

Place branding & place marketing 1976–2016: A multidisciplinary literature review

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Abstract This contribution offers a systematic and complete overview of the scientific literature in the field of place marketing and place branding research. A total of 1172 articles published between 1976 and 2016 in 98 different journals were analyzed and meticulously classified into categories and subcategories according to disciplinary approach, method used and perspective adopted. This literature review thus provides a detailed overview of the state of the art and reveals various trends and developments in this emerging field of study. Among other things, it demonstrates that the field suffers from a lack of conceptual clarity, diverging definitions and a weak theoretical foundation, which means it addresses a very broad range of research topics. In addition, the field lacks empirical evidence and explanatory articles, meaning that the numerous hypotheses concerning the effects of place marketing activities on attractiveness remain unsubstantiated. The review also underscores the literature’s lack of interest in the political and institutional contexts of places, although this information is crucial in terms of public management. Moreover, this work notes that the rhetoric of consultants is given pride of place, with the publication of numerous prescriptive articles focused on sharing best practices. Finally, this study notes the existence of a significant number of critical articles.

Keywords Place marketing · Place branding · Literature review · State of the art · Public management

1 Place branding as an emerging scientific domain

Branding has “invaded all aspects of public and private life” (van Ham 2002, p.249). In fact, in the case of places, significant efforts and resources are being devoted to the development of place marketing and place brand(ing) strategies: public bodies spend

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millions of dollars each year on this (Kotler et al. 1993; Young and Lever 1997; Morgan et al. 2002; Seisdedos 2006; Jacobsen 2009, 2012). Such activities relate to all levels: local, regional, national, international and cross-border (Baker 2007; Braun 2008; Go and Govers 2010, 2011; Houllier-Guibert 2012; Chamard et al. 2014; Alaux et al. 2015; Zenker and Jacobsen 2015). Numerous public and para-public organizations sometimes even consider these strategies to be crucial to regional development.

The range of practices and the literature analyzing these practices has become very broad and includes numerous concepts, even those that appear at first unrelated to marketing like land planning, urban planning and regional development. The total number of scientific papers on topics related to place marketing and place branding has exponentially increased within the last decades, as display, among other possible indicators, the numbers of items per year obtained via Google Scholar search with these keywords and as we will show in this review including contributions from 1976 to 2016. The number of organized conferences and platforms, such as The Place Brand Observer (2014), associated with this theme has also augmented (Désilets 2012). In this regard, recent developments may lead towards more “institutionalization” of this field, which values strong ties between academics and professionals. Such developments include the creation of the Regional Attractiveness & Place Marketing Chair at Aix-Marseille University (A&NMT 2013), the set-up of the Special Interest Group on Place Marketing & Branding at the Institute of Place Management (IPM 2015), as well as the establishment of the International Place Branding Association (IPBA 2015).

As a result, there is an emerging field of research devoted to the scientific analysis of these practices (Dinnie 2004) and place branding can be considered as “a serious domain of research” (Tiwari and Bose 2013, p.19). However, the literature on place marketing and place branding is full of idiosyncrasies. As a relatively new multidisciplinary field that is “largely based on anecdotic evidence from single case studies” (Lucarelli and Berg 2011, p.14) and influenced by the prescriptive approach of consultants (Aronczyk 2008; Boland 2013) and other practitioners (Niedomysl and Jonasson 2012), it is fragmented, lacks empirical data, and requires more academic rigor. So have stated various literature reviews.

To date, no systematic and exhaustive overview of this emerging field of study has corroborated these shortcomings. Only a comprehensive literature review can provide a solid foundation for the scientific development of the field and put an end to the observed tendency to systematically reinvent the wheel. While we do note that a variety of articles using different perspectives are being written to address this very theme, these papers are sometimes complementary, sometimes contradictory, and frequently fail to reference each other. For these reasons, we decided to conduct a broad and systematic literature review.

A total of 1172 articles published between 1976 and 2016 in 98 different journals were identified, using specific criteria to select the journals examined (systematic phase) and a pragmatic approach to find additional items (empirical phase). The articles were then examined closely and classified into categories and subcategories according to disciplinary approach, method used and perspective adopted. Before discussing our methodological choices in detail and presenting our findings, we would like to begin by acknowledging existing works and pointing out the relevance of conducting such a literature review.

2 Existing literature reviews

To the best of our knowledge, no existing literature review has inventoried more than 292 papers. In fact, among the literature reviews identified, Lucarelli and Brorström (2013) work on a corpus of 292 publications, Lucarelli and Berg (2011) categorize 217 articles, Gertner (2011a, b) examines 212, both Oguztimur and Akturan (2016) and Acharya and Rahman (2016) study a total of 147 each, Chan and Marafa (2013) look at 111 and Andersson (2014) analyzes 86. These existing literature reviews have established several different classifications. We will therefore briefly present an overview of each one, in reverse chronological order:

- The most recent one we know about is that of Acharya and Rahman (2016), which identifies nine themes addressed by the literature. These authors conclude that most of the 147 articles examined are conceptual, qualitative and based on case studies. The major research theme to emerge from all the studies is place brand identity.
- Oguztimur and Akturan (2016) review 147 articles on city branding (a category included in place branding). Noting that the articles are either “marketing” or “urban planning” oriented, the authors propose four categories to describe the topics addressed: (1) city branding concepts, processes and measures, (2) branding strategies, (3) social urbanism and (4) cultural and tourism branding.
- The literature review of Andersson (2014) focuses solely on place branding articles in the field of human geography. She organizes the 86 articles analyzed into seven different categories.
- Chan and Marafa (2013) analyze 111 papers, focused on 117 different places, appearing in three academic journals that frequently publish articles on the subject. The authors conclude that the articles examined lack integrated research approaches and an integral theory, and that few have a statistical basis. Place branding literature thus offers little in the way of explanatory material to advance this field.
- The work of Lucarelli and Brorström (2013) is based on a corpus of 292 articles and is a meta-theoretical analysis of the literature. The authors apply the model of Burrell and Morgan (1979) to the organization and analysis of paradigms, which enables them to divide the field of place branding research into six perspectives. They discover that the literature is dominated by studies adopting an objectivist approach, driven notably by a production and consumer-oriented perspective.
- Lucarelli and Berg (2011) classify 217 articles published between 1988 and 2009 into three categories: those focused on (1) production (process under which brands are created and managed), (2) appropriation (the way in which brands are perceived and consumed by target groups) and (3) criticism (impact of branding logics on the existing social, economic and cultural environment). The authors try to show that city branding research (as a subdomain of place marketing) is a booming field with a fragmented theoretical foundation that is often based on case study anecdotes¹ rather than on sound empirical research.

