In the context of globalisation, which forces cities to compete against each other in a race for attractiveness, having a powerful brand image can help attract and retain professionals and visitors alike. This article is a literature review that aims to highlight the particularities of building a city brand through cultural strategies. Whether authorities focus on a local personality, flagship buildings, large recurring events, cultural neighborhoods or an art theme in order to build a brand image, culture is seen as a successful technique for ensuring the distinctiveness of cities. The article also focuses on place attachment, which is the positive, emotional bond that people develop with certain cities. Cultural events (such as art festivals) have a mediating role in place attachment and city brand equity, and can increase the level of loyalty for a place.

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There are various reasons why city administrations and public officials turn to city marketing and branding techniques when it comes to ensuring economic welfare. One major aspect to consider is the process of globalisation, which led local and regional authorities to embark on a race for attractiveness (Thiard, 2007). This switch from local to global, together with the rise of new technology forces cities to compete (Kotler & Gertner, 2002) in attracting and retaining various target groups such as investors, businesses, organizations, tourists, and residents (Vuignier, 2016). In other words, place marketing practices are considered “snapshot[s] of the symbolic battlefield of cities” (Anttiroiko, 2015).

Other reasons why local administrations choose to adopt city branding strategies include increasing residents’ satisfaction and strengthening city identities (Joo & Seo, 2018). Quality of Life (QOL), which can briefly be defined as: ‘a feeling of well-being, fulfillment, or satisfaction on the part of residents or visitors to a place’ (Andrews, 2001, p.202) is one of the main objectives city governors have begun to pursue in order to increase place attractiveness. Furthermore, research shows that a good city image is positively linked to the perceived trip quality and satisfaction of tourists (Chen & Tsai, 2007), which can increase the city’s level of competitiveness.

The practice of ‘branding’, understood as a marketing instrument associated with image and perception (Vuignier, 2016) “has invaded all aspects of public and private life” (van Ham, 2002, p. 249) and “corporate level brands can also be applied to countries, regions and cities” (Balmer & Gray 2003, p.7). More and more places around the world are creating urban strategies that include various marketing techniques, in order to create awareness about certain qualities or unique attributes the city or region may possess. However, in comparison to other marketable products, destinations are extremely difficult to market and brand (Thiard, 2007), mainly because of the intricate connections between stakeholders (Sauutter & Leisen, 1999). Anholt (2007: xii) states that the branding of places “covers some of the hardest philosophical questions one can tackle: the nature of perception and reality, the relationship between objects and their representation, the phenomena of mass psychology, the mysteries of national identity, leadership, culture and social cohesion, and much more besides”.

As a process, city branding includes a series of functional steps: (Karvelyte & Chiu, 2011): (1) establishment of the planning group (optional stage); (2) research stage; (3) building the city’s brand identity (including identification of vision and goals and comprehensive branding strategy formation); (4) development and implementation of action plan; and (5) control and evaluation. Kavaratzis (2004) argues that the notion of city branding incorporates a higher level of complexity and is more appropriate than that of city marketing. According to the professor, “[…] branding is attempting to create associations with the city; associations that are emotional, mental, psychological, moving away from the functional - rational character of marketing interventions” (Kavaratzis 2004, p. 11). Anholt (2006) postulates that all decisions, from the simple ones like buying an everyday product to relocating a large firm, are influenced by both function and emotion and city brands are no exception.

