

# City marketing: A look at its research trajectory through bibliometric analysis

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## ABSTRACT

**Objective.** A bibliometric study was conducted to identify research patterns around the city marketing topic.

**Design/Methodology/Approach.** We extracted documents from Scopus from 2000 to 2023 and analyzed scientific production to identify productivity patterns at the institutional, journal, and author levels. Furthermore, the study employed network analysis to map the co-occurrence of terms and the co-citation of documents and journals. This was achieved using analytical tools such as VOSviewer, which enabled the visualization of connections and the identification of the most influential topics and literature.

**Results/Discussion.** Regarding geographical distribution, most of the most productive institutions are located in Europe, which suggests that this continent is at the vanguard of research in this field. The most productive journals are *Information Communication Technologies and City Development* and *Cities*. The researcher with the most publications is *Escourido-Calvo, M.*, with five articles. Subsequently, several authors have published four articles, including *Barajas, A.*, *Braun, E.*, *Karachalis, N.*, and *Kavaratzis, M.* The word clustering revealed three main themes: urban planning and development, city branding, and economic aspects of cities. The co-citation of journals revealed that the most prominent journals are on urbanism, geography, market research, and sustainability. Four clusters were identified with the co-citation of documents: *Cluster 1: Urban Planning and City Image Management*, *Cluster 2: Urban Competitiveness and Economic Development*, *Cluster 3: Urban Image and Public Perception*, and *Cluster 4: Urban Culture and Regeneration*.

**Conclusions.** This analysis indicates that European institutions predominantly research city marketing, a field well-represented in various academic journals on technology, sustainability, and innovation. The network analysis showed that cities utilize branding and marketing strategies to position themselves in a global market. From urban planning to image management, competitiveness, and culture, cities engage in a process of self-promotion, not only to attract tourists but also to attract investment and talent. The literature indicates that developing a robust brand identity, which incorporates economic, cultural, and administrative elements, is crucial.

**Keywords:** city marketing; city branding; bibliometric analysis; urban marketing; urban branding; destination marketing.

**Received:** 09-07-2024. **Accepted:** 22-10-2024. **Published:** 25-07-2025.

**How to cite:** Cotrina-Coral, G. S. (2024). City marketing: A look at its research trajectory through bibliometric analysis. *Iberoamerican Journal of Science Measurement and Communication*; 5(3), 1-11. DOI: 10.47909/ijsmc.152

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

CITY MARKETING represents a consolidated practice in urban management, encompassing a range of strategic activities. According to Boisen (2007):

The fundamental logic of city marketing thus implies planning and management of both ‘real’ aspects of the city as well as ‘perceptions’ of the city, pressing the issue of the way in which city marketing is organised and integrated into the systems of urban governance.

City marketing is gaining traction in urban planning, as evidenced by the growing number of cities incorporating it into their strategies (Kavaratzis, 2009). Kotler (1999) offers a simplified definition of city marketing, asserting that it merely applies marketing principles to urban contexts.

Historically, cities have utilized various media to promote their image, including television, radio, magazines, and events. However, the advent of social networks has significantly enhanced the potency of this medium (Zhou & Wang, 2024). Despite the need for more research on the subject, Ma *et al.* (2021) have identified a need for further investigation into how cities employ image strategies. City marketing is predicated on identifying the distinctive characteristics that define a city’s unique personality, which are then promoted to attract individuals and groups (Goovaerts, Van Biesbroeck & Van Tilt, 2014).

As posited by Kavaratzis (2007), the process of city marketing commences with a comprehensive examination of the city’s existing circumstances, encompassing the identification of its inherent strengths, potential avenues for growth, and the target audiences that may be engaged. Based on this assessment, a vision is formulated, and goals are established through collaboration with various stakeholders. Subsequently, specific projects are devised to achieve the goals above, with the roles of the multiple parties involved being clearly defined. The implementation of the measures encompasses spatial, financial, organizational, and promotional aspects. Ultimately, the process entails continuous monitoring and assessment of outcomes, enabling adjustments and reiterations based on insights gained.