¹ However, rigorous case studies can provide reasonably good results, as shown in an article on place branding case studies (Lajarge 2000).

- Having closely examined 212 articles about place branding and place marketing published in 43 periodicals between 1990 and 2009, Gertner’s analysis (Gertner 2011a, b) presents a classification by time period to explain the development of this field of study: a gestation period (1990–2000), the birth of the discipline (around 2002), a period of adolescence (2004–2008) and a last phase with the approach of maturity (2009 and onwards).
- Berglund and Olsson (2010) propose a classification that divides articles into four categories: (1) empirical, (2) critical, (3) prescriptive and (4) conceptual.

These various classifications underscore the multidisciplinary nature of this field of study and illustrate the variety of articles in terms of research interests and questions. However, they are not comprehensive and the categories chosen are not really explained or discussed. Moreover, not one of these literature reviews resulted in a classification system that could be systematically used for all papers associated with place marketing or place branding. Given the multidisciplinary nature of this field of research and its multifaceted subject (“place”), it is important to move away from a silo mentality in order to successfully gather together articles that address the same phenomenon while using different and at times diverging disciplinary approaches and perspectives.

3 The need for a systematic literature review

The relevance of conducting a broad, systematic literature review can be explained in part by the need to transcend the limits of existing literature reviews. Such a process is also justified by the ongoing need to clarify existing research in this field, which is the result of a convergence between several academic domains (Hankinson 2010)² and whose lack of conceptual clarity has been raised by many authors (Berglund and Olsson 2010; Niedomysl and Jonasson 2012; Kavaratzis and Hatch 2013, p.71). In addition, a structured overview of the field of place branding and marketing is required if we want to provide a knowledge base for future research. In fact, the literature reviews mentioned earlier all agree that this field of research has not yet reached a very advanced stage. It lacks generally accepted definitions, agreed-upon classifications, and a general research plan with an overview of the existing research and issues to be clarified (with research models, variables).

Florek and Kavaratzis (2014) underscore that researchers are starting to become aware of the need to address the field’s lack of discipline and theoretical foundation. To this end, as Kavaratzis and Hatch (2013) note, many authors have tried to introduce theories, like Niedomysl and Jonasson (2012), or have proposed models (Hankinson 2004; Hanna and Rowley 2011, 2013). However, these suggestions are not being systematically adopted and articles are not collectively generating a theory of place marketing and place branding. Instead, they appear to be a collection of

² According to Hankinson (2010), “After years of separate development, there has recently been a convergence between the academic domains of urban policy, tourism and mainstream branding resulting in the emergence of a new domain of place branding.” We would also add public management, classic marketing and political science to the list of disciplines active in this field, as evidenced by certain articles published in their respective academic journals.

separate, disconnected papers. Although this could be perceived as the sign of an academic discipline in the making that is relatively young and bursting with a variety of fragmented research topics, a situation like this demonstrates the need for a dire clarification in existing research (Kavaratzis and Hatch 2013).

4 Methodology

A corpus of 1172 papers was obtained following a two-stage research process: a systematic phase and a phase that can be described as empirical. Although the findings from these two complementary phases could be discussed separately, for the purposes of this literature review we have chosen to present them in aggregated form.

For the systematic phase, we conducted a first literature review that ultimately enabled us to collect 833 papers. It was decided to include only articles published in English, referenced online, with no time limits other than the article be available online between July 2015 and January 18, 2016 (starting and end dates of the literature search). To avoid the potential bias of research guided by algorithms beyond our control and because search engines like Google Scholar are limited when it comes to a systematic literature search (Kembellec 2012, p.40), we elected to conduct our searches using the search engines of the journals that publish on this topic or could be interested in this field. The articles in our literature review published in academic journals are thus all peer-reviewed papers.

Selecting relevant academic journals for a multidisciplinary field is challenging. The primary journals may be obvious choices, but trying to identify all the journals that address or could potentially address a topic is a meticulous task. It was a two-step process: we began by drawing up a list of the primary journals based on existing literature reviews, and then expanded this list by adding the top-ranked journals of any disciplines associated with place marketing. This second step required looking at various journal rank indicators, which obviously do not always agree, given their respective political and economic viewpoints (Schöpfel and Prost 2009). The rank indicator used was the SCImago Journal Rank (SJR) developed by Elsevier using the Scopus database. We decided to work with this ranking rather than others like Source-Normalized Impact per Paper (SNIP) or the Impact Per Publication (IPP), given that it “is a size-independent indicator and it ranks journals by their ‘average prestige per article’ and can be used for journal comparisons” in the scientific evaluation process (original words from SJR). For a detailed academic discussion of these issues, see Guerrero-Bote and Moya-Anegón (2012) and Moed (2010). To obtain a sufficiently large number of journals and still ensure that this meticulous task was feasible,³ we decided to include the top 10 journals per category in the SCImago Journal Rank indicator that were associated with the fields of marketing, public management, public administration, geography, tourism and political science. In the end, after assembling the list of journals considered relevant by existing literature reviews and the top-ranked journals (and then eliminating the journals that

³ Apart from two student assistant colleagues who provided assistance with the downloading, printing and storage of the articles during the systematic phase, the author conducted this entire research project on his own.

did not produce any search results with our chosen keywords), we were left with a total of 30 journals.⁴

Regarding key word, given that the aim was to conduct a literature review on place marketing and place branding and that the number of journals was already quite high, we decided to restrict the list of keywords to “place marketing” and “place branding” in the search engines of the individual journals. In our understanding, place branding is not synonymous with place marketing, even if both are parts of public marketing (Pasquier and Villeneuve 2012). However, the literature tends to no longer clearly distinguish between place marketing and place branding, at least when it comes to designating the field of study. The idea of place branding is now defined in such broad, all-encompassing terms that the two terms are confused and used as synonyms (interchangeably) by numerous authors. Moreover, Braun (2008) observes a shift from marketing to branding and Kavaratzis (2004) sees place branding as a new episode in the application of place marketing with more focus on emotional, mental, psychological associations moving away from the more functional and rational character of marketing interventions. For a discussion on place marketing vs. place branding see the contributions of Skinner (2008) and Vuignier (2016a).

For the empirical phase, based on our research in the field (the author being a PhD candidate in Public Administration), we put together a practical database of articles associated with place marketing that were mentioned in our readings. Since the goal was to provide a general overview of the literature, we deemed it relevant to include these elements. In particular, this empirical phase supplemented the systematic literature review with articles from other journals, articles in French, papers referenced in search engines like Google Scholar that were not identified during the systematic phase, as well as academic works other than articles, such as books (each proposed item was subjected to a careful reading to ensure its content was truly relevant, as explained later). In the end, after repetitions were eliminated, an additional 339 items were added to the 833 from the systematic phase, bringing the total number of documents analyzed for this literature review to 1172.

