

## IS PLACE BRANDING EXCLUSIVELY URBAN? ASYMMETRIES IN BRAZILIAN RESEARCH

Rodrigo Maurício Freire Soares

Departamento de Ciências Humanas I, Universidade do Estado da Bahia, Salvador, Brazil

---

### ABSTRACT

This study examines Brazilian scholarly production on place branding across territorial scales — urban, rural, and regional. It is grounded in a theoretical perspective that frames place branding as a multi-sectoral public policy, closely connected to governance, urban planning, and stakeholder management, and implemented through strategically oriented communication. The concept of a “place brand” extends beyond a set of promotional initiatives for a given territory, representing instead an institutional arrangement that relies on the coordination of multiple public policies and the relational capacity of diverse actors. The research *corpus* comprises publications from 2005 to 2025, drawn from both Brazilian and international databases. The findings reveal a predominance of studies focused on large cities — particularly capitals — where institutional capacity is greatest. Finally, the article proposes the development of a quantitative measure for place branding, termed the “multi-sector index”, designed to comparatively evaluate the degree of integration among public policies that support the territorial narrative.

### KEYWORDS

place brand, city brand, public policy, urban-rural, branding

---

## A MARCA-LUGAR É APENAS URBANA? ASSIMETRIAS NA PESQUISA BRASILEIRA

### RESUMO

Este artigo investiga a produção científica brasileira sobre a marca-lugar do ponto de vista de suas escalas territoriais (urbana, rural ou regional). O estudo ancora-se na abordagem teórica que posiciona o *place branding* como uma política pública multissetorial, vinculada à governança, ao planejamento urbano e à gestão de públicos de interesse, articulando-se a uma comunicação de natureza estratégica. A noção de “marca-lugar” não se restringe a um conjunto de ações com fins promocionais de um dado território, mas configura-se em um arranjo institucional que depende da coordenação de múltiplas políticas públicas e da capacidade relacional de múltiplos atores. O *corpus* apresentado na pesquisa abrange a produção realizada no período de 2005 a 2025, em que foram contempladas informações coletadas em bases de dados brasileiras e internacionais. Os resultados indicam o predomínio de estudos sobre grandes cidades — sobretudo as capitais —, sendo recorrentes onde há maior capacidade institucional. Como proposição final, sugere-se a construção de um indicador quantitativo para mensuração da marca-lugar, nomeado “índice de multissetorialidade”, capaz de avaliar comparativamente o grau de integração entre políticas públicas que sustentam a narrativa territorial.

### PALAVRAS-CHAVE

marca-lugar, marca cidade, políticas públicas, urbano-rural, *branding*

---

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Cities, through their municipal administrations, compete for external investment, visitors, and businesses, consolidating territorial space as a market category. To distinguish themselves, city governments construct discourses about these spaces, seeking to ascribe meaning to place, often relying on isolated communication initiatives disconnected from broader public policy frameworks. When place branding is reduced to communication or marketing campaigns without proper coordination with sectors such as urban planning, housing, culture, mobility, and the environment, there is a risk of neglecting the fundamental dimensions necessary for effective brand consolidation.

Recently, many cities have drawn attention to the harmful impacts of mass tourism, or *overtourism*<sup>1</sup>, which have led to the degradation of the urban environment, rising property prices, and pressure on public services, even threatening local culture and a sense of belonging. In Brazil, this issue is particularly pronounced in areas such as Salvador's historic centre or the tourist districts of Rio de Janeiro, where the promotion of place branding can drive socio-spatial transformations, often without adequate control mechanisms, contributing to gentrification, the displacement of local populations, and environmental imbalances. Studies on Salvador and Lisbon, for instance, indicate that the rapid growth of tourist flows, combined with the intensive use of historic buildings for accommodation and services, puts pressure on the real estate market and turns urban areas into "sterile" spaces, emptied of local life (Sampaio & Miranda, 2021). Under these conditions, tourism becomes a deterritorialising force, weakening affective bonds and reducing the capacity of traditional neighbourhood populations to remain.

Beyond the promotional lexicon, which often equates communicational success with a greater number of visitors, there is a tension related to scale that appears to permeate this debate: urban areas tend to occupy the centre of the agenda, particularly capitals and large cities, while rural environments receive little visibility. In other words, the phenomenon seems to be confined to a limited set of cities, resulting in visitor excess, which could be categorised as a form of tourism "harmful" to these major centres. From another perspective, the limited visibility of non-urban locations and the predominance of studies focused on capitals, for example, is mirrored in the scholarly production on the topic, restricting possibilities for critical analysis and diverse approaches.

Taking these aspects into consideration, this study is guided by the following research question: to what extent does Brazilian scholarly production on place branding prioritise large cities (to the detriment of medium/small cities and rural areas) under a predominantly communication-oriented public policy perspective? By framing the question within the domain of public policy, the article seeks to shift the discussion from episodic communication campaigns or actions tied to a government management cycle to the debate on place branding as a multi-sectoral coordination effort capable of generating territorial value sustainably.

---

<sup>1</sup> The term "overtourism" was popularised by Skift, a media organisation specialising in the tourism and travel sector, in 2016, as the exponential growth of global tourism began to raise concerns about overcrowding and negative urban impacts. Subsequently, it was adopted by the World Tourism Organization as an official analytical category (World Tourism Organization, 2018).

This study adopts a specific analytical focus on the scientific production on the topic in Brazil, seeking to distinguish individual cities from regions and to identify research that addresses the branding of rural territories. In this way, the analysis examines whether the presumed “urban bias” derives from a scale imbalance that causes rural contexts to appear primarily as regional policies, thereby requiring specific criteria for analysis and comparison. Empirically, the study operates with a national *corpus* classified according to the typologies of the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics (IBGE), including works that present in their title, keywords, or abstract the terms “place branding”, “place/city branding”, or “city branding”, as well as those that signal the theme through adjacent literatures, such as identity, image, creative districts, urban narratives, among others. On this basis, two working hypotheses are formulated:

- Hypothesis 1: The concept of “place branding” is more closely associated with large cities and is weakly disseminated in the literature on medium-sized and small cities and rural areas.
- Hypothesis 2: The potential concentration on large cities is explained by the multi-sectoral public policy character of place branding (tourism, culture, environment, infrastructure, economy), which requires greater institutional and budgetary capacity than an isolated communication policy.