A review of the scientific literature reveals many studies about city image and marketing strategies in a diverse array of cities and regions. These include studies conducted in China (Ma *et al.*, 2021), India (Amore & Roy, 2020), Greece (Deffner *et al.*, 2020), Indonesia (Wibowo *et al.*, 2023; Miftahuddin *et al.*, 2021), Europe (Van Den Berg & Braun, 2017), Turkey (Gümüş, 2016), Ukraine (Dril, Galkin, & Bibik, 2016), and numerous other locations. A detailed examination of the scientific literature on city marketing, as presented by Osorio-Andrade, Murcia-Zorrilla, and Arango-Espinal (2020), reveals a notable surge in research activity in this domain, particularly since 2015. In light of the considerations above, an analysis of the scientific production on the subject in Scopus will be conducted to identify specific research patterns.

## 2. METHODOLOGY

As stated in the introductory section, Scopus was the primary database for this article due to its comprehensive coverage of scholarly publications across numerous disciplines. The period under consideration, spanning from 2000 to 2023, was used to identify research trends. The search strategy included the keyword “city marketing,” which was applied to titles, abstracts, and keywords. Filters were used to limit the search to articles, reviews, conference papers, conference reviews, and book chapters to ensure the relevance of the results.

The extracted data included comprehensive bibliographic information, such as titles, authors, affiliations, publication years, keywords, countries of origin, and sources. This data was then processed for disambiguation and normalization. Subsequently, an analysis of scientific production was conducted to identify productivity patterns at the institutional, journal, and author levels. Furthermore, the study employed network analysis to map the co-occurrence of terms and the co-citation of documents and journals. This was achieved using analytical tools such as VOSviewer, which enabled the visualization of connections and the identification of the most influential topics and literature.

A co-occurrence analysis of keywords was conducted to identify the primary themes, which were then grouped into thematic clusters. This approach facilitated the understanding of

the sub-areas of research within the field. In this instance, terms with a frequency of five or more were selected, resulting in a map comprising 63 words. Similarly, citations were analyzed to identify the most frequently cited documents and journals. A map of 107 was generated in the co-citation of journals, as only those with ten or more than ten co-citations were included. In the case of documents, only those with more than five co-citations were included, resulting in a map of 61 documents.

The results were interpreted to provide a comprehensive view of the current state of city marketing research. For data analysis, various tools were employed, including Excel and VOSviewer. These tools facilitated the organization, visualization, and analysis of networks. This methodology facilitated a structured and comprehensive understanding of city marketing research in Scopus.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1. Literature output

A review of the scientific literature reveals that the University of Thessaly in Greece has the highest productivity in city marketing research, having published seven articles on the subject. The following most productive institutions are Erasmus University Rotterdam in the Netherlands and the University of A Coruña in Spain, which have published six articles. These institutions are distinguished as the primary contributors to the field, exemplifying a noteworthy dedication to advancing knowledge in this domain. Other institutions of note include Delft University of Technology in the Netherlands and Manchester Metropolitan University in the United Kingdom, which have published four articles (See Table 1).

Institution, Country	Number of articles
University of Thessaly, Greece	7
Erasmus University Rotterdam, Netherlands	6
Universidad A Coruña, Spain	6
Delft University of Technology, Netherlands	4
Manchester Metropolitan University, United Kingdom	4
Royal Institute of Technology, Sweden	4
Simon Fraser University, Canada	4
Universidad Complutense de Madrid, Spain	4
University of Amsterdam, Netherlands	4
University of Kassel, Germany	4
University of Ljubljana, Slovenia	4
University of Maribor, Slovenia	4
University of Vigo, Spain	4
Polytechnic Institute of Cávado and Ave (IPCA), Portugal	3
Sun Yat-sen University, China	3
Trakya University, Turkey	3
Universidade Federal do Rio de Janeiro, Brazil	3
University of Prešov, Slovakia	3
University of South Australia, Australia	3
University of the Basque Country, Spain	3

Table 1. Productivity by institution.