Regarding the classification, the first task was to develop a system for organizing all the articles into categories (see Fig. 1 in Findings). The categories chosen were the paper’s relevance to the research topic (the criteria for this filter will be explained in greater detail later), the disciplinary approach, the method, and the perspective adopted. In addition, a comments area for notes on content was added to each article.

After being carefully read by the author, all the articles were sorted and placed into the categories (to offer a quantitative overview) that will be individually discussed in

⁴ Here is the complete list: *Place Branding and Public Diplomacy* (formerly known as *Place Branding*), *Urban Studies*, *Cities*, *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*, *Journal of Place Management and Development*, *European Planning Studies*, *European Journal of Marketing*, *European Urban and Regional Studies*, *Tourism Management*, *Journal of Marketing Management*, *Procedia-Social and Behavioral Sciences*, *Journal of Brand Management*, *Journal of Business Research*, *Annals of Tourism Research*, *Journal of Vacation Marketing*, *Journal of Travel & Tourism Marketing*, *Journal of Destination, Marketing & Management*, *Tijdschrift voor economische en sociale geografie*, *Town Planning Review*, *Journal of Travel Research*, *Urban Geography*, *Journal of the American Planning Association*, *City & Community*, *Journal of Hospitality Marketing & Management* (formerly known as *Journal of Hospitality & Leisure Marketing*), *Marketing Theory*, *Journal of Product & Brand Management*, *Public Administration Review*, *International Review of Administrative Sciences*, *Public Management Review* and *International Journal of Public Sector Management*.

the next section and their content was assessed using various qualitative criteria (assessment of the content), such as the aim of the article, its contributions and its limitations. While such an exercise can appear simplistic for comprehensive publications (since each item is put in a box), it has the virtue of offering a clear snapshot of the current state of the field.

4.1 Classification by relevance

Once the corpus of 1172 publications was created, a content analysis phase determined the relevance of each item to the field of place marketing by asking the following basic question: Does this document address issues associated with place marketing? Three categories were created: the item is deemed entirely relevant, the item addresses place marketing in a secondary manner or the item is to be eliminated from this literature review because it is a book review, an editorial (or position paper), off-topic or unidentifiable.

4.2 Classification by disciplinary approach

A careful reading of the articles led to their classification by disciplinary approach. In addition to content, indicators like the authors referenced in the bibliography and the academic style helped classify articles.

The first category groups together articles that address the field of **marketing** in the classic sense of the term. Such articles are based on general marketing literature and use an approach, methods and analysis tools particular to this discipline. “Place” is therefore understood to be a marketing object like any other, with no major adaptations.

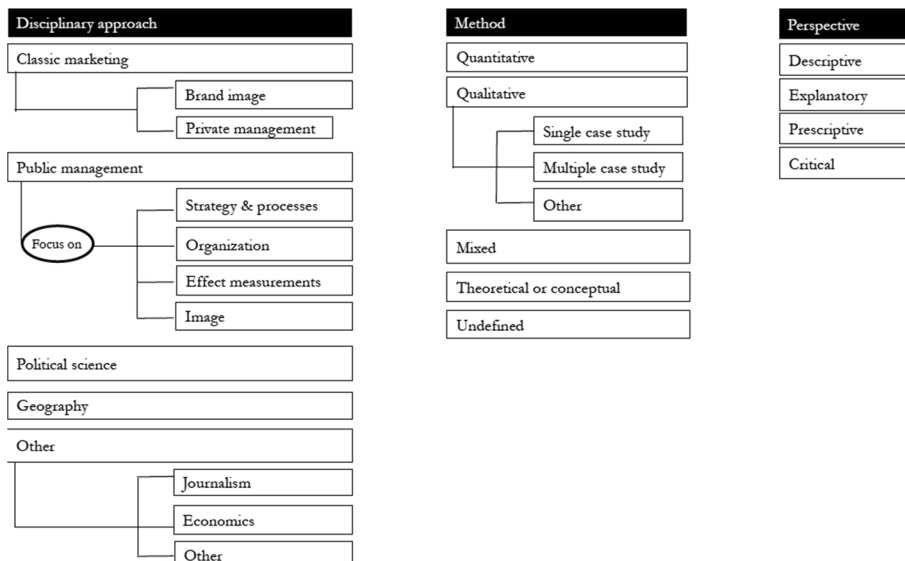


Fig. 1 Structure of the classification system

The brand image subcategory contains articles that apply traditional brand analysis tools (normally used on products, services and businesses) to places. The private management subcategory covers articles that examine place marketing management issues from a purely “private” approach that does not consider the specifics of the place or its public, political and institutional context.

The second category gathers together articles that address the field of **public management**. Given the interdisciplinary nature of this approach, we have adopted a broad vision of public management since this category includes articles that examine the specifics of the public, political and institutional context in which a place marketing strategy operates as well as its management issues.

Four subcategories help specify the focus of each item: strategy in general (and the related processes put into place), the type of organization (stakeholder involvement, political and institutional arrangement created, partnerships set up), effect measurements (value, performance and impact of strategies) and image (place perception, place associations, place awareness or reputation). The last subcategory, which often confuses image and brand image, differs from the brand image subcategory of classic marketing because tools and methods from classic marketing have to undergo major adaptations before being used in place marketing. Unlike the classic marketing approach, it does not, for example, analyze the image of a city with the same tools regularly used to study the image of a private brand.

A third category contains articles that adopt a **political science** approach to examine place marketing issues. It therefore includes research focused specifically on political issues and stakeholders (politics), as well as sociological studies.

The fourth category brings together articles whose approach refers to **geography**. Such documents address place marketing by taking a special look at issues of land planning, urbanism or regional development, or by using geographical concepts like the notions of sense of place or place making (Chang 2011).

The fifth and last category is devoted to **other** articles, that is, those that do correspond to any of the preceding categories. It notably includes documents with a journalism or economic approach.

It must be noted that the category of tourism, whose academic status is the subject of some debate though the field itself is the focus of certain journals (Kadri 2008), was not given its own separate category since we believe that the very heterogeneous documents in this field can also be placed in other categories. For example, an article about tourism management can be classified under a public management approach, while research on the tourism image of a place can be similar to a classic marketing exercise, depending on the tools used.

4.3 Classification by method

Using a classic distinction found in most manuals on methodology (van Thiel 2014), articles were categorized according to whether they used quantitative, qualitative or mixed methods, or were theoretical or conceptual, in other words, based on theoretical aspects and the literature. While papers using theoretical methods sometimes present cases as an illustration, they do not develop them and the process is not like gathering empirical data. Literature reviews were classified in this category. Another category includes articles whose method is not defined or could not be clearly identified.

