi et al. (2020), Mengi & Guaralda (2020), Fallah Mehrjerdi et al. (2022), Peel & Lloyd (2008), Pugalys (2009), Talen & Koschinsky (2013), Chong (2017), Rahul & Vandna (2022), Stellacci & Moro (2022), Zamanifard et al. (2018), Song et al. (2022), Yavuz (2020).

## REFERENCES

- Anttiroiko, Ari-Veikko. 2015. City Branding as a Response to Global Intercity Competition. *Journal of Growth and Change* 46(2): 233-252.
- Ashworth, Gregory. 2009. The Instrument of Place brand :How is it Done?. *Journal Of European Spatial Research and Policy* 16(1). <https://doi.org/10.2478/v10105-009-0001-9>
- Asadi, Zohreh, and Hamid Mohammadi. 2021. Creating an urban brand to develop creative tourism using City Brand Management (CBM) model (Case Study: Junqan city). *Motaleate Shahri* 10(40): 27-42. doi: [10.34785/J011.2021.114/Jms.2021.132](https://doi.org/10.34785/J011.2021.114/Jms.2021.132). [in Persian]
- Azmudeh, Maryam. 2012. Communicational Scape; Media facade in city square. *Journal of Manzar* 20(35). [in Persian]
- Ashworth, Gregory. 2011. *Public Paſts in Plural Societies: Models for Management in the Poſtsecular City*. Poſt-secular cities: Space, theory and practice.
- Ashworth, Gregory, and Mihalis Kavaratzis. 2010. *Towards effective place brand management: Branding European cities and regions*. Edward Elgar Publishing.
- Anholt, Simon. 2007. *Competitive Identity: The new brand management for nations, cities and regions*. Basing-stoke: Palgrave Macmillan UK.
- Abusaada, Hisham, and Abeer Elshater. 2021. Effect of people on placemaking and affective atmospheres in city streets. *Ain Shams Engineering Journal* 12(3): 3389-3403.
- AfsharBakeshloo, Farbod, and Sam Griffiths. 2021. A tale of “two streets”: changing land-uses and media contexts on Oxford Street, 1970 and 2019 compared. International Seminar on Urban Form and The Sustainable and PROSPEROUS Cities, Glasgow, 2021. <https://doi.org/10.17868/ſtrath.00080375>
- Bellini, Nicola, Anna Loffredo, and Cecilia Pasquinnelli. 2010. Managing Otherness: The political economy of place images in the case of Tuscany. *Branding European cities and regions* 1: 89-115.
- Block, India. 2017. Plans unveiled to pedestrianise London’s Oxford Street in 2018, November 6, 2017. <https://www.dezeen.com/2017/11/06/london-oxford-street-pedestrian-zone-2018-news/>
- Cottle, Sara. 2017. Times Square Through the Decades 1900-today. December 26, 2017. <https://www.milrose.com/insights/times-square-through-the-decades>