By articulating these hypotheses with a methodological approach that prioritises the conceptual core and respects the urban scale, the study seeks to refine the analysis of the purportedly predominantly urban bias in the field. Accordingly, place branding is understood not as a promotional appendage of tourism or communication departments, but as a policy arrangement.

In the following section, the literature is critically examined in light of the formulated research question, with an emphasis on international and national debates concerning place branding, city branding, and their interface with public policy. The third section describes the methodological procedures adopted for constructing the *corpus*, detailing the databases consulted, the territorial classification employed, and the criteria for categorising the studies. This is followed by the presentation of results and analyses, which are articulated with the proposed research hypotheses, culminating in a discussion of the study’s contributions and the identification of gaps and future research agendas.

## 2. PLACE BRANDING, CITY BRANDING AND PUBLIC POLICY

The literature on place branding has consolidated as a critical evolution of place/city marketing, shifting the focus from episodic promotional activities to the integrated management of meanings attributed to a given territory (a nation, city, neighbourhood, etc.). Kavaratzis (2004) proposes a framework in which city branding results from the combination of primary communication (urban policies and actions themselves), secondary communication (formal promotion), and tertiary communication (media and word of mouth). The emphasis here is on public policies and structuring investments that complement informal communication.

Two strands reinforce the critique of reducing the topic to a promotional logic. The first is the identity-based approach, which positions the brand as an articulation of a

given place's identity and the images it creates or projects. Kavaratzis and Hatch (2013) argue that a place brand is a process of shared meaning and that urban policies and practices must coherently reflect the identity they intend to assert. Kavaratzis and Kalandides (2015) advance this discussion by emphasising the interactive formation of brands and the importance of participation. From this perspective, places are co-produced by residents, organisations, and visitors, and branding must be designed as a participatory and relational process, rather than as the “delivery” of a fixed narrative.

The second strand extends the dialogue to public management and governance, as observed in Eshuis and Klijn (2012), who treat branding as an instrument of management and collaborative governance, involving coordination among multiple actors and institutional coalitions. The notion of “brand” is thus expanded from a communication perspective to an understanding of branding as the outcome of an ecosystem of policies and public-sector decision-making processes. Soares (2024) presents an institutionalist perspective that, although acknowledging citizen participation and governance as key components of city branding, identifies municipal administration as the principal driver of the brand concept, due to its systemic, multi-sectoral vision and investment capacity for implementing actions, projects, and programmes.

This shift towards public policy is also evident in the field of territorial planning, as highlighted in the volume organised by Van Assche et al. (2020), which proposes rethinking the relationships and synergies between spatial planning and place branding, arguing that the brand should both guide and be guided by diagnostics, regulations, investments, and concrete urban projects. In other words, planning is also communication (as it materialises values in space), and communication is also planning (as it stabilises narratives that enable collective decision-making). The literature has come to view residents and local actors not as “communication audiences”, but as co-producers of place value. Foundational texts on residents' roles emphasise that meaningful participation enhances the effectiveness and sustainability of brands, preventing the creation of artificial, top-down branding.

Research on governance in smart city contexts, for instance, demonstrates that citizen participation is shaped by institutional arrangements and governance modes (managerial, pro-growth, and corporatist), showing that denser urban structures enable more complex participatory processes (Przebyłowicz et al., 2020). Similarly, studies on accessible tourism and inclusive cities reinforce the idea that territorial attractiveness also depends on the capacity to coordinate diverse policies (Caldeira et al., 2017). Analysing the city of Guimarães, Caldeira et al. (2017) show that tourism promotion requires concrete adjustments to urban space and hospitality infrastructure to make the city accessible to diverse audiences, reinforcing the understanding that a place's image is inseparable from the quality and equity of the policies that structure it.

A closer examination of the Brazilian context increasingly challenges the notion of city branding as limited solely to tourism campaigns or institutional promotion. Places distinguish themselves and build reputations not only through tourism and creative economy projects and programmes, but also via initiatives in environmental

sustainability, infrastructure, urban regeneration, innovation, culture, and heritage, among others. Accordingly, the field of study has increasingly incorporated tools from planning, public policy, and governance, alongside brand management techniques and stakeholder engagement strategies.

This theoretical shift carries important methodological implications for empirical research, as analysing place branding requires attention to a portfolio of policies rather than merely communication outputs. In this regard, scale is a critical factor, since the governance approaches differ markedly between a single city and regions or multiple municipalities. Furthermore, there is growing attention to participatory processes and institutional arrangements — who makes decisions, with which instruments, and with what capacities — given the centrality of participation as a critical variable that legitimises the process, whether it originates from organised civil society or from government initiatives.

Additionally, it is important to emphasise that studies on digital communication have highlighted that participation cannot be understood merely as a provision of channels or technological tools, but involves varying degrees of engagement. Sixto-García et al. (2024), in their analysis of participation mechanisms in Portuguese digital media, show that the presence of technical opportunities for interaction does not guarantee immediate engagement, as effective participation depends on a brand's trust, legitimacy, and credibility. Although the authors examine a distinct phenomenon, their findings help to understand that participatory processes, including those within public policies focused on place branding (the object of this study), similarly require institutional density and public recognition.

In summary, city branding can arguably be better understood as a multi-sectoral public policy, anchored in governance and planning, which in turn orchestrates communication. Promotion remains important, as it generates visibility, but it gains substance when it aligns inter(multi-)sectoral priorities and investments. In this light, it may be more meaningful to ask not only “what is the campaign?”, but also “which public policies accompany the place branding process?”.

### 3. METHODS

#### 3.1. CORPUS DEFINITION

A research *corpus* covering the period from 2005 to 2025 was compiled, comprising publications on place branding — including journal articles, book chapters, conference proceedings, doctoral and master's dissertations — to empirically classify studies by territorial scale (urban, rural, regional). Boolean operators (“AND”, “OR”, “AND NOT”) were applied in both Portuguese and English, for example: “marca-lugar” OR “place branding” OR “city branding” AND “identidade” OR “imagem”, as well as “place branding” AND NOT “corporate brand”. The searches were conducted across SciELO, the CAPES Catalogue, Google Scholar, the DOAJ API, and institutional repositories (including Universidade Federal da Bahia, Universidade Federal do Rio Grande do Sul, Universidade Federal de Santa Catarina, and Universidade Federal de Minas Gerais, among others).