Based on existing literature reviews, we assumed that many items would be qualitative studies, which gave rise to the following subcategories: single case study, multiple-case study and other (the latter includes, for example, document analyses that are not part of a case study). We distinguish between single and multiple case studies, as well as between case studies that observe the methodological requirements of this approach (Yin 2009) and case analyses whose methodology is either not explained in detail or ignored entirely.

4.4 Classification by perspective

This classification is broken down into four different perspectives. Among the nine categories mentioned by Rispol (2002)—descriptive, analytical, explanatory, prescriptive, didactic, Socratic method, propositional, interpretive and formative—we have kept the descriptive, explanatory and prescriptive perspectives and added the critical. The decision not to include the analytical perspective can be explained by the fact that all of the articles identified attempt to adopt an analytical view and aim to further the understanding of a phenomenon since they are all published in academic journals or publications. The other perspectives not used in our classification were deemed too specific and not suitable for our literature review, which strives to provide an overview of the state of the art.

Certain articles could be classified in more than one category. An article could, for example, explain a phenomenon (explanatory perspective), and then propose some related managerial recommendations (prescriptive perspective) as well as some critical analysis (critical perspective). The choice of category for each item was decided by the perspective that dominated throughout the text. Following a careful reading, the task was thus to determine the text's overall impression: a description (reporting on a reality), an explanation (illustrating and linking phenomena), a recommendation (offering advice) or a criticism (rationally deconstructing facts).

The prescriptive, or normative, perspective covers publications whose contribution consists primarily of making recommendations and proposing new avenues to practitioners without offering a true scientific analysis. Such articles attach great importance to best practices, contain assumptions that are not debated and unsubstantiated methodologies and have no empirical evidence.

5 Findings

The findings are presented first by category and subcategory, then by combinations of categories and subcategories that include the dimension of time. This is followed by an interpretation of these findings, and then a final summary. To increase the readability of this document, we will focus solely on key elements since the complete database is available upon request to the author.

5.1 Keywords

It was originally thought that the findings for the keywords “place marketing” and “place branding” would be analyzed separately. However, two observations showed

that this would not be appropriate or necessary. Firstly, when downloading the articles, it was noticed that many of the respective search results for the two terms overlapped (these repetitions were obviously eliminated before the total of 1172 was reached). Secondly, in terms of content, the careful reading of the articles selected revealed no tendency to differentiate between these two categories, despite our critical look at the definitions and distinctions between the terms “branding” and “marketing” (as discussed earlier, in a strict sense place branding is not synonymous with place marketing).

5.2 Relevance

The relevance filter was used to immediately eliminate any articles deemed off-topic, in other words, documents in which the keywords referred only anecdotally to place branding or marketing (305 publications, which represents 80% of the articles eliminated), as well as editorials (32; 8%), book reviews (22; 6%) and conference proceedings (21; 5.5%) that had not been previously identified as such. In addition, 2 unidentifiable documents (0.5%) were part of the group of 382 items that made up the “to be eliminated” category.

Of the 1172 initial items found, 790 academic articles published between 1976 and 2016 in 98 different journals were deemed relevant. Of these, 214 were identified as addressing place marketing in a secondary manner. In such documents, place branding or marketing issues are not central to the analysis or the research questions themselves, but are discussed enough to make a contribution to the field. The remaining 576 documents deemed entirely relevant therefore made up the core of our literature review.

5.3 Journals

As mentioned earlier, the systematic phase of the literature review identified 30 journals. With the additions from the so-called non-systematic (or empirical) phase of the review, the total number of journals examined reached 98 (80, if we consider only the 576 documents deemed entirely relevant). In addition, 4 conference proceedings and 28 books were added to the corpus. The following journals proved to be the most prolific in our review: *Place Branding and Public Diplomacy* (formerly known as *Place Branding*), *Journal of Place Management and Development*, *Cities*, *Urban Studies* and *Tourism Management*. Not surprisingly, our findings reveal a correlation between the journal and the type of documents found in certain categories; the title is often a good indicator. For example, *Marketing Theory* focuses on theoretical aspects, which makes this academic journal primarily a source for conceptual documents, while the journals *Urban Studies*, *Urban Geography* and *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* examine urbanism issues and thus publish more articles with a geography approach. Moreover, in terms of content quality, the articles in a given journal are relatively consistent.⁵ However, if we look at all the categories

⁵ With the exception of the journal *Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences*, whose content varies widely from one article to the next.

and subcategories in our literature review, the findings vary significantly in the journals. Such an observation underscores the merits of conducting this literature review.

5.4 Disciplinary approaches

The current literature confirms the multidisciplinary nature of this field of study (see charts in Fig. 2). As we see, 59% of the articles were classified in the public management category (462 items), 18% in geography (142), 11% in classic marketing (90), 10% in political science (82) and 2% in the “other” category (14). The content analysis reveals a tendency to adopt a silo mentality when studying the same specific characteristics; for example, papers using a given approach to examine the role of culture in place marketing strategies will often use the same primary references, while those addressing the topic from other approaches will rarely cite these references.

Within the public management approach, 64% of the articles address issues of strategy and processes (295 items), 16% focus on brand image (75 items), 10% on organization, in other words, how to involve stakeholders and create and manage political and institutional arrangements and partnerships (such as Public-Private Partnerships or PPP) devoted to place marketing (48 items), and 10% focus on effect measurements, that is, the assessment of place brand value and place marketing strategies (44 items).

Among the articles classified under the classic marketing approach, 66% focus on brand image (59 items) and 34% on private management issues (31). These documents present tools regularly used to study the image of private brands, inspiring some authors to develop tools adapted to place marketing, like the advanced Brand Concept Map (aBCM) of Zenker (2014). When an article focuses on how such an instrument is used to manage a place and details the managerial specifics involved, we have classified it in the public management category.

Among the articles adopting the political science approach, which represent 10% of the documents, the analysis of the balance of power among stakeholders is a key concern and questions the use of marketing techniques in a public, social and political environment.

The geography approach addresses place branding and place marketing issues from two different angles: at the macro level, it offers conceptual reflections on space, place and geospatial relationships and discussions; at the micro level, it examines questions of land planning and architecture.

Very few items were classified under the category “other”: 72% of such articles adopt an economics approach (10 items), 7% a journalistic approach (1) and, in 21% of cases, the approach does not correspond to any of the other categories (3).

For each disciplinary approach, Fig. 3 illustrates the percentage of articles using each method, while Fig. 4 does the same exercise for the various perspectives.⁶ These figures paint a picture of the relative weighting within each category. For example, the classic marketing category has the highest percentage of articles using a quantitative method, while the political science category has the highest percentage of articles with a critical perspective.