- Carmona, Matthew, Claudio De Magalhaes, and Leo Hammond. 2008. *Public space: The Management Dimension*. London: Routledge Press. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203927229>
- Carmona, Matthew. 2018. Place Value: Place quality and its impact on health, social, economic and environmental outcomes. *Journal of Urban Design* 24(1): 1-48.
- Collins, Brady. 2021. Place Branding and Its Discontents: The Politics and Management of Neighborhood Governance System. *Journal of Planning Education and Research* 1-13.
- Campelo, Adriana, Robert Aitken, Maree Thyne, and Juergen Gnoth. 2014. Sense of Place: The Importance for Destination Branding. *Journal of Travel Research* 53(2): 154-166. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0047287513496474>
- Cleave, Evan, and Godwin Arku. 2014. Place branding and economic development at the local level in Ontario, Canada. *GeoJournal*. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10708-014-9555-9>
- Chang, Tou C., and Shirlena Huang. 2008. Geographies of everywhere and nowhere: place- (UN) making in a world city. *International Development Planning Review* 30(3): 227-247.
- Chan, Chung-Shing, and Mike Peter’s. 2011. Investigating brand strategy gap in Hong Kong: first impressions and unique attractions. *Journal Of Asian Geographer* 38(1): 1-22.
- Cidell, Julie. 2006. Air transportation, airports and the discourses and practices of globalization. *Urban Geography* 27(7): 651-663.
- Dinnie, Keith. 2004. Place branding: Overview of an emerging literature. *Place branding* 1(1): 106-110.
- Durmaz, S. Bahar. 2015. Analyzing the Quality of Place: Creative Clusters in Soho and Beyoğlu. *Journal of Urban Design* 20(1): 93-124. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/13574809.2014.972348>
- Daldanise, Gaia. 2020. From Place-Branding to Community-Branding: A Collaborative Decision-Making Process for Cultural Heritage Enhancement. *Journal of Sustainability* 12(4).
- Demirbag, Kaplan, Melike Oznur Yurt, Burcu Guneri, and Kemal Kurtulus. 2010. Branding places: applying brand personality concept to cities. *European Journal of Marketing* 44(9/10): 1286-1304.
- De Jong, Martin, Yawei Chen, Simon Joss, Haiyan Lu, Miaoxi Zhao, Qihui Yang, and Chaoning Zhang. 2018. Explaining city branding practices in China’s three mega-city regions: The role of ecological modernization. *Journal of Cleaner Production* 179: 527-543.
- Ellisa, Evawani. 2011. Enhancing City Branding through Public Spaces. In *12th International Conference on Quality International Research, Bali, Indonesia*, 2011.