Screening returned 148 records, of which 67 were selected based on thematic relevance and the temporal scope<sup>2</sup> (Figure 1 and Table 1). Documents were excluded if they did not include empirical application or theoretical discussion directly related to the concept of “place branding”, or if the term “brand” was used exclusively in a corporate sense, disconnected from territorial contexts. Furthermore, studies focusing solely on product or tourism destination marketing strategies without connection to identity or territorial policies, as well as duplicate records appearing in multiple databases, were also excluded.

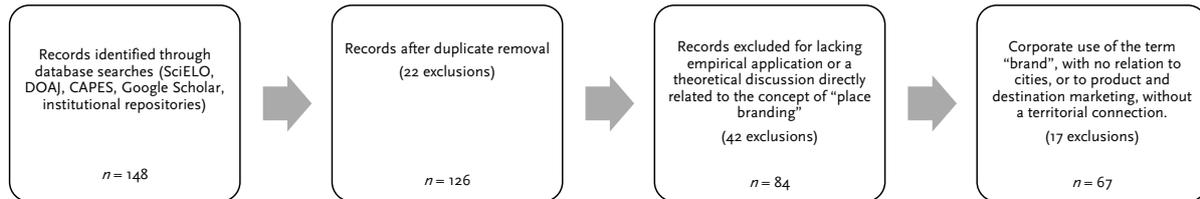


Figure 1. Summary of the screening process

CATEGORY	DESCRIPTION
Doctoral and master's dissertations	CAPES Catalogue of doctoral and master's dissertations and institutional repositories (e.g., Federal University of Bahia/Graduate Programme in Communication and Contemporary Culture; Federal University of Rio Grande do Sul/Lume; Federal University of Santa Catarina; Federal University of Minas Gerais; Federal University of Ceará; Federal University of Espírito Santo, among others).
Brazilian academic journals	SciELO Brazil and specialised journals in communication and urban studies, including <i>Organicom</i> , <i>e-metropolis</i> , <i>Revista Brasileira de Pesquisa em Turismo</i> , <i>Cadernos Metr�pole</i> , <i>Revista Brasileira de Estudos Urbanos e Regionais</i> , <i>Geosp – Espaço e Tempo</i> .
Brazilian conference proceedings	Brazilian Society for Interdisciplinary Studies of Communication (Brazilian Congress of Communication Sciences); Brazilian Association of Researchers in Organisational Communication and Public Relations; Meeting of Multidisciplinary Studies in Culture/Federal University of Bahia; and the Compol�tica Conference.
International journals	<i>Place Branding and Public Diplomacy</i> (Palgrave/Springer), <i>Journal of Place Management and Development</i> (Emerald). Related journals: <i>Cities</i> , <i>European Planning Studies</i> , <i>Urban Studies</i> , <i>Annals of Tourism Research</i> , <i>Journal of Travel Research</i> , <i>Environment and Planning</i> (A, B, C).
Metasearch engines and APIs	DOAJ API (open-access search by subject and country) and Google Scholar (manual searches; no automated scraping).
Complementary and supporting sources	ResearchGate and Academia.edu (preprints, alternative versions, and non-indexed conference documents); Public Communication Observatory, from Federal University of Rio Grande do Sul (journals and conference proceedings).

Table 1. Research corpus

To ensure both coverage and reproducibility, we combined automated data collection (Python scripts executed locally using VS Code) with assisted manual verification supported by spreadsheets (Excel).

### 3.2. DEFINITIONS OF “URBAN” AND “RURAL”

The research adopted the definition provided by IBGE, according to which “a population arrangement is the grouping of two or more municipalities where there is strong

<sup>2</sup> Minor future variations are expected, particularly in searches conducted via Google Scholar and DOAJ, due to ongoing indexing updates.

population integration due to commuting for work or study, or the contiguity of urbanised areas” (Instituto Brasileiro de Geografia e Estatística, 2016, p. 22). This conceptualisation allowed cases located in capitals, urban arrangements, or urban agglomerations, as well as municipalities with an urban profile as defined by the criteria of “population arrangements” and “urban agglomerations”, to be classified as urban, thereby providing an empirical basis for the *corpus* analysis. Similarly, studies were defined as rural only when they explicitly addressed singular rural localities (communities, villages, districts), with all regional or supra-municipal cases excluded from this category and classified instead as state/region. This distinction was essential to ensure that comparisons between scales (urban versus rural) were consistent and aligned with IBGE definitions. The precision of these universe delimitations and their methodological implications is also supported by Furtado (1970), who, in reference to rural space, observes: “the rural is not mere emptiness, but a distinct form of land structure, production, and territorial life” (p. 45). In this study, the state/region category was employed to accommodate multi-municipal units, such as geographic indications or territorial clusters.

#### 4. RESULTS

To guide the reading of this section, the results are organised into three analytical blocks derived from the classification protocol proposed in this article. The dataset on capitals is presented in Table 2, comprising 28 occurrences. Non-capital cities, which constitute medium- or small-sized cities, accounted for only three occurrences and are presented in Table 3.

YEAR	TITLE	AUTHORS	TYPE	CAPITAL
2025	“O Projeto Fortaleza Cidade Criativa do Design da UNESCO: Estratégia-Como-Prática e Efeitos no Processo Criativo”	Rodrigo Ábner Gonçalves Menezes and Ana Sílvia Rocha Ipiranga	Journal article ( <i>Organizações &amp; Sociedade</i> )	Fortaleza
2025	<i>Fortaleza Cidade do Design da Unesco: Avaliação de uma Política Cultural a Partir da Classe Criativa dos Designers</i>	Valdemice Costa de Sousa	Master’s dissertation	Fortaleza
2024	A Dimensão Estratégica da Comunicação Para Construção da Marca Lugar: Os Sentidos Atribuídos à Cidade de Salvador Pelas Administrações Municipais no Período Pós-Redemocratização (1986-2016)	Rodrigo M. F. Soares	Doctoral dissertation	Salvador
2024	“Salvador e as Marcas do Tempo: Da Cidade Fortaleza à Cidade Global”	Rodrigo M. F. Soares	Journal article ( <i>e-metrópolis</i> )	Salvador
2024	“Expressividade da Marca Lugar Salvador na Festa de Iemanjá: Uma Análise da Publicidade da Prefeitura Via Instagram (2022–2024)”	Brenda Cristina Santos Melo, Mariana Pinto Miranda and Rônei Rocha Barreto de Souza	Conference proceedings (“Meeting of Multidisciplinary Studies in Culture 2024”)	Salvador
2023	“Centro Histórico de Salvador, Bahia, Brasil: Marca Coletiva e Territorial Para o Desenvolvimento Sustentável”	Angela Machado Rocha and Márcia Magalhães Guimarães	Journal article ( <i>Revista de Gestão e Secretariado</i> )	Salvador
2023	“Estratégias das Marcas Territoriais na Representação e Reputação dos Territórios no Âmbito do Desenvolvimento Regional”	Giovana G. F. de Almeida	Journal article ( <i>Revista de Estudios Urbano Regionales</i> )	Porto Alegre