Regarding geographical distribution, most of the most productive institutions are located in Europe, which suggests that this continent is at the vanguard of research in this field. Greece, Spain, the Netherlands, and the United Kingdom are well represented, which may reflect a greater interest or investment in this type of study in those countries. Of

particular note is the Netherlands, home to two institutions that rank among the most prolific publishers in this field: Erasmus University Rotterdam and Delft University of Technology. In contrast, Spain is represented by the University of A Coruña, which plays a significant role in the country's research landscape.

The discrepancy in the number of articles published between the most prolific institution and the subsequent ones is not considerable, indicating a relatively uniform distribution of scientific output among the leading institutions. However, the number of articles per institution decreases beyond the top positions, suggesting that, although some universities have a significant presence in this field, the majority contribute between one and four articles.

Regarding productivity per journal, the most productive journal is Information Communication Technologies and City Development, which has published 12 articles. The journal Cities is the next most productive, with ten articles

published, demonstrating its relevance and specific focus on urban issues and city marketing. Other journals, including Sustainability (Switzerland), Smart Innovation, Systems and Technologies, and the International Journal of Sports Marketing and Sponsorship, have each published five articles. While Information Communication Technologies and City Development is the most prolific journal regarding the number of publications, other journals with broader focuses, such as Sustainability, also make notable contributions. This diversity reflects the interdisciplinary nature of city marketing, which connects with technology, sustainability, and urban development issues (See Table 2).

Publication	of documents
Information Communication Technologies and City Marketing: Digital Opportunities for Cities Around the World	12
Cities	10
Sustainability (Switzerland)	5
Smart Innovation, Systems and Technologies	5
International Journal of Sports Marketing and Sponsorship	5
Journal of Place Management and Development	5
Place Branding and Public Diplomacy	4
Iberian Conference on Information Systems and Technologies, CISTI	4
Standort	4
Urban Geography	4
Strategic Place Branding Methodologies and Theory for Tourist Attraction	4
Polish Journal of Management Studies	4
Tourism Review	3
European Planning Studies	3
Bitacora Urbano Territorial	3
Cities and Fascination: Beyond the Surplus of Meaning	3
Environment and Planning A	3
Eure	3
Place Reinvention: Northern Perspectives	3
Raumforschung und Raumordnung	3

Table 2. List of most productive sources.

The journals with the highest productivity encompass diverse topics about urban marketing. Information Communication Technologies and City Development (ICTCD) examines the role of technology in urban development, whereas Cities addresses a more comprehensive range of urban challenges, including marketing aspects. Conversely, journals such as Sustainability address the interconnections between urban marketing and sustainable development objectives, a topic of growing significance in the contemporary global context.

The researcher with the most publications is Escourido-Calvo, M., with five articles (See Table 3). Subsequently, several authors have published four articles each, including Barajas, A., Braun, E., Karachalis, N., and Kavartzis, M. Despite the presence of one prominent researcher with five articles, productivity is relatively evenly distributed among multiple authors, reflecting a collaborative approach to the advancement of the field. The proximity in the number of articles among the principal authors suggests that there is no dominant figure but a

Author	# of documents
Escourido-Calvo, M.	5
Barajas, A.	4
Braun, E.	4
Karachalis, N.	4
Kavaratzis, M.	4
Liu, Y.	4
McCann, E. J.	4
Podnar, K.	4
Sánchez-Fernández, P.	4
Bacik, R.	3
Berglund, E.	3
Broudehoux, A.-M.	3
Fedorko, R.	3
Hospers, G.-J.	3
Kalandides, A.	3
Kanai, J. M.	3
Liu, H.	3
Martinez-Fernandez, V.-A.	3
Metaxas, T.	3
Misic, K. U.	3
Olsson, K.	3
Ozer, S. U.	3
Prado-Domínguez, A. J.	3
Rofe, M. W.	3
Struver, A.	3
Xue, D.	3
Zenker, S.	3

Table 3. List of most productive authors.

balanced contribution in publications. This depiction suggests that the research field in question is one in which many voices and perspectives are actively engaged.