- Ecadi Team. 2019. The Nanjing Pedestrian Road Extension. <https://landezine-award.com/the-nanjing-pedestrian-road-extension>
- Farag, Alshimaa Aboelmakarem. 2019. *The story of NEOM city: Opportunities and challenges. New cities and community extensions in Egypt and the Middle East: Visions and challenges*. "Ed" by Sahar Attia, Zeinab Shafik, and Asmaa Ibrahim. Cham: Springer.
- Florek, Magdalena, Marta Hereźniak, and Anna Augustyn. 2021. Measuring the effectiveness of city brand strategy. In search for a universal evaluative framework. *Journal Of Cities*.
- Fan, Hong. 2014. Branding a place through its historical and cultural heritage: The branding project of Tofu Village in China. *Journal of Place Branding and Public Diplomacy* 10(4): 279-287.
- Fallah Mehrjerdi, Mahsa Fallah, Ali Hosseini, and Hossein Mansourian. 2022. Toward a place quality manifesto with the experience economy approach. *Journal of Cities*.
- Fisher, Max. 2019. One Country, Two Nationalisms': The Identity Crisis Behind Hong Kong's Turmoil. <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/09/27/world/asia/hong-kong-protests-identity.html>
- Gospodini, Aspa. 2002. European Cities in Competition and the New 'Uses' of Urban Design. *Journal of Urban Design* 7(1): 59-73.
- Gospodini, Aspa. 2007. Urban morphology and place identity in European cities: built heritage and innovative design. *Journal of Urban Design* 9(2): 225-248.
- Gospodini, Aspa. 2001. Urban Design, Urban Space Morphology, Urban Tourism: An Emerging New Paradigm Concerning Their Relationship. *Journal Of European Planning Studies* 9(7). <https://doi.org/10.1080/09654310120079841>
- González LR, Gale F. 2021, Theorizing "Value" in Sustainable Urban Branding Strategies. *Public Branding and Marketing*: 25-41.
- Greenop, Kelly, and Sébastien Darchen. 2016. Identifying place in place branding: core and periphery in Brisbane's "New World City". *Geo Journal*: 379-394.
- Grodach, Carl. 2008. Museums As Urban Catalysts: The Role of Urban Design in Flagship Cultural Development. *Journal of Urban Design* 13(2): 195-212.
- Gaubatz, Piper. 2004. Globalization and the development of new central business districts in Beijing, Shanghai and Guangzhou. *Routledge Group*: 87-108.
- Goldwyn, Eric. 2014. How "People-Centered" Design Made Times Square the Place To Be on New Years, December 30, 2014. <https://nextcity.org/urbanist-news/urban-design-times-square-concrete-bowtie-density-gehl-new-years-eve>
- Ghahremani, Hooman, Sepideh Afsari Baještani, Linda McCarthy, and Mahshid Jalalianhossein. 2021. Transformation of Urban Spaces within Cities in the Context of Globalization and Urban Competitiveness. *Journal of Urban Planning and Development*. [https://doi.org/10.1061/\(ASCE\)UP.1943-5444.0000703](https://doi.org/10.1061/(ASCE)UP.1943-5444.0000703)
- Golkar, Kourosh. 2008. "Design-Oriented Urban Design; Policy-Oriented Urban Design: Model Terms of References for Guiding Instruments in Iran. *Journal of Soffeh* 17(1). [in Persian]
- Hammond, Julia. 2022. Oxford Street in London One of London's busiest streets, December 26, 2022. <https://fr.hotels.com/see/go/england/oxford-street>
- Hanna, Sonya, and Jennifer Rowley. 2021. Place branding and city image: Exploring integration in city planning and policy-making. *Journal of Place Management and Development*.
- Iqbal, Zainab. 2022. New York Muslims voice concern over Times Square's first Tarawih prayers, April 1, 2022. <https://www.middleeasteye.net/news/us-new-york-city-ramadan-tarawih-prayer-times-square>
- Jong, Martin, Yawei Chen, Simon Joss, Haiyan Lu, Miaoxi Zhao, Qihui Yang, and Chaoning Zhang. 2018. Explaining city branding practices in China's three mega-city regions: The role of ecological modernization. *Journal of Cleaner Production*: 527-543.
- Jian, Yang. 2019. Shanghai's iconic Nanjing Road Pedestrian Mall to be extended, September 11, 2019. <https://www.shine.cn/news/metro/1909111877/>
- Kelleher, Michael. 2005. Images of the Past: Historical Authenticity and Inauthenticity from Disney to Times Square. *Journal of Heritage Stewardship* 1(2).
- Kavaratzis, Michail. 2008. From city marketing to city branding An Interdisciplinary Analysis with Reference to Amsterdam, Budapest and Athens, Thesis Master's degree, Groningen univ.
- Kavaratzis, Michail. 2004. From city marketing to city branding: Towards a theoretical framework for developing city brands. *Place Branding* 1(1).
- Madanipour, Ali. 2006. Roles and challenges of urban design. *Journal of Urban Design* 11(2): 173-193.
- Masuda, Jeffrey, and Sonia Bookman. 2016. Neighbourhood branding and the right to the city. *Journal of Progress*