2022	“Cotidiano, Imprensa e Política: A Construção Simbólica da Cidade de Goiânia por Intermediário do Jornal O Popular”	George Leonardo Seabra Coelho	Journal article ( <i>Revista Brasileira de Estudos Urbanos e Regionais</i> )	Goiânia
2021	“A Criação de uma Marca-Lugar a Partir dos Enunciados Políticos: As Cidades Como Organizações Discursivas”	Rodrigo M. F. Soares	Journal article ( <i>Organicom</i> )	Salvador
2020	“Maratona do Rio de Janeiro: O Branding da Cidade Maravilhosa”	Tatiana Cioni Couto	Conference proceedings (“Brazilian Congress of Communication Sciences”)	Rio de Janeiro
2020	“Centro Histórico de Manaus/AM: Subsídios Para o Reordenamento Turístico”	Sibelle da Silva Oliveira, Márcia Raquel Cavalcante Guimarães and Karla C. Ribeiro Maia	Journal article ( <i>Revista de Turismo Contemporâneo</i> )	Manaus
2020	“Lugares Como Marcas: Aproximações Possíveis Entre a Promoção das Cidades e a Economia Política da Comunicação”	Rodrigo M. F. Soares	Conference proceedings (“Brazilian Congress of Communication Sciences”)	Salvador
2019	“Cidade Maravilhosa: Imaginário e Consumo na Maratona do Rio de Janeiro”	Tatiana Cioni Couto	Conference proceedings (“Brazilian Congress of Communication Sciences”)	Rio de Janeiro
2019	“Megaeventos, Porto Maravilha e a Retórica do Legado: A Construção Discursiva do ‘Rio, Cidade Global’”	Vânia O. Fortuna	Conference proceedings (Brazilian Association of Researchers in Organisational Communication and Public Relations)	Rio de Janeiro
2019	“Rio Criativo e a Valorização da Marca ‘Rio’: Eventos Como Estratégia de City Branding”	Jorgiana Melo de Aguiar Brennard and Talita de Oliveira Trindade	Conference proceedings (Brazilian Association of Researchers in Organisational Communication and Public Relations)	Rio de Janeiro
2019	“Entre o Cidadão e o Turista: As Marcas Lugares Salvador e Lisboa e Suas Produções de Sentidos em Peças Audiovisuais de Autopromoção Dessas Cidades”	Janine Pereira F. de Oliveira, Adriano de O. Sampaio, Claudiane de Oliveira Carvalho Sampaio	Journal article ( <i>Organicom</i> )	Salvador/ Lisbon
2019	“MARCA SALVADOR E MARCA LISBOA: Análise Comparativa dos Seus Valores e Atributos em Vídeos Promocionais Acerca Dessas Cidades”	Janine Pereira F. de Oliveira and Adriano de O. Sampaio	Conference proceedings (Brazilian Association of Researchers in Organisational Communication and Public Relations)	Salvador/ Lisbon
2018	<i>A Marca da Cidade — O Caso do Rio de Janeiro</i>	Patrícia Cerqueira Reis	Book	Rio de Janeiro
2018	“As Cidades Dentro da Cidade: A Construção de uma Narrativa Visual de Salvador/BA Sob o Viés do Consumo, Cultura e Espaço Público”	Rodrigo M. F. Soares	Conference proceedings (“Meeting of Multidisciplinary Studies in Culture 2018”)	Salvador
2018	“Salvador e os Sentidos: Estratégias de Comunicação na Web Para a Construção da Marca-Cidade”	Adriano de O. Sampaio	Journal article ( <i>Organicom</i> )	Salvador
2018	<i>Marca Territorial Como Produto Cultural no Âmbito do Desenvolvimento Regional: O Caso de Porto Alegre, RS, Brasil</i>	Giovana G. F. de Almeida	Doctoral dissertation	Porto Alegre
2017	“The World Heritage Brand and Tourism: An Approach to the Historic Centre of São Luís, Brazil-Heritage Tourism Marketing”	A. B. Galvão and R. M. Barbosa	Book chapter	São Luís
2016	Rio de Janeiro, uma Cidade Global? Uma Reflexão Sobre a Construção da Marca Rio	Patrícia Cerqueira Reis	Master’s dissertation	Rio de Janeiro

2016	“Quando o Projeto Disfarça o Plano: Concepções de Planejamento e Suas Metamorfoses em Belém (PA)”	Ana C. D. Cardoso, Taynara V. Gomes, Ana C. C. de Melo and Luna B. Bibas	Journal article ( <i>Cadernos Metrópole</i> )	Belém
2015	<i>Sistematização da Aplicação do Brand DNA Process no Design de Marca de Cidades Criativas - Caso Projeto Rota da Inovação, Florianópolis</i>	Laryssa Tarachucky	Master's dissertation	Florianópolis
2014	“Intervenções Urbanas em Maceió e os Discursos Sobre Identidade e Marketing Urbano”	Vanessa T. C. de Lima and Adriana C. B. S. Manhas	Conference proceedings (“14th State Meeting of ANPUH History”)	Maceió
2008	“A Modernização Urbana do Centro de Vitória (ES): Considerações Preliminares Sobre a Geografia do Passado de uma Cidade”	Eduardo Rodrigues Gomes	Journal article ( <i>Geografães</i> )	Vitória
2007	“City Marketing ou Desenvolvimento Urbano? Um Estudo Baseado na Cidade de Belém do Pará”	Carlos A. C. de Mattos, Aline L. Miralha and Antonio Pascoal Del'arco Junior	Conference proceedings (“11th Latin American Meeting of Scientific Initiation & 7th Latin American Meeting of Postgraduate” — Universidade do Vale do Paraíba)	Belém