3.2. Literature mapping

The co-word map comprises 63 nodes, as illustrated in Figure 1. The map is small, given the limited number of documents on the subject. Three clusters were formed after applying the VOS (visualization of similarities) algorithm (Table 4). Cluster 1 is primarily concerned with urban themes, encompassing concepts such as the “built environment,” “city,” and “human.” This cluster pertains to urban planning and development, both at the local and global levels. Cluster 2 is comprised of terms such as “branding,” “city branding,” “city identity,” “city marketing,” and “destination marketing.” The inclusion of terms such as “city branding,” “city identity,” and “city marketing” indicates a focus on how cities project their image and position themselves competitively on the global stage. The number of links and occurrences serve to underscore the critical role of branding in urban development and city management strategies. Cluster 3 addresses more expansive socio-economic concerns, including economic development, globalization, and governance.

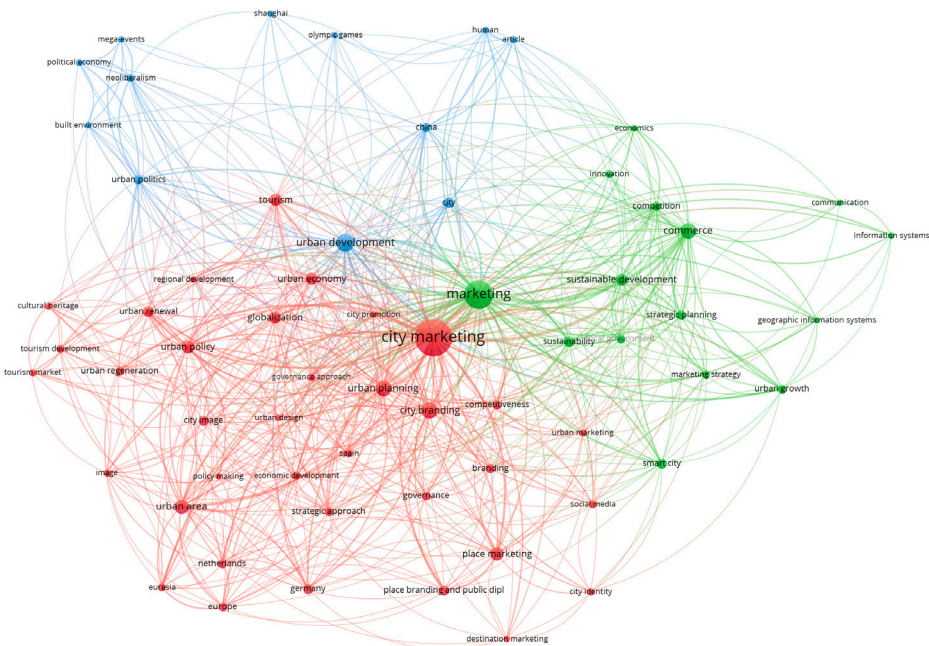


Figure 1. Co-word map.



Indicator	Cluster 1	Cluster 2	Cluster 3
# of terms	36	15	12
Total link strenght	1685	929	402
Average citations	37	7.78	19.4
Top frequent terms	article, built environment, china, city, human	branding, city branding, city identity, city marketing, destination marketing	commerce, communication, economic development, globalization, governance

**Table 4.** Main description derived from the co-word clustering results.

The cluster includes terms associated with the structural and economic aspects of regions and cities, such as international trade (commerce) and the role of communication technologies.