⁶ These aggregate data (combinations) represent the 576 documents in the “entirely relevant” category.

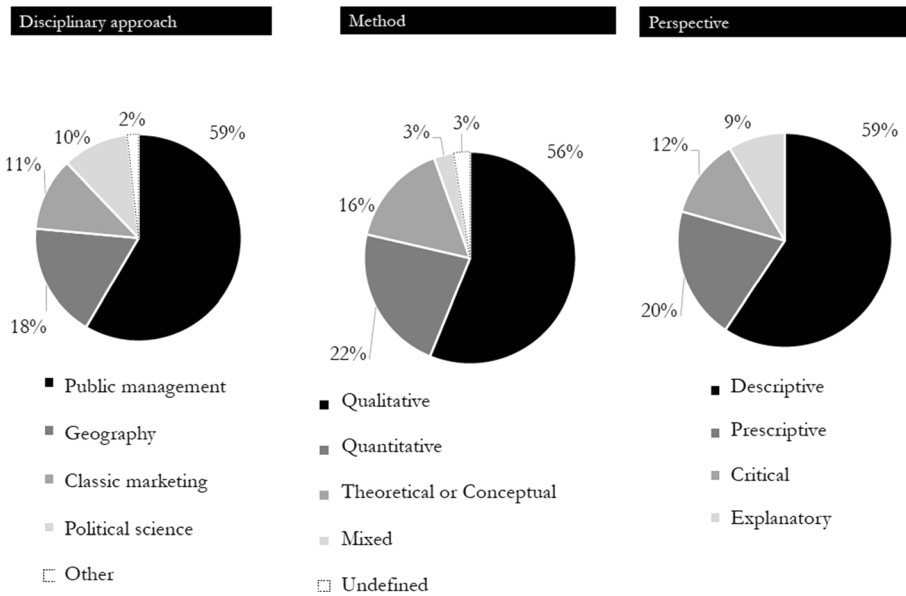


Fig. 2 Findings: charts of the articles (*n* = 790) broken down by disciplinary approach, method and perspective

5.5 Methods

According to our literature review, a majority (56%, 428 items)⁷ of the articles use qualitative methods, while 22% (171) opt for quantitative methods and 3% (23) use mixed methods. Another 16% (121) of the articles are theoretical or conceptual and 3% (19) of the items do not specify the method used (see charts in Fig. 2).

Among the documents using qualitative methods, 66% are based on single case studies, 20% on multiple case studies and 14% on other specific qualitative methods such as discourse analysis, the analysis of promotional materials, participant observation or action research.

Among the case studies, very few follow “a rigorous methodological path” as defined by Yin (2009). A large number of articles are a cross between a true complete, detailed case study with an overview of the case, and an analysis of a specific element or phenomenon in a particular context. There is some terminological confusion in this regard, which is worsened by the fact that some journals also use the label “case study” for articles that do not use this method while categorizing documents that meticulously use this method as “research papers.”

In terms of data collection, we note that interviewees often include practitioners, for example, contributors to organizations in charge of implementing place marketing (e.g., Destination Marketing Organizations) and students. The literature presents much fewer cases of collecting empirical data from target groups.

⁷ Note that 428 is 56% of 762 items rather than 790. This is because for the purposes of classification by method we eliminated the 28 books from our corpus, after realizing that it was difficult to determine a method category for eclectic publications of this type.

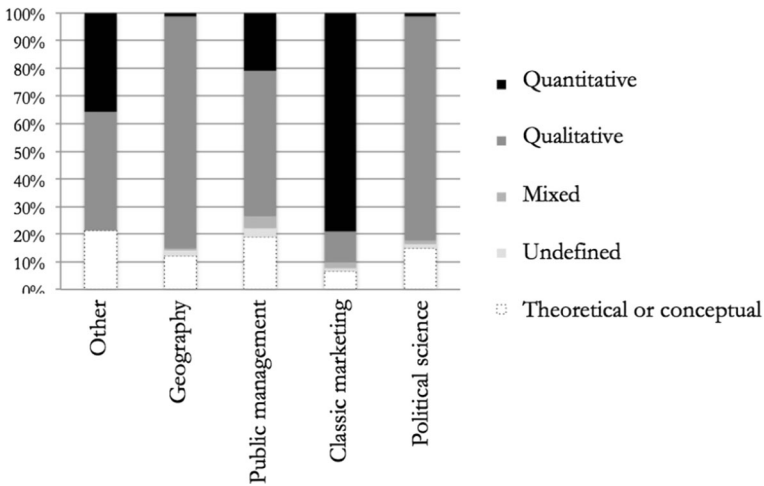


Fig. 3 Disciplinary approach broken down by type of method

5.6 Perspectives

While the 1172 items examined in this literature review are academic papers, the level of scientificity varies widely from one article to the next, as we have already hinted. All of the articles are, at least in part, analytical, to the extent that they study a phenomenon, seek to explain it and aim to add to the existing body of knowledge. Our classification by perspective is useful for highlighting the primary contribution of each article. Does the author (or authors) describe a reality? Does the author try to offer recommendations by highlighting the managerial implications of the research? Does the research primarily offer a critical viewpoint of its subject? Or does the

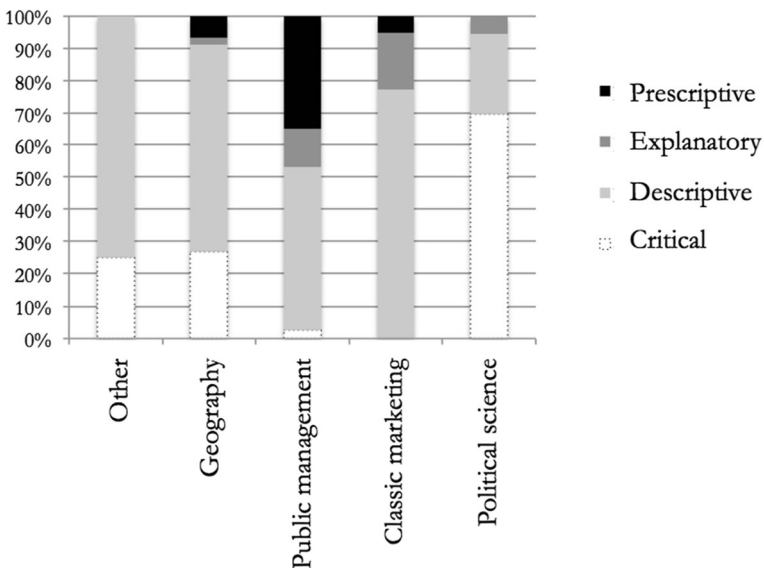


Fig. 4 Disciplinary approach broken down by perspective

author explain a phenomenon with the help of solid arguments and empirical evidence?