Taking the emotional factor one step further, Olins (2003) believes a well-defined brand intertwines with our values and adds to the idea of ourselves. The “purposeful symbolic embodiment of all information connected to a city” (Lucarelli & Berg, 2011, p. 21) can sometimes ideally relate to the inhabitants’ or the visitors’ tastes or beliefs and can be experienced as a self-extension (Proshansky, Fabian, & Kaminoff., 1983). This idea perfectly introduces the concept of place attachment, which describes a positive bond with a certain city or landscape (Clarke, Murphy & Lorenzoni, 2018). Bott (2005) believes place attachment merges physical and cultural characteristics on one side with the individual’s affective perceptions and functional needs on the other. Emotional attachment is said to predict the level of loyalty for a place which can be linked to a positive behavior (Poço & Casais, 2019). In other words, the more connected someone feels about a city or region, the more likely they are to live there or visit it. Hidalgo and Hernandez (2001) agree that attachment is linked to the feeling of familiarity and with the desire to maintain closeness to at certain place or destination. Loyalty can also mean greater participation within the dynamics of the city, as people with higher place attachment report an active social and political involvement in their group or community (Mesch & Manor, 1998).

The concept of place attachment embodies both an emotional dimension, or place identity, and a functional one, also referred to in specialized literature as place dependence (Williams & Roggenbuck, 1989). Each of these components develops gradually over time and can have various effects on loyalty and behavior. Place identity is associated with memories, ideas, feelings and people, while place dependence relates to personal functional needs and goals (Anton & Lawrence, 2014). Recreational areas are often associated with ‘place bonding’, which also includes an affective and cognitive component. Hammitt, Backlund & Bixler (2006) adopt a five-dimensional approach to place bonding, which includes place familiarity,
belongingness, identity, dependence, and rootedness. By being aware of the notion and implications of place attachment, city administrators can enhance the city branding process. Closely monitoring place identity and dependence for various stakeholders can lead to branding strategies that can ensure long-lasting connections with the city.

**CITY BRANDING THROUGH CULTURAL STRATEGIES**

City development through culture has been introduced to regenerate and revitalize post-industrial cities (Um, Dong, Choi & Jeong, 2021). Economic innovation in various fields including communication and management, together with a raise in the educational level of the people and disposable income spent on entertainment and leisure activities (Grodach & Loukaitou-Sideris, 2007) are some of the trends that facilitated the adoption of cultural development strategies in Europe and the United States. The increasing competition for cities to become Europe’s cultural capital only highlights the key part that culture and entertainment plays nowadays in the economic growth of a city (Mihalis, 2005).

“Culture is more and more the business of cities” (Zukin 1995, p. 2) and places all over the world are now relying on it as a helpful administrative tool, part of the “symbolic economy” (Zukin, 2004). The latter is defined as “the process through which wealth is created from cultural activities, including art, music, dance, crafts, museums, exhibitions, sports and creative design in various fields” (Zukin, 2004, p. 3). Howkins (2001) advances the idea that when intangible assets such as knowledge, skills, and information become perceived as relevant for communities, creativity may have a leading role in economy development; therefore, investing in creativity is a good approach when it comes to building long term strategies for the city. Moreover, creativity in the arts can enhance the overall cultural vitality and the social quality of life (Adams and Goldbard, 2000). Grodach & Loukaitou-Sideris (2007) also believe that cultural amenities and infrastructure do not just improve a city’s image and comply with tourist needs, but also provide education for the local population and employment for artists, which can lead to place dependance and emotional ties with the city.

In other words, culture is not only a trigger for economic development, but also a great tool for city branding and place attachment. In fact, when it comes to developing long-term bonds between people and cities, cultural events (such as art festivals) have a mediating role in place attachment, event image and city brand equity (Jawahar, Vincent & Philip, 2020). While culture can lead to branding strategies, let’s not overlook the opposite: “brands are signs that identify places and evoke associations that imbue places with cultural meaning” (Eshuis, Klijn & Braun, 2014, p. 154).

The complex nature of the city as a dynamic entity is in itself a cultural construct, which makes branding strategies even more challenging: “An image of a city depends on both identity and alterity construction and has many constructors: politicians and officials, tourists and citizens, writers and filmmakers, architects and media people […] Yet, this picture is made even more complex by setting it in motion: these processes do not take their turns in time or place, but happen simultaneously, in connection, possibly, within one and the same organizational practice” (Czarniawska, 2002, p. 15).