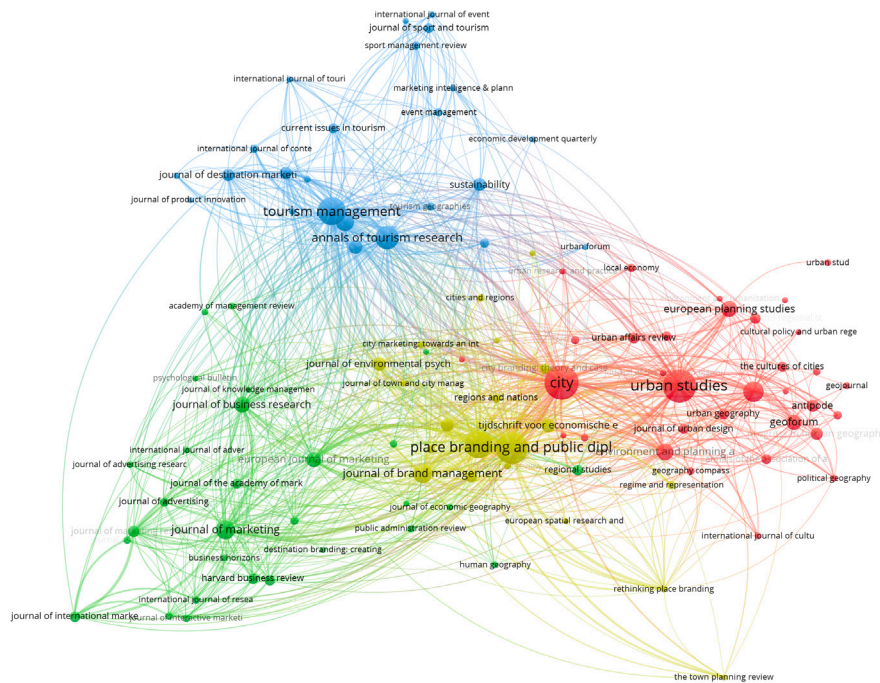
The most prominent terms on the map, in terms of their centrality and high citation frequency, are located in cluster 1. The initial term is “city branding,” which exhibits a link strength of 93 and an average citation frequency of 40.38. This highly connected topic is cited, indicating its central importance in urban marketing and city positioning discussions. Additionally, the term “place marketing” merits attention. It is also present in cluster 1. This term exhibits a linkage strength of 55 and an average citation rate of 53. A third term that merits particular attention is “urban area,” which has a link strength of 83 and an average citation count of 55.23. This term has a broad relationship with urban planning and development. The term “urban policy” occupies the fourth position. This term has a link strength of 81 and an average number of citations of 79.61, distinguishing it as a critical concept in the study of urban governance and policy formulation. Finally, we identify a fifth term closely related to the fourth, “urban politics,” which has a link strength of 47 and an average number of citations of 47.78. This term is indicative of discourse about socio-political policies.

For the clusters formed by the co-cited journals in city marketing, clusters reflecting disparate approaches are revealed (Table 5). The analysis of the data provided offers the following key details about the clusters, as illustrated in Figure 2:

- Cluster 1 comprises the journals with the highest interconnectivity and citation frequency. These journals are central to developing urban theories and approaches related to marketing and city planning, including urbanism, urban policy, and geography.
- Cluster 2 is likely composed of journals that address more specific topics, such as urban branding and event management. These interconnected topics receive fewer overall citations than those in Cluster 1.
- Cluster 3 focuses on the more commercial aspects of city marketing, including urban advertising and market research. This reflects a growing interest in how cities promote themselves in the context of global competitiveness.
- Cluster 4: This cluster, with the strongest linking strength, suggests a highly interconnected focus on topics such as strategic urban planning and sustainable development, which are of paramount importance to the study of cities and their promotion through marketing.