Table 2. Capitals

YEAR	TITLE	AUTHORS	TYPE	CITY
2023	“Um Olhar Sobre Nazaré/BA: Manifestações Culturais Como Elemento de Fortalecimento da Marca Cidade”	Bianca N. dos Santos and Rodrigo M. F. Soares	Conference proceedings (“Intercom Júnior”)	Nazaré (Bahia)
2022	“O Posicionamento Discursivo da Marca Lugar dos Açores: Uma Proposta Analítica”	Mariana Pinto Miranda	Journal article ( <i>NAUS: Revista Lusófona de Estudos Culturais e Comunicacionais</i> )	Azores, Portugal
2017	“Os Componentes da Identidade de Marca de Gramado/BR”	Vanessa A. de Azambuja and Marlei S. Mecca	Journal article ( <i>Revista Brasileira de Pesquisa em Turismo</i> )	Gramado (Rio Grande do Sul)

Table 3. Medium and small cities (non-capitals)

Regional and theoretical–conceptual studies — works that extend beyond a single case (multi-municipality arrangements, metropolitan regions, geographical indications, national/international comparisons, or conceptual discussions) — are consolidated in Table 4. These studies are largely urban in focus, using cities or capitals as illustrative examples while engaging with broader theoretical discussions on territorial identity, public policy, and place branding at national and global scales. In these cases, the empirical territory appears less as an isolated object and more as an illustration within a conceptual construction, justifying the creation of a distinct category that acknowledges its hybrid nature.

YEAR	TITLE	AUTHORS	TYPE
2025	“Sustainable Tourism and Extreme Intercurrences: Recovery Strategies and Future Perspectives”	Adriano O. Sampaio, Mariana P. Miranda, Mamadou Gaye and Rodrigo M. F. Soares	Book chapter
2025	“Editorial – Places, People and Partnerships: Literature's Indispensable Theoretical-Practical Trivium”	Ana Margarida Barreto, Fabiana G. Mariutti, João R. Freire and Nuno C. Brito	Editorial

2025	“Territorial Brand as a Public Governance Strategy: Cases of Brazil and Portugal”	Giovana G. F. de Almeida	Journal article ( <i>Administrative Sciences</i> )
2024	“When Place Brand and Place Logo Matches: VRIO Applied to Place Branding”	Fabiana G. Mariutti, Vivian I. Strehlau, Eliana Herrero and John J. Loomis	Journal article ( <i>Place Branding and Public Diplomacy</i> )
2024	“Images of Territory in the Power Relations From Territorial Brand: An Intercultural Discussion”	Giovana G. F. de Almeida and Paulo Almeida	Journal article ( <i>GeoJournal</i> )
2024	“The City Makes Its Mark in a Review on Digital Communication and Citizenship”	José Gabriel Andrade, Adriano Sampaio, Jorge Esparteiro Garcia and Manuel José Fonseca	Book chapter
2023	“Imagem Afetiva dos Turistas no Destino Vale dos Vinhedos (RS)”	Rafael M. L. Freire, Kettrin Farias Bem Maracajá, Vander Valduga and Alex B. F. M. do Nascimento	Journal article ( <i>Turismo Visão e Ação</i> )
2023	“Territorial Brand in Regional Development”	Giovana G. F. de Almeida	Journal article ( <i>Encyclopedia</i> )
2023	“What Makes a Serious Country? The Status of Brazil’s Seriousness From the Perspective of Great Powers”	Daniel Buarque	Journal article ( <i>Place Branding and Public Diplomacy</i> )
2022	“City Branding, Financeirização e Mercadificação da Cidade: Novas Estratégias de Reprodução do Capital”	Fábio B. Montanari	Journal article ( <i>GEOgraphia</i> )
2022	“Discussions Between Place Branding and Territorial Brand in Regional Development—A Classification Model Proposal”	Giovana G. F. de Almeida and Lucília Cardoso	Journal article ( <i>Sustainability</i> )
2022	“Marca Territorial Como Estratégia nos Planos Estaduais de Turismo (RN, RO, RS)”	Giovana G. F. de Almeida	Journal article ( <i>Revista Brasileira de Gestão e Desenvolvimento Regional</i> )
2022	“Marca Lugar: A Produção Científica Sobre o Tema nos Anos de 2020 e 2021”	Mariana Miranda and Brenda C. S. Melo	Conference proceedings (“XVI Congresso ABRAPCORP”)
2022	“Place Branding, Digital Communication, and Citizenship”	Adriano de O. Sampaio and José Gabriel Andrade	Book chapter
2022	“The Future Pathways of Place Branding – Brazilian Landscape”	Fabiana G. Mariutti and Magdalena Florek	Editorial
2022	“University Brand Reputation From the Perspective of Place Branding: The Brazilian Case”	Fabiana G. Mariutti and I. Poiani	Journal article ( <i>Brazilian Research and Studies Center</i> )
2022	MARCA LUGAR: A Produção Científica Sobre o Tema nos Anos de 2020 e 2021”	Mariana Pinto Miranda, Brenda Cristina Santos Melo and Rônei Rocha Barreto de Souza	Conference proceedings (“Meeting of Multidisciplinary Studies in Culture – ENECULT”)
2021	“Branding Cities, Regions and Countries: The Roadmap of Place Brand Equity”	Fabiana G. Mariutti and Janaina M. E. Giraldi	Journal article ( <i>RAUSP Management Journal</i> )
2021	<i>Indicação Geográfica Como Promotora do Desenvolvimento Territorial Sustentável: Vales da Uva Goethe e Corupá</i>	Paulo R. L. Arruda	Doctoral dissertation
2021	“Os Impactos da Covid19 Sobre o Turismo e a Cultura na Bahia, Ceará e Pernambuco: Estratégias Para Sustentabilidade e Fortalecimento da Marca Lugar”	Mariana P. Miranda, Adriano O. Sampaio, Janine P. F. Oliveira and Rodrigo M. F. Soares	Journal article ( <i>Rizoma</i> )
2021	“Marca-lugar, Cidades e Cidadania”	Logos/Federal University of Bahia (coordinated session)	Coordinated session (“Meeting of Multidisciplinary Studies in Culture”)