According to Currid (2007), what makes the cultural brand of a city stand out today is a large concentration of creative people and an active cultural milieu. On this note, the most famous city branding strategy to include a culture component belongs to the state of New York, which developed its campaign based on the “I love NY” slogan and logo (Vuignier, 2016). Several elements came together to build a brand for New York in the 1970s: an economic crisis, credible research, adequate funding, and the right people (Bendel, 2011). Other notable city branding campaigns include Barcelona and its ‘Gaudi gambit’, Amsterdam with its “Iamsterdam” branding project and Berlin which launched the “Be Berlin” branding campaign in 2008. These are also among the cities ranked higher in the world in terms of brand awareness and reputation (Bellos, 2011).

Building a city brand through culture can be achieved in a variety of ways. Kavaratzis (2004, 2008) developed a theoretical framework for building a city image that includes three stages of image communication: the primary communication consists of the architecture, museums, public art, urban design and overall perceived city behavior, which includes the long-term vision local leaders and administrators have for the city; the secondary communication refers to all type of formal and intended communication, such as advertising, public relations, official logos and slogans; the tertiary communication is that which is not controlled by marketers, consisting of word-of-mouth advertising and voluntary media coverings. Rehan (2014) considers that culture should be integrated into city branding through strategies at several different levels. The instruments used include logos, slogans, and websites for media coverings; libraries, museums and landmarks for highlighting signature architecture and historical buildings and cultural activities for branding city life (Fig. 1).
Encouraging the formation of small-scale creative clusters such as music venues and art galleries can offer opportunities for leisure and draw in the “creative class”. The latter refers to knowledgeable professionals such as architects, artists, writers, and software designers (Florida, 2002). Moreover, clusters of skilled and creative individuals can build strong ties with similar hot spots around the world, resulting in complex interactions with positive outcomes for the local cultural production (Bathelt, Malmberg & Maskell, 2004). Aside from creative class strategies, Carl Grodach and Loukaitou-Sideris (2007) identified two other types of cultural development master-plans: entrepreneurial strategies, which catalyze private sector investments and focus on developing high-scale infrastructure and events, and progressive strategies, which focus on community development, access to artistic education and local cultural production.

When it comes to cultural innovation, city officials should encourage pioneering and experimental programs, build on the history and cultural heritage of the city, finance advanced research in media and technology and ensure that the artistic community is properly involved in the city branding process (Landry & Wood, 2003). Furthermore, cultural production should be encouraged by policy makers in both developed and developing countries (Santagata, 2010). In a broad sense, culture production includes, aside from material culture related to the fashion and food sectors, the content and media industry (publishing, film, television, advertising, software) and cultural heritage valorization: museums and monuments services, performing arts and architecture (Walter & Bertacchini, 2011).

Building a city brand should also be based on the effects of the ‘tourist gaze’. This concept is broadly described by British sociologist John Urry as the visitors’ need to travel in order to discover visual experiences (such as a breathtaking landscape or a majestic cathedral) which they do not commonly see in their place of origin (Urry, 1990). Given that the tourist gaze can be highly influenced by advertising, public relations, and various media channels, it can be a powerful tool in the context of city branding (Hospers, 2011). In other words, marketers can invest in branding strategies that associate a visual highlight with a certain city, with the purpose of attracting visitors to that place. Rapoport (1977) argues that culture, beliefs, and past experiences influence the environmental perception. Therefore, marketers should consider the diversity and complexity of the ‘targeted’ visitors.

Cultural elements can help shape the tourist gaze at various levels. Hospers (2011) mentions hallmark events, associating a city with a personality and flagship buildings as precious assets that can help promote the image of a city.