Indicator	Cluster 1	Cluster 2	Cluster 3	Cluster 4
# of journals	33	29	24	20
Total citations	1289	636	811	862
Total link strenght	21467	17820	19831	25688
Top co-cited journals	City, Urban Studies, International Journal of Urban and Regional Research, Environment and Planning A, European Planning Studies	Journal of Marketing, Journal of Business Research, European Journal of Marketing, Journal of Marketing Research, Journal of International Marketing	Tourism Management, Annals of Tourism Research, Journal of Travel Research, Journal of Vacation Marketing, Sustainability	Place Branding and Public Diplomacy, Journal of Place Management and Development, Journal of Brand Management, Journal of Environmental Psychology, Tijdschrift Voor Economische en Sociale Geografie

**Table 5.** Main description derived from the documents co-citation clustering



**Figure 2.** Journal co-citation map.

Of the journals that comprise the map, "Place Branding and Public Diplomacy," which is situated within cluster 4, is particularly noteworthy. It has a total impact factor of 7200 and 241 citations. The second-ranked journal is the "Journal of Place Management and Development," within cluster 4. The journal has a link strength of 5522 and 178 citations. This journal is primarily concerned with place management and development and is pivotal in this field. The third most relevant journal is *City*, within Cluster 1. The journal has a link strength of 5,499 and 273 citations. This is one of the most frequently cited and highly connected journals within the field of urban studies, making a significant contribution to the discourse on urban development and planning. The fourth most considerable journal is "Tourism Management," within cluster 3. The journal has a link strength of 4600 and 188 citations. This journal occupies a central position in tourism management in urban contexts. Finally, the journal *Urban Studies*, also within cluster 1, is of particular note, exhibiting a link strength of 3837 and 263 citations. This journal is pivotal in examining urban environments, policies, and development strategies, which renders it one of the most frequently cited and connected in urban studies and the marketing of cities.

With the co-citation of documents, four clusters were identified. (See Table 6 and Figure 3). We summarize the themes of the clusters as follows:

- *Cluster 1: Urban planning and city image management.* Two documents are of particular relevance within this cluster. The initial document, entitled “Selling the City: Marketing Approaches in Public Sector Urban Planning” by Ashworth and Voogd (1990). It introduces the concept of marketing cities as products to attract investors, tourists, and new residents. In this framework, urban planning and marketing are inextricably linked. The second of these is entitled “City Branding.” In “An Effective Assertion of Identity or a Transitory Marketing Trick?,” Kavaratzis and Ashworth (2005) build upon the concept of city branding. They posit that a city should manage its brand identity in a way that is analogous to a company managing its products. The overarching theme of this cluster is the nexus between urban planning and city image management. The papers investigate the necessity for cities to plan not only their infrastructure but also their global image. The concepts of urban image, branding, and territorial marketing are essential.

A notable concept that emerges from the studies in this cluster is the idea that cities can utilize a form of self-promotion to attract investment and human capital.

- *Cluster 2: Urban competitiveness and economic development.* In this cluster, the initial document that merits particular attention is “From City Marketing to City Branding” by Kavaratzis (2004). This work examines the progression of urban marketing toward urban branding. Furthermore, it underscores the necessity for cities to be constructed as enduring brands. The second featured paper is “Urban Competitiveness, Marketing and the Need for Organizing Capacity” by Van den Berg and Braun (1999). This paper examines how cities must compete in a globalized world to attract tourists, investment, human capital, and business. Urban competitiveness