in *Human Geography* 42(2): 1-18.

- Makagon, Daniel. 2003. A search for social connection in America's town square Times square and urban public life. *Southern Communication Journal* 69(1).
- Miao, Pu. 2011. Brave New City: Three Problems in Chinese Urban Public Space since the 1980s. *Journal of Urban Design* 16(2): 179-207.
- Montgomery, John. 1998. Making a city:Urbanity,vitality and urban design. *Journal of Urban Design* 3(1).
- Merrilees, Merrilees, Bill, Dale Miller, and Carmel Herington. 2013.City branding: A facilitating framework for stressed satellite cities. *Journal of Business Research*: 37-44.
- Mohammadi, Ahmad, and Sakineh Marofi. 2018. Evaluation of urban branding strategies in Iranian cities. *International Journal of Human Capital in Urban Management*: 153-166.
- Mengi, Onur, Ana Bilandzic, Marcus Foth, and Mirko Guaralda. 2020. Mapping Brisbane's Casual Creative Corridor: Land use and policy implications of a new genre in urban creative ecosystems. *Journal of Land Use Policy*. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.landusepol.2020.104792>
- Mercieca, Joseph, Ioannis Kaparias, Michael GH Bell, and Elspeth Finch. 2011. Integrated street design in high-volume junctions: The case study of London's Oxford Circus. The *1st International Conference on Access Management, Athens, Greece, 2011*.
- Nogueira, Sónia, and João MS Carvalho. 2022. Unlocking the dichotomy of place identity,place Image and Its impact on place satisfaction for ecotourism destinations. *Journal of Ecotourism*: 1-19.
- Ooi, Can-Seng, and Birgit Stöber. 2008. Authenticity-in-Context: Embedding the Arts and Culture in Branding Berlin and Singapore. *Creative Encounters Working Paper* 6: 1-20.
- Pasalar, Celen, and George Dewey Hallowell. 2019. A grassroots research approach for branding urban districts. *Journal of Architectural Research* 13(2): 331-348. <https://doi.org/10.1108/ARCH-03-2019-0047>
- Prilenska, Viktorija. 2012. City Branding as a Tool for Urban Regeneration:Towards a Theoretical Framework. *Journal of Architecture and Urban Planning* 6: 12-16.
- Quayson, Ato. 2011. Signs of the Times: Discourse Ecologies and Street Life on Oxford St. *Journal of City & Society* 22(1): 72-96.
- Riza, Müge, Naciye Doratli, and Mukaddes Fasli. 2012. City Branding and Identity. *Journal of Planning Social and Behavioral Sciences*: 293-300.
- Richards, Greg. 2017. From Place Branding to Placemaking: The role of events, inInternational. *Journal of Event and Festival Management* 8(1): 8-23. <https://doi.org/10.1108/IJEFM-09-2016-0063>
- Rausch, Anthony. 2009. Capitalizing on Creativity in Rural Areas: National and Local Branding in Japan. *Journal of Rural and Community Development* 4(2): 65-79.
- Rehan, Reeman Mohammed, Mohammed Refaat, Ghina Maher Hakim, Rouba Mayyas Gamal, and Ghadah Baraat. 2019. Cultural Urban Branding as an Approach Towards Sustainability A case study of Madinah, KSA. *International Journal on: Proceedings of Science and Technology*.
- Radosavljevic, Uroš, and Irena Kuletin Čulafić. 2019. Use of Cultural Heritage for PLace Branding in Educational Projects: The Case of Smederevo and Golubac Fortresses on the Danube. *Journal of Sustainability*. <https://doi.org/10.3390/su11195234>
- Rehan, Reeman Mohammed. 2013. Urban branding as an effective sustainability tool in urban development. *Housing and Building National Research Center HBRC Journal*: 222-230.
- Rüyeyda, Betül, and Nilüfer Kart Aktas. 2021. The Effect Of Social Change And Popular Culiure In Historical Place:The Case Of İstiklal Avenue. *Turkish Journal of Landscape Research* 4(2): 129-145.
- Rezazadeh, Raziieh, Esfandiar Zebardast, and Laleh Latifi. 2010. Perceptual measurement of neighborhoods walkability and its influential factors in neighborhoods (a case study:Chizer neighborhood). *Urban Management Journal*. [in Persian]
- Sarvari, Hadi, and Hamid Majedi. 2012.The Role of Urban Design on the Branding of Urban Space. *International Journal Of Architecture and Urban Development* 2(2): 67-72.
- Spirin, Iosif, Dmitry Zavyalov, and Nadezhda Zavyalova. 2016. Globalization And Development Of Sustainable public Tranport Systems. *16th International Scientific Conference Globalization and Its Socio-Economic Consequences, Slovakia, 2016, 2076-2084*. Zilina University.
- Shirzadi, reza. 2014. Government Development In Hong Kong. *Journal of Political Science Quarterly* 9(1): 37-60. [in Persian]
- Scaramanga, Marinda. 2012. Talking about art A theoretical framework clarifying the association between culture and place branding. *Journal of Place Management and Development* 5(1).
- Siu, Yu, Stephen, lau, and Hoyin lee. 1996. The vertial urban environment of Hong Kong. In *Association of Collegiate Schools of Architecture European Conference*. Hong Kong, 1996, Hong Kong university.