2020	“Country Brand Personality of Brazil: A Hindsight of Aaker’s Theory”	Fabiana G. Mariutti and Janaina M. E. Giraldi	Journal article ( <i>Place Branding and Public Diplomacy</i> )
2020	“Leveraging the Country-of-Origin Image by Managing It at Different Levels”	Mariana B. Suter, Felipe M. Borini, Diego B. Coelho, Moacir M. Oliveira Jr. and Marcos C. C. Machado	Journal article ( <i>Place Branding and Public Diplomacy</i> )
2020	“O Conceito de Marca Lugar nos Congressos da Abrapcorp: Transversalidade Entre Comunicação Estratégica, Turismo e Cidadania”	Mariana P. Miranda and Adriano de O. Sampaio	Conference proceedings (Brazilian Association of Researchers in Organisational Communication and Public Relations)
2020	“O Conceito de Marca Lugar nos Congressos da ABRAPCORP: Transversalidade Entre Comunicação, Turismo e Cidadania”	Adriano de Oliveira Sampaio and Mariana Pinto Miranda (session/study organisation)	Conference proceedings (Brazilian Association of Researchers in Organisational Communication and Public Relations)
2019	“Cluster Branding: O Caso do Vale dos Vinhedos”	Andreia C. Azevedo and Carlos Ramoa	Journal article ( <i>Gestão &amp; Regionalidade</i> )
2019	“Fundamentos Teóricos Sobre Marketing de Lugar, Gestão de Marca de Lugar e Valor de MarcadeLugar”	Fabiana G. Mariutti	Journal article ( <i>Comunicação &amp; Mercado</i> )
2017	<i>Country Reputation Theory: Brazil’s Brand Image in the United Kingdom</i>	Fabiana G. Mariutti	Doctoral dissertation
2017	“The Placement of Country Reputation Towards Place Management”	Fabiana G. Mariutti	Journal article ( <i>Journal of Place Management &amp; Development</i> )
2016	“How Does Brazil Measure Up? Comparing Rankings Through the Lenses of Nation Brand Indexes”	Fabiana G. Mariutti and Ralph Tench	Journal article ( <i>Place Branding and Public Diplomacy</i> )
2015	“Magical Touch of Marketing: Matching Promotion With the 4 R’s of Place Branding”	Fabiana G. Mariutti	Journal article ( <i>Archives of Business Research</i> )
2015	“Place Branding as a Strategic Spatial Planning Instrument”	Eduardo da Silva Oliveira	Journal article ( <i>Place Branding and Public Diplomacy</i> )
2013	<i>Design Gráfico na Construção da Identidade Visual da Marca Turística em City Branding</i>	Helder A. T. G. Cardoso	Master’s dissertation
2013	“Indicações Geográficas e Desenvolvimento Territorial (Estudo com Vale dos Vinhedos)”	Fernando S. Anjos, Encarnación Aguilar Criado and Nádía Velleda Caldas	Journal article ( <i>DADOS – Revista de Ciências Sociais</i> )
2013	<i>Processo de Planejamento de Marcas Gráficas Turísticas de Cidade</i>	Eduardo Napoleão	Master’s dissertation
2008	<i>Marca Bahia no Turismo: Identidade Territorial e Construção de Marca Lugar</i>	Frederico Burgos Lima	Master’s dissertation

Table 4. Regional and theoretical-conceptual approaches

#### 4.1. INTERPRETATION OF RESULTS IN LIGHT OF THE HYPOTHESES

The analysis of the national *corpus* (2005–2025), comprising 67 works of various types (journal articles, book chapters, conference proceedings, doctoral and master’s dissertations), confirms a strong urban bias in Brazilian scholarly production on place branding. Considering the overall distribution, 28 studies (41.8%) focus on capitals, compared with only three (4.5%) on non-capitals. The remainder of the *corpus* addresses regional-scale studies, including multi-municipal arrangements, geographical indications, metropolitan regions, and mixed conceptual or national/comparative works (53.7%). It is

noteworthy that there are no cases classified as “rural” according to the IBGE typology: no study focused directly on a rural municipality as an empirical unit.

This result becomes even more evident when isolating the subset most relevant to the hypothesis, as 31 studies were categorised as “single-city”. Of these, 28 concern capitals and 3 non-capitals, meaning that, in percentage terms, the literature shows an index exceeding 90% compared with single-city studies. In the ranking of the most-studied cities, Salvador (10 studies) and Rio de Janeiro (six) lead, followed by Porto Alegre, Fortaleza, and Belém (two each). Non-capitals appear only marginally, with isolated cases such as Gramado (Rio Grande do Sul) and Nazaré (Bahia). This indicates a minimal presence, supporting the interpretation that medium-sized and small cities remain marginalised in the academic field.

The third category of mapped publications consists of regional and theoretical-conceptual studies that extend beyond the single-city case: they examine multi-municipal arrangements (metropolitan regions, inter-municipal consortia), analyse geographical indications and productive territories, or discuss place branding from an epistemological perspective. Among these 36 publications, some studies do not refer to a single city.

This predominance of capitals is not exclusive to Brazil. International literature on place branding has similarly identified the strong centrality of major cities in territorial management studies. Simon Anholt (2007), one of the pioneers of the concepts of nation branding and later city branding, highlighted that large urban centres tend to concentrate promotional narratives, multi-sectoral public policies, and resource flows, making them the principal laboratories for place-branding experiences. Likewise, Ashworth and Kavaratzis (2010) argue that global cities constitute “privileged fields” for the application of territorial differentiation strategies, precisely because they simultaneously mobilise tourism, culture, the creative economy, and urban governance.

In Brazil, this trend is evident in the recurrent focus on Salvador, Rio de Janeiro, Recife, and Porto Alegre. Studies emphasise large urban projects (revitalisations, such as Porto Maravilha), international events (Carnival, World Cup, Olympics), and tourism and creative economy policies. These cities offer a more diverse multi-sectoral portfolio, combining tourism, culture, innovation, mobility, and housing, which directly relates to Hypothesis 2 (place branding as a multi-sectoral policy).