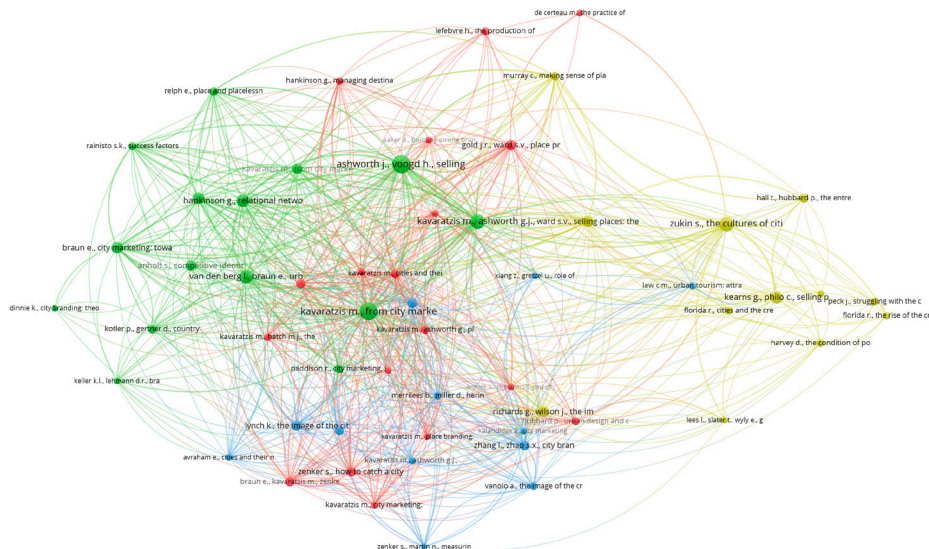
is inextricably linked to marketing principles and cities’ need for organizational capacity. This cluster is dedicated to examining urban areas’ competitiveness and economic development. A correlation is identified between a city’s capacity to compete in the global economy and its ability to project a compelling brand image. The studies underscore the pivotal role of administrative organization and management capacity in implementing urban branding strategies.

- *Cluster 3: Urban image and public perception.* This cluster is notable for its high level of co-citation, with the paper “City Marketing for Bogotá” being a particularly prominent example. A case study on the reconfiguration of Bogotá’s image through urban branding is presented in “A Case Study in Integrated Place Branding” by Kalandides

Indicator	Cluster 1	Cluster 2	Cluster 3	Cluster 4
# of documents	18	15	12	12
Total citations	124	223	87	121
Total link strenght	747	1,067	501	439
Top co-cited documents	gold j.r., ward s.v., place promotion: the use of publicity and marketing to sell towns and regions, (1994) zenker s., how to catch a city? the concept and measurement of place brands, journal of place management and development, 4, 1, pp. 40-52, (2011) braun e., kavaratzis m., zenker s., my city-my brand: the different roles of residents in place branding, journal of place management and development, 6, 1, pp. 18-28, (2013) greenberg m., branding new york: how a city in crisis was sold to the world, (2008) kavaratzis m., ashworth g., place marketing: how did we get here and where are we going?, journal of place management and development, 1, 2, pp. 150-165, (2008)	ashworth j., voogd h., selling the city: marketing approaches in public sector urban planning, (1990) kavaratzis m., from city marketing to city branding: towards a theoretical framework for developing city brands, place branding, 1, 1, pp. 58-73, (2004) kavaratzis m., ashworth g.j., city branding: an effective assertion of identity or a transitory marketing trick?, tijdschrift voor economische en sociale geografie, 96, 5, pp. 506-514, (2005) van den berg l., braun e., urban competitiveness, marketing and the need for organizing capacity, urban studies, 36, 5-6, pp. 987-999, (1999) hankinson g., relational network brands: towards a conceptual model of place brands, journal of vacation marketing, 10, pp. 109-121, (2004)	lynch k., the image of the city, (1960) lucarelli a., berg p.o., city branding: a state-of-the-art review of the research domain, journal of place management and development, 4, 1, pp. 9-27, (2011) zhang l., zhao s.x., city branding and the olympic effect: a case study of beijing, cities, 26, 5, pp. 245-254, (2009) zenker s., who’s your target? the creative class as a target group for place branding, journal of place management and development, 2, 1, pp. 23-32, (2009) merrilees b., miller d., herington c., multiple stakeholders and multiple city brand meanings, european journal of marketing, 46, 7-8, pp. 1032-1047, (2012) vanolo a., the image of the creative city: some reflections on urban branding in turin, cities, 25, 6, pp. 370-382, (2008)	zukin s., the cultures of cities, (1995) kearns g., philo c., selling places: the city as cultural capital, past and present, (1993) ward s.v., selling places: the marketing and promotion of towns and cities 1850-2000, (1998) richards g., wilson j., the impact of cultural events on city image: rotterdam, cultural capital of europe 2001, urban studies, 41, 10, pp. 1931-1951, (2004) hall t., hubbard p., the entrepreneurial city: geographies of politics, regime, and representation, (1998)