- Sengupta, Trisha. 2023. People perform Garba at Times Square to celebrate dance form getting UNESCO, December 8, 2023. <https://www.hindustantimes.com/trending/people-perform-garba-at-times-square-to-celebrate-dance-form-getting-unesco-tag-101702045495666.html>
- Talen, Emily, and Julia Koschinsky. 2013. The walkable neighborhood: A literature review. *International Journal of Sustainable Land Use and Urban Planning* 1(1): 42-63.
- Trip, Jan Jacob. 2007. Assessing Quality Of place:A Comparative analysis of Amsterdam and Rotterdam. *Journal Of Urban Affairs* 29(5): 501-517. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467.9906.2007.00362.x>
- Vonolo, Alberto. 2008. The Image of the creative city: some reflections on urban branding in Turin. *Journal of Cities* 25(6): 370-382. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cities.2008.08.001>
- Warnaby, Gary, and Dominic Medway. 2013. What about the 'place' in place marketing. *Sage journals* 13(3): 345-363. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1470593113492992>
- Wollman, Elizabeth. 2002. The economic development of the "new" Times Square and its impact on the Broadway musical. *American Music* 20(4): 445-465. <https://doi.org/10.2307/1350153>
- Wu, Jiaping. 2013. Globalization and Emerging Office and Commercial Landscapes in Shanghai. *Urban Geography* 32(4): 511-530. <http://dx.doi.org/10.2747/0272-3638.32.4.511>
- Wu, Fulong. 2000. Place promotion in Shanghai, PRC. *Journal of Cities* 17(5): 349-361.
- Yazdan Panah Shahabadi, Mohammad Reza, Hassan Sajadzadeh, and Mojtaba Rafieian. 2019. Explaining Theoretical model of place branding: an asset-based approach to regeneration of the historic district of Tehran. *Journal of Brand Management* 27(4): 377-392. <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41262-020-00186-7>
- Willer, Christopher. 2021. Rebranding place "to build community": neighborhood branding in Buffalo, NY. *Urban Geography* 43(9): 1350-1371.
- Wan, Sancia WS. 2007. The Central Business District of Hong Kong: Spatial and Functional Changes Since the 1990s. *The International Journal of Interdisciplinary Social Sciences* 2(2): 53-64.
- Warren, Stacy. 2006. Review Essay: Learning From Times square. *Journal Of Urban History* 32(2): 302-313. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0096144205281609>
- Yang, Zhen, and Miao Xu. 2009. Evolution, public use and design of Central Pedestrian Districts in large Chinese cities: A case study of Nanjing Road, Shanghai. *Urban design International Journal* 14(2): 84-98.
- Yiu, Wai, Chu, Stephen. 2011. Brand Hong Kong: Asia's World City as Method?. *Journal of Visual Anthropology*: 46-58.
- Zenker, Sebastian, and Erik Braun. 2010. The Place Brand Centre –A Conceptual Approach for the Brand Management of Places. *39th European marketing academy conference, Copenhagen, Denmark, 2010*, 1-8. Hamburg university.
- Zhao, R., J. Edelenbos, and M. De Jong. 2025. Between branding and being: how are inclusive city branding and inclusive city practices related?. *Journal of Place Management and Development* 18(1): 20-39.

#### HOW TO CITE THIS ARTICLE

Baratzadeh, Fatemeh, and Hooman Ghahremani. 2025. Urban Branding and the Challenges of Place Quality (A Critical Reading of Contradictory Representations in Four Global Cities). *Armanshahr Architecture & Urban Development Journal* 18(51): 35-54.

DOI: 10.22034/AAUD.2025.461796.2892

URL: [https://www.armsanshahrjournal.com/article\\_227407.html](https://www.armsanshahrjournal.com/article_227407.html)



#### COPYRIGHTS

Copyright for this article is retained by the author(s), with publication rights granted to the Armanshahr Architecture & Urban Development Journal. This is an open-access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution License.

<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>