If capitals dominate the debate, medium- and small-sized municipalities appear only marginally. Even when they are identified, as in the cases of Gramado (Rio Grande do Sul) or Nazaré (Bahia), the framing tends to occur primarily through tourism. In other words, very few studies explore other dimensions of place branding in these localities, such as community identity or even local development strategies. Although some studies address rurality, they almost always fall under the “regional” category, focusing on geographical indications, tourist routes, or local production arrangements. Consequently, no isolated rural municipality appears as a direct empirical object over the 20 years analysed, highlighting a shift of rurality to a regional scale.

It is possible to infer several factors that may explain why Brazilian scientific production on place branding is predominantly linked to capitals: (a) capitals concentrate public narratives, media presence, and discursive production concerning urban identity;

(b) large cities provide access to data, documents, and institutional archives, facilitating academic research; (c) they offer a broader range of public policies and strategic projects, attracting approaches that conceive place branding as an urban governance phenomenon; and (d) capitals typically host mega-events (e.g., World Cup 2014, 2016 Olympics) and, for this reason, become empirical laboratories for discussions on city branding, particularly in the Brazilian context. Moreover, the presence of a critical academic mass, as evidenced by research groups and university studies focused on place branding or urban studies, may reinforce the concentration of research on a given city, thereby establishing these locations as laboratories for scholarly investigation<sup>3</sup>.

This result highlights the need to broaden the field's empirical scope by incorporating studies at alternative scales and in peripheral territories, to avoid reproducing a partial and elitist view of place-branding dynamics in Brazil.

Hypothesis 2 is based on the premise that the concentration of studies in large cities does not stem solely from an academic bias but from a structural characteristic: the notion of “place brand” depends on a multi-sectoral coordination of public policies. In other words, it is not an isolated communication policy but an arrangement that mobilises sectors such as tourism, culture, environment, infrastructure, and others. This feature makes it plausible that capitals, endowed with greater institutional and budgetary capacity, assume a leading role in scientific production and empirical practice. The 28 capitals analysed are almost always associated with programmes that combine different lines of action:

- Rio de Janeiro: urban redevelopment projects (Porto Maravilha), linked to mega-events (World Cup, Olympics) and tourism policies;
- Salvador: investments in cultural tourism, heritage, and the revitalisation of historic areas integrated with creative economy policies;
- Recife: Porto Digital as a driver of technological innovation;
- Fortaleza: the UNESCO “Creative City of Design” designation (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization – UNESCO).

These cases illustrate the multi-sectoral nature of place branding. As Anholt (2007) notes, “the reputation of places is not built solely with slogans or logos, but by the sum of policies, behaviours, and investments that sustain the life of a community” (p. 5). The concept, therefore, is only sustainable in contexts where it is possible to coordinate multiple government sectors and social actors around a shared narrative. In this regard, Mariutti and Florek (2022) add: “place branding has been used to foster economic restructuring, social inclusion and cohesion, political engagement and participation” (p. 5).

In this sense, the overrepresentation of capital cities in the literature is not incidental: they possess the institutional and budgetary capacity to coordinate different governmental departments and sectoral policies, whereas medium-sized and small municipalities

<sup>3</sup> This hypothesis is supported by the significant body of research on Salvador/Bahia and the existence of a research group that has established itself as a reference in the study of place branding, based at the Universidade Federal da Bahia (Grupo Logos). Similarly, groups that investigate the city across multiple dimensions — such as SOPAPO — Society, Space and Politics (Federal University of Pernambuco) and ProLUGAR + SEL RJ (Universidade Federal do Rio de Janeiro//School of Architecture and Urbanism) — also contribute to fostering research on the topic.

rarely have the resources required to implement integrated strategies. The comparative analysis by Kavaratzis and Hatch (2013) reinforces this point by arguing that effective place branding depends on alignment between urban policies, stakeholder management and narratives of collective identity. Although such alignment is desirable at any scale, it is more feasible in cities that concentrate institutional density, a diversity of actors, and greater attention from the national state and the media. Broegaard et al. (2019), in their analysis of communities in the Nordic context, similarly show how territorial branding operates as a “glue” that connects different institutional arrangements under a shared narrative of reputation and competitiveness. When this reasoning is transposed to the Brazilian context, it becomes clear why cities such as Salvador, Rio de Janeiro or Recife emerge as preferred laboratories: they possess a larger symbolic stock and a greater capacity to articulate multi-sectoral policies around a territorial project.

Regarding non-capital cities, Gramado (Rio Grande do Sul) is mainly cited in the context of event tourism, while Nazaré (Bahia) appears in the context of religious tourism and events (such as the Feira de Caxixis). These are relevant initiatives, but they do not amount to an integrated place-branding policy. The same absence is observed in rural municipalities, which do not appear as isolated empirical cases in the *corpus*. When rurality is addressed, it is done only through studies at the regional scale, such as those focusing on geographical indications, wine routes, or local productive arrangements. This suggests that, in Brazil, the concept of “place branding” has not yet become established as a multi-sectoral policy tool in medium-sized, small or rural municipalities.

In summary, the empirical analysis confirms Hypothesis 2: the concentration of the literature on large cities stems from the very logic of the place branding concept, which requires multi-sectoral articulation and higher levels of institutional resources. This structural characteristic favours capitals and metropolitan areas but, at the same time, exposes a gap in the field: there is a lack of studies examining how smaller municipalities might adapt the concept to their specific contexts, whether through community identity policies, niche tourism, or sustainable development strategies. If culture is indeed a key driver of place branding, it is worth asking why small and medium-sized historic cities struggle to overcome their relative isolation. The answer may lie precisely in their more limited capacity to coordinate public policies.

## 5. FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

This article contributes to place branding studies by offering a replicable analytical framework for examining place branding in Brazil, based on an investigation of distinctions between analytical units (single city × state/region × mixed), as well as an effort to classify the urban and rural dimensions present in the literature. The use of an analytical corpus composed of multiple open sources (federal repositories, national conference proceedings, and international databases) provides the necessary breadth for this review. Among the key findings, the data indicate that an urban bias dominates the overall ecosystem of publications; however, the conceptual core of branding is not confined to

capital cities. When branding is approached as a public policy, inter-sectoral (or multi-sectoral) coordination becomes more visible, including in non-capital cities. The analytical design proposed here helps to avoid distortions arising from the homogenisation of scale and scope, offering a basis for both longitudinal and cross-city comparisons.