Our findings indicate that 59% (469 items) of the articles are descriptive, 20% (158) are prescriptive, 12% (95) are critical and 9% (68) are explanatory (see Fig. 2). Generally speaking, certain authors are systematically classified in the same category because all of their articles adopt the same perspective. This is true, for example, of certain very practice-oriented authors. Also, the publishing journal can influence the perspective adopted. Certain journals require empirical data, for example, which is why such a significant number of articles in the classic marketing category adopt an explanatory approach.

The majority of papers are descriptive, that is, they offer readers a presentation of phenomena or case studies. Although they can sometimes be very sophisticated and analytical, such papers are limited to reporting on a specific reality, which is characteristic of an emerging scientific field. Only a minority of articles will go so far as to explain phenomena, for example, by linking variables or presenting substantiated causal relationships.

Articles with a prescriptive perspective are characterized by the repeated use of expressions and vocabulary indicating a value judgment, such as “should,” “successful,” “better,” and “key.” They seek to have a practical effect, to influence and change, rather than understand and explain. As a result, they attach little importance to empirical measurements and tremendous importance to prescriptive elements. While almost all of the articles address the managerial implications of their findings, such implications figure most prominently in articles classified as prescriptive: these articles not only offer recommendations with regard to their specific research findings, they also advise the reader on a host of often abstract elements that at times lack empirical evidence. These documents are similar to reports from consultants and emphasize best practices and rankings.

The critical perspective encompasses articles that adopt a critical viewpoint and highlight the risks of using branding terms and tools from the private sector on places that are, by definition, public, political and endowed with a particular identity. These articles underscore the complexity and multidimensionality of places as they question the relevance of applying marketing tools: one cannot sell a place with a history, culture and identity.

Documents of this type are part of the power politics associated with place marketing strategies and tend to affirm that place marketing activities support a neo-liberal ideology and are part of a symbolic process of domination that can be exploited by the elites (Eisenschitz 2010; Didier et al. 2012; Mele 2013; Browning 2014; Eder and Öz 2015).

Some authors condemn the fact that spending on place marketing may be done at the expense of public social policies, which in turn creates social injustice (Harvey 1989; Crilley 1993). In addition to attracting external target groups, place marketing is also a tool for internally legitimizing activities that “entertain” the public to avert any protests against local social problems (Hubbard 1995; Häussermann and Colomb 2003). As long as everything is polished, sterilized and simplistic like the images conveyed, this will inhibit any expression of multiculturalism and render the process selective and discriminating (Gold and Ward 1994; Holcomb 1994). Baur and Thiéry (2013) talk about the symbolic poverty of the visuals used to represent communities and places.

Figures 5 and 6 illustrate the change between 2005 and 2015 in the proportion of articles using each perspective. The proportions remained more or less constant during this period. However, the percentage of explanatory and critical articles rose very slightly, while the proportion of prescriptive and descriptive articles declined somewhat, although the latter category clearly remains dominant.

5.7 Recurring themes

A careful reading of the 790 articles revealed the primary themes addressed and specific research topics. We begin by summarizing the six most common themes, then discuss some topics particular to certain disciplinary approaches and finally note some additional themes mentioned anecdotally.

5.7.1 Image

A large percentage of the articles on place marketing look at place image, awareness and reputation. Place perception is studied by creating indexes, using concepts like brand personality and employing tools to measure the associations that people have about places. Many of the articles with a tourism-focus analyze the image of destinations. Specific issues appear in this regard, such as the image repair during crisis (Avraham 2015).

5.7.2 Identity

The multifaceted concept of place identity (Kalandides 2011) is a common theme. It is considered a distinctive feature of any place: place identity is very different from the brand identity of a product, service or organization.

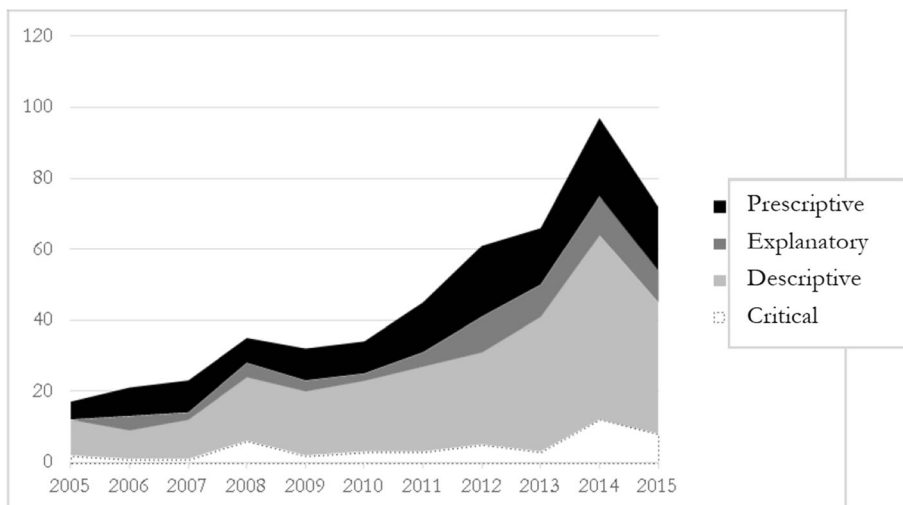


Fig. 5 Change in perspective between 2005 and 2015 (curves)

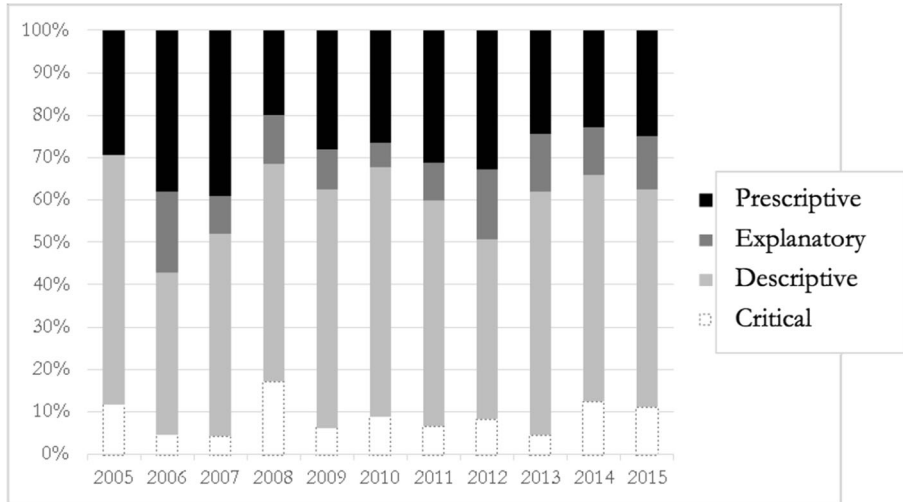


Fig. 6 Change in perspective between 2005 and 2015 (columns)

5.7.3 Effects

Brand value and its effects are analyzed with the help of various concepts, notably brand equity and other closely related concepts: “brand equity may be considered an umbrella construct expressed through the use of one of the six terms: equity, evaluation, effectiveness, performance, measurement, and assessment” (Kladou et al. 2015, p.195).