A recurring event that manages to turn localities into dynamic cultural centers every year is the European Capital of Culture. In Romania, the Sibiu International Theater Festival (FITS), in its 22nd edition in 2022, put Sibiu on the map of cultural cities, the festival being considered among the best theater events globally. According to Getz (2008), festivals can serve a variety of purposes, from exhibiting samples of local culture to creating international relations and improving place marketing. While hallmark events (such as large recurring festivals) can have an important contribution to the image of a place, Olsen (2010) thinks that smaller events can also lead to the development of city branding strategies, as they tend to be more authentic and deeply connected to the real personality of a city.

Focusing on a cultural personality to build a city brand can prove to be a successful long-term strategy. Ashworth (2009) calls this technique the ‘Gaudi gambit’, after the successful Barcelona city branding campaign based on the figure of architect and designer Antonio Gaudi. Other cities have built on the image of famous painters or musicians (Hospers, 2011), such as Vermeer (Delft, The Netherlands), Hundertwasser (Vienna, Austria), Mozart (Salzburg, Austria) or Bach (Eisenach, Germany).

Associating the image of the city with that of an iconic building is another branding technique used by local administrations. In addition to the classic example of the Eiffel Tower, built between 1887 and 1889, which soon became the symbol of Paris, the capital of France abounds in architecture in a unique, recognizable style. An example of this is the Pompidou Center, also known as the Beaubourg Center. Through the modern architecture of the building erected in 1971, the French government intended not only to encourage contemporary art, but also to change citizens’ perceptions of French local authorities, with the intention of making them appear in the eyes of taxpayers as interested in culture and progress (Kavaratzis, 2008). A downside to this branding technique is that many municipalities are beginning to privilege the building of iconic architecture in downtown areas (at the cost of habitable buildings) and hire world renowned architects in an attempt to “rebrand” the city, without prioritizing on the needs of the city dwellers (Vale & Warner 2001).

The increase of the cultural notoriety of a city can also take place through the artistic development of a cultural district. “Cultural quarter” is a term used to describe an existing group of cultural and creative industries in a particular urban area, where a concentration of cultural goods and services can be seen (Montgomery, 2003). In most of the world’s major cities, there are neighborhoods
known for their active cultural life. These neighborhoods exert a force of attraction on both local people interested in culture, as well as tourists. The Soho district of New York or the Left Bank of Paris are constantly associated with the idea of art and a bohemian atmosphere thanks to the many artists who have given these places a reputation. The novelty of the development of cultural neighborhoods in recent decades is that they have been and are being used as a deliberate model for the revitalization of declining urban areas and as an intentional way to reinvent the identity of a space. In other words, they have been adopted as city branding mechanisms. One such model is the Rotterdam Museum District. In 1980, members of the local public administration decided to revitalize a city fair by setting up museums and transforming the urban landscape, giving it a new image and a new potential to attract visitors (Mommaas, 2004). Currently, a museum of visual arts, a museum of contemporary art, a museum of natural sciences and a generous space dedicated to exhibitions coexist here. The district is connected to the west of the city by a “cultural boulevard” bordered by art galleries and cafes.

Choosing a cultural domain (for example: theater, dance, film) and using it as a theme in order to build a city image is another way to create a city brand. The best-known example is the municipality of Cannes in France, host of the Cannes Film Festival, an event currently underway (in 2022) at the 75th edition. The “City of Books” is the nickname of a small town of almost 2000 inhabitants that has built its brand around literature and bookstores. Located on the border between England and Wales, the town hosts a literature festival that attracts around 500,000 visitors annually (250 times the number of inhabitants of the city).

To conclude, culture and creativity do not just increase the quality of life in a certain region but can also be used by local administrators as tools to develop powerful city brands which can attract professionals and tourists. Some of the most notorious city brands (New York, Barcelona, Paris) have integrated culture in their city image and perception. While there are various ways in which city officials can build cultural branding strategies, focusing on place attachment and meaningful interactions with the cultural assets of a city should also be taken into account.

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LIST OF FIGURES

Fig no. 1
Culture in city branding strategies
*Source: Rehan, 2014, p.225*