The contrast between the strong presence of capital cities and the limited incidence in other contexts suggests the need to develop analytical tools capable of capturing not only territorial scale, but also the quality of public policy coordination involved in place branding construction. In other words, it is not sufficient to determine whether a city is large or small; it is also necessary to assess the extent to which it can coordinate distinct policy sectors under a shared narrative.

In this sense, one of the main contributions of this study lies in highlighting the potential value of proposing a multi-sector index as a future development for the field. It is suggested that the greater the number of public policies involved and aligned with communication actions, the more robust a city's place brand is likely to be. Such an index would enable comparisons across cities regarding the breadth and diversity of policies associated with their place branding strategies, providing a more objective basis for evaluating the phenomenon. This approach would help move beyond a purely descriptive reading of the urban bias and towards a deeper understanding of the actual capacity to integrate public policies around territorial strategies.

Nevertheless, some limitations remain and must be acknowledged: the *corpus* may under-represent non-indexed conference proceedings; municipal rurality is rare, which calls for dedicated case studies; and inferences regarding multi-sector coordination require content analysis beyond keyword-based approaches. Even so, the consistency of the urban pattern is sufficiently robust to reposition the prevailing narrative and to inform both policy-making and future research agendas. A structural gap persists, constraining the field's ability to explore the specificities of place branding in contexts of lower demographic and institutional density, thereby reproducing a partial and elitist view of the phenomenon in Brazil.

### Machine Translation Post-Editing: Anabela Delgado

#### REFERENCES

- Anholt, S. (2007). *Competitive identity: The new brand management for nations, cities and regions*. Palgrave Macmillan.
- Ashworth, G. J., & Kavaratzis, M. (2010). *Towards effective place brand management: Branding European cities and regions*. Edward Elgar Publishing.
- Broegaard, R. B., Larsen, K. T., & Larsen, L. H. (2019). Translocal communities and their implications for place branding. In C. Cassinger, A. Lucarelli, & S. Gyimóthy (Eds.), *The Nordic wave in place branding: Poetics, practices, politics* (pp. 109–123). Edward Elgar Publishing. <https://doi.org/10.4337/9781788974325.00019>

- Caldeira, C. B. M., Silva, N. C., & Nunes, F. P. J. (2017). Turismo acessível em Guimarães. Oportunidade e desafio para uma cidade inclusiva. *HOLOS*, 4, 341–356. <https://doi.org/10.15628/holos.2017.5274>
- Eshuis, J., & Klijn, E.-H. (2012). *Branding in governance and public management*. Routledge.
- Furtado, C. (1970). *Teoria e política do desenvolvimento econômico*. Editora Universidade de Brasília.
- Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics. (2016). *Arranjos populacionais e concentrações urbanas do Brasil* (2nd ed.). IBGE.
- Kavaratzis, M. (2004). From city marketing to city branding: Towards a theoretical framework for developing city brands. *Place Branding*, 1, 58–73. <https://doi.org/10.1057/palgrave.pb.5990005>
- Kavaratzis, M., & Hatch, M. J. (2013). The dynamics of place brands: An identity-based approach to place branding theory. *Marketing Theory*, 13(1), 69–86. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1470593112467268>
- Kavaratzis, M., & Kalandides, A. (2015). Rethinking the place brand: The interactive formation of place brands and the role of participatory place branding. *Environment and Planning A*, 47(6), 1368–1382. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0308518X15594918>
- Mariutti, F., & Florek, M. (2022). The future pathways of place branding – Brazilian landscape. *ReMark - Revista Brasileira de Marketing*, 21(1), 1–8. <https://doi.org/10.5585/remark.v21i1.21486>
- Przebilovicz, E., Cunha, M. A., Geertman, S., Leleux, C., Michels, A., Tomor, Z., Webster, C. W. R., & Meijer, A. (2020). Citizen participation in the smart city: Findings from an international comparative study. *Local Government Studies*, 48(1), 23–47. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03003930.2020.1851204>
- Sampaio, A. O., & Miranda, M. P. (2021). Espelhamento de marca-lugar e gentrificação: Desafios dos centros históricos de Salvador e Lisboa. In U. Sindocha & A. A. C. Rubim (Eds.), *Enlaces culturais Brasil-Portugal* (pp. 171–190). Documenta.
- Sixto-García, J., Duarte-Melo, A., & Andrade, J. G. (2024). The relationship between the most consumed digital media in Portugal and audience participation mechanisms. *Frontiers in Communication*, 9, Article 1466140. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fcomm.2024.1466140>
- Soares, R. M. F. (2024). *A dimensão estratégica da comunicação para construção da marca-lugar: Os sentidos atribuídos à cidade de Salvador pelas administrações municipais no período pós-redemocratização (1986–2016)* [Doctoral dissertation, Universidade Federal da Bahia]. Repositório Institucional da UFBA. <https://repositorio.ufba.br/handle/ri/39740>
- Van Assche, K., Beunen, R., & Oliveira, E. (2020). Spatial planning and place branding: Rethinking relations and synergies. *European Planning Studies*, 28(7), 1274–1290. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09654313.2019.1701289>
- World Tourism Organization. (2018). *Overtourism? Understanding and managing urban tourism growth beyond perceptions*. <https://doi.org/10.18111/9789284420070>

## BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

Rodrigo Maurício Freire Soares is a public relations professional and holds a PhD in Communication and Contemporary Culture from the Graduate Programme in Communication and Contemporary Culture at the Federal University of Bahia. He also holds a master's degree in Social Development and Management from the Graduate

Programme in Social Development and Management at the same institution. He is a lecturer in the Public Relations undergraduate programme at the Federal University of Bahia, a member of the research group Communication, Politics and Digital Networks (CP-Redes/Federal University of Bahia), and the lead researcher of the INTERFACES research group: Communication, Organisations, Languages and Culture (Federal University of Bahia). His research interests include public relations, organisational communication, public communication, brand management, and place branding. He is a registered member of the Regional Council of Public Relations (1st Region – CONRERP 0250).

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-4497-3432>

Email: [rmsoares@uneb.br](mailto:rmsoares@uneb.br)

Address: Universidade do Estado da Bahia (UNEB) - Departamento de Ciências Humanas I, Curso de Relações Públicas, Rua Silveira Martins, 2555, Cabula, Salvador – BA, Brasil

**Submitted: 05/09/2025 | Accepted: 05/01/2026**



*This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License.*