**Table 6.** Main description derived from the journal co-citation clustering results.





**Figure 3.** Document co-citation analysis.

(2011). The paper demonstrates how cities can alter their international reputation by implementing an integrated branding strategy. The second most co-cited paper is Lynch's (1960) "The Image of the City." This foundational text in urban theory delineates how individuals perceive and navigate urban environments and how city managers can plan and enhance these perceptions. The papers in this cluster are primarily concerned with forming urban images and how residents, tourists, and external visitors perceive and construct a representation of the city. Furthermore, it underscores the significance of the city's visual and experiential aspects, encompassing its tangible form and its emotional and symbolic dimensions.

- **Cluster 4: Urban culture and regeneration.** This cluster focuses on the seminal text, *The Cultures of Cities* (1995) by Zukin, which elucidates the pivotal role of culture in the evolution and revitalization of urban centers. He emphasizes that cities utilize cultural resources to attract new residents, tourists, and investment. The second paper, "Urban Competitiveness and Place Marketing," by Van den Berg and Braun (1999), examines the influence of cultural events on the perception of cities. The case study of Rotterdam illustrates how significant events can alter the perception of a city. This cluster of papers investigates how cultural policies and events can be utilized to enhance the image

of a city and facilitate urban regeneration. It examines the interrelationship between culture and the economy, whereby cities leverage their cultural heritage and events to attract residents and tourists.

#### 4. CONCLUSION

Ultimately, this analysis indicates that research on city marketing is predominantly conducted by European institutions. This reflects a geographical trend in which developed countries, particularly Europe, appear to exert a significant influence in this field. However, more institutions from other regions, including Latin America, Asia, and Africa, are needed. This could indicate an opportunity to expand research in these areas.

This field of study is well-represented in various academic journals that address related topics, including technology, sustainability, and innovation. The existence of journals employing disparate methodologies indicates the field's continued evolution and relevance to numerous knowledge domains. This underscores the necessity for interdisciplinary research in this domain. The analysis of the clusters of co-cited journals in the literature demonstrates disparate approaches emphasizing the thematic diversity inherent to this field. In particular, two key groupings merit attention: cluster 4, which groups journals with a strong focus on strategic urban planning and

sustainable development and shows the greatest interconnectedness, and cluster 1, which includes publications central to the development of urban theories and city planning. The most relevant journals, such as Place Branding and Public Diplomacy and Urban Studies, underscore the significance of place management and urban planning.

Concerning the document co-citation analysis, it was demonstrated that all four clusters indicate that cities utilize branding and marketing strategies to position themselves in a global market. From urban planning to image management, competitiveness, and culture, cities engage in a process of self-promotion, not only to attract tourists but also to attract investment and talent. The literature indicates that developing a robust brand identity, which incorporates economic, cultural, and administrative elements, is crucial.

Moreover, the public perception of cities and the image they project are crucial factors in determining their success. Urban culture and events play a significant role in regenerating areas and creating an attractive brand. This indicates that cities that leverage their cultural heritage and strategically manage their image can significantly enhance their competitiveness and attract more economic resources.

### Conflict of interests

The authors should declare potential conflicts of interest or not.

### Statement of data consent

The data generated during the development of this study has been included in the manuscript. ●

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