5.7.4 Stakeholders

Frequent topics include stakeholder analysis, stakeholder involvement in developing place marketing strategies, and the use of participatory processes (Kalandides and Kavaratzis 2012; Eshuis et al. 2014; Zenker et al. 2014; Kavaratzis and Kalandides 2015). Numerous articles examine the perceptions of residents and citizens, in particular (Zenker and Seigis 2012; Braun et al. 2013; Rehmet and Dinnie 2013; Stylidis et al. 2014; Zenker and Rütter 2014; Che-Ha et al. 2015).

5.7.5 The internet and social networks

Social networks, social media and the Internet are popular research topics in the literature (Ketter and Avraham 2012; Sevin 2013; Andéhn et al. 2014; Charkas and Eltun 2014; Sevin 2014; Zhou and Wang 2014; Zhang 2015; Sevin 2016) and there is widespread interest in information and communication technologies.

5.7.6 Events

Event strategies and specific events are frequently analyzed in the literature. This echoes the phenomenon of *événementialisation* that has been observed in certain places (Arnaud and Soldo 2015). Researchers investigate a wide variety of events: festivals

and mega-events (Olympic Games, Universal Exposition, World Cup, etc.), medium and small-scale events (Pinson 2016) and series of events with umbrella titles like the “European Capital of Culture.”

5.7.7 *Topics particular to certain disciplinary approaches*

Specific themes were identified for each disciplinary approach. For example, articles in the geography category regularly mention the following two concepts: creative city (Florida 2005, 2006) and urban entrepreneurialism (Hall and Hubbard 1996). Architecture and urban design issues are also frequently addressed in articles of this type, which clearly distinguish between the characteristics of rural areas and those of cities. In classic marketing articles, certain concepts developed for products, services and businesses—like brand personality—are applied directly to places without adaptation (Demirbag Kaplan et al. 2010). In this same category, papers commonly assume that place brands are managed just like traditional brands in the private sector (Stephens Balakrishnan 2009).

Depending on the disciplinary approach, articles can feature topics and issues related to place marketing like place competitiveness and attractiveness, regional development and governance, tourism and communications. If they only address place marketing anecdotally and are only subject of their own specific literature, they were eliminated. This is why many of the articles addressing these issues were deemed not relevant (see the section on relevance). For instance, only few contributions link directly place branding and economic development (Cleave and Arku 2015). In this logic, in the tourism category, only articles that specifically analyze marketing and branding issues were retained.

5.7.8 *Other themes*

The literature review also identified some very specific themes that are sometimes anecdotal. Here are some: the role of migrants (Kadirov and Triveni 2010), the special case of slums (Hernandez and Lopez 2011; Torres 2012; Kalandides and Hernandez-Garcia 2013), the influence of hip-hop (Madichie 2011), specific target groups like the creative class (Zenker 2009) and gay people (Hughes 2003), food-branding (Boyne and Hall 2004; Gyimóthy and Mykletun 2009; Blichfeldt and Halkier 2013; Berg and Sevón 2014), the role of smells (Henshaw et al. 2016), the impact of litter (Parker et al. 2015). These topics demonstrate the variety of viewpoints and the breadth of place branding research, which we will examine in the next section.

5.8 The diversity of place branding research

An examination of the literature reveals that, thanks to the lack of conceptual clarity and precise definitions, research papers in the field of place branding touch on a wide variety of specific topics. Figure 7 provides an overview of the diversity of place branding research in the literature, organizing topics along two axes, from a very narrow definition of place branding (on the left) to a very broad definition (on the right), and from strategic notions (at the top) to operational and concrete notions (at the bottom).

The section on the far left represents articles whose definition of place branding sticks closely to the general concept of branding. A place brand does not refer to the physical, concrete characteristics of the place, but to the perception of these things. It is “a network of associations in the consumers’ mind based on the visual, verbal, and behavioral expression of a place, which is embodied through the aims, communication, values, and the general culture of the place’s stakeholders” (Zenker and Braun 2010). Articles thus evoke the strategic aspects of the process designed to create place brands: the creation of a brand vision, the definition of brand identity and values, and the search for positioning. In more operational terms, authors look at the organizational structures in place, place perception (associations with the place brand), communication campaigns related to the place brand strategy, and even very tangible aspects like graphic design, logos and slogans, and promotional products. Research topics thus range from the place brand strategy defining the priority target groups to attract and retain, to the promotional products created, like the classic “I love New York” mug. Furthermore, some authors take branding concepts developed in the literature and apply them directly to place case studies, like the concepts of place brand love (Swanson 2015) and place brand personality (Hosany et al. 2006; Glinska and Kilon 2014a, b; Ishii and Watanabe 2015).

The central area of Fig. 7 represents articles that focus on place promotion, which is an element of place marketing more than of place branding. Research topics in this area are place marketing strategy, promotional campaigns that involve concrete measures associated with legal, political and economic framework conditions, tourism, cultural and sports products and so-called flagship projects like events

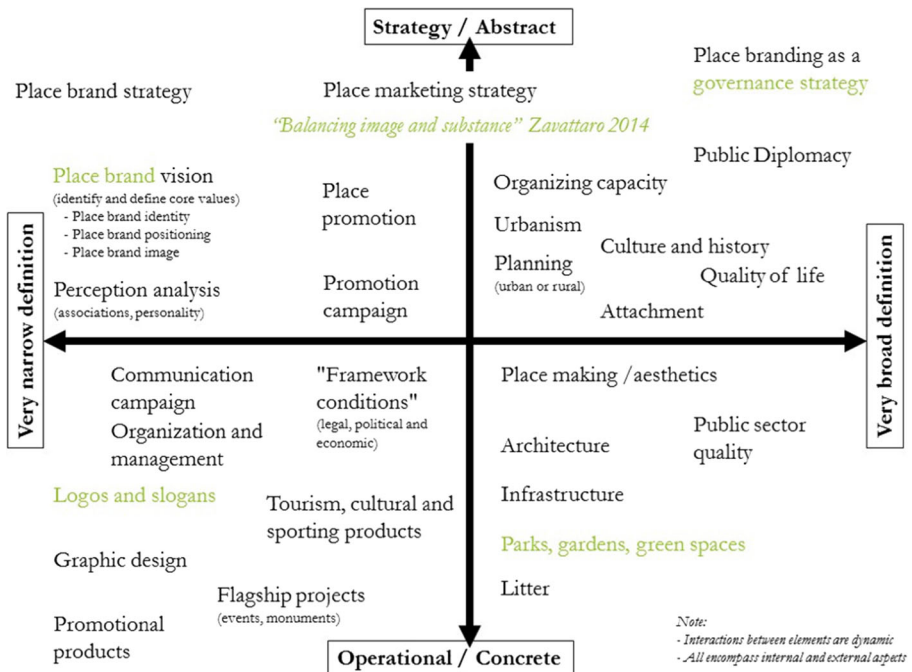


Fig. 7 The diversity of place branding research

and monuments. In the other section of the central area, which is moving towards a broader definition of place branding, research includes issues like urbanism, planning (urban or rural), architecture and infrastructure (Ashworth and Voogd 1990; Boland 2013; Oliveira 2014; Oliveira and Parker 2015), from both a strategy viewpoint as well as very concrete aspects like managing parks, gardens, green space and litter (Parker et al. 2015).

The right-hand section of Fig. 7 underscores that the literature also addresses very broad concepts of place branding, like culture and history, place attachment (Florek 2011; Zenker and Rütter 2014) and quality of life. In tangible terms, this means that target groups' perception of quality of life and public sector quality is also part of place branding. Furthermore, the field of public diplomacy can almost be considered part of place branding given that it is very similar to, and according to some authors a near synonym of, nation branding. Incidentally, one example of the connection between place marketing and public diplomacy is the fact that France has created the position of Ambassador of Cultural Attractiveness.

Finally, numerous authors underscore that place branding (and especially the place brand strategy) is political (Braun 2008, p.104) and part of a marketing strategy that is itself part of a place strategy (Janiszewska and Insch 2012). However, the literature generally has little to say about the political and institutional aspects of place branding (Vuignier 2015), even though this context is unique when it comes to public management. The broadest definition of the phenomenon of place branding appears to be that proposed by Eshuis and Klijn (2012), who believe that place branding is a very broad governance strategy that goes beyond managing image and perceptions (Braun et al. 2014, p.64): it appears to add an essential element to public administration since the logic of branding can be adopted in all sectors involved in public management.

Place branding literature thus covers a broad spectrum of topics, from simple logos and slogans in some articles, to “beyond the logo” in others (Ashworth and Kavaratzis 2007). Widely considered a strategic exercise, place branding is implemented with the help of very concrete measures that constantly seek to balance substance (tangible aspects) and image (perception) (Zavattaro 2014).

6 Conclusion

This literature review provides an overview of the state of the art and helps substantiate several characteristics of this field. Firstly, it underscores the multidisciplinary nature of this field of research with its variety of approaches, from public management and geography, to classic marketing and political science. Secondly, it looks at the change in the number of articles published and their content, confirming the emergence of place branding and marketing as a distinct area of scientific study. However, there is no clear evidence to “indicate the approaching maturity of the discipline,” in the words of Gertner (2011a), although we may be tempted to say not yet. In fact, our literature review shows that 36% of the scientific studies analyzed are single case studies. Moreover, the majority of studies classified in this category do not even use proper case study methodology as defined by Yin (2009). While these studies can be very practical and present interesting tools, they focus on specific cases, meaning it is

difficult to step back and compare them with other situations. This, in turn, contributes to the idiosyncrasies of the field and hinders the development of a solid theoretical foundation.

In terms of perspective, 56% of the papers conducted a descriptive analysis, while 20% adopted a prescriptive approach. As a result, the field of place branding and place marketing does not include many explanatory articles and many questions remain. Nonetheless, it is no longer valid to ask very general questions like *Is it possible to market a location?* or *Can branding techniques be applied to places?* Such questions essentially ignore the advances that have been made in the literature since the 1990s (Ashworth and Voogd 1990; Matson 1994), since these questions have already been addressed in numerous articles.

We have identified several themes that attract authors in this field and that we believe could develop in the coming years: analysis of the role of stakeholders and residents, advances in information technology (the Internet and social networks) and the overall effects of place branding and place marketing. This last point is particularly important since a brand, by definition, must produce a brand effect (Kapferer and Laurent 1992; Kapferer 2012). The target group of companies and investments (Bose et al. 2016; Mabillard and Vuignier 2017) seems to have been especially overlooked. Indeed, “empirical evidence and research are lacking regarding whether place branding is effective in the attraction and retention of business” (Cleave et al. 2016).

To summarize, five observations characterize the current state of research in this field. The literature on place marketing and branding:

- suffers from a lack of conceptual clarity, diverging definitions and a weak theoretical foundation, which means it addresses a very broad range of research topics;
- makes few references to classic marketing literature, which, for its part, provides clear definitions of marketing and branding;
- lacks empirical evidence and explanatory articles, meaning that the numerous hypotheses concerning its effects on attractiveness remain unsubstantiated;
- is disconnected from the political and institutional aspects of locations, although this context is important when it comes to public management;
- offers pride of place to the rhetoric of consultants by including many prescriptive publications that aim to share best practices.

We would also like to mention two additional observations that have not, to our knowledge, been noted by other authors. The first is that this literature features a significant number of critical articles. Critical articles shine a light on processes that legitimize social elites and neo-liberalism (Stigel and Frimann 2006; Eisenschitz 2010; Kaneva 2011) and the phenomenon of imitation (Babey and Giauque 2009; Riza 2015), in which places paradoxically try to differentiate themselves by using similar tools and launching comparable projects. Careful reading of these papers shows that, although they are, in theory, far removed from public management issues, they can be very useful for understanding place branding processes. In fact, they offer a complementary, thoughtful perspective that is in stark contrast to the prescriptive papers we identified.

The second observation concerns a link between the disciplinary approach used and repeated references. When the bibliographies of the papers reviewed were read and

compared, it was observed that papers adopting the same approach had a tendency to cite the same authors and reference works. In other words, each approach had its own list of common references. While this is hardly surprising, one consequence is that papers addressing the same field of study are not widely distributed. That is, the multidisciplinary nature of the field leads to a silo mentality in which articles in the same field are published at the same time, but without referencing each other. For example, if we look at the contributions to the field made by geography articles with regard to land planning and urban governance, they are very rarely cited in public management articles. Similarly, analysis tools used in classic marketing articles are not often used by authors working outside this approach.

Finally, we would like to note several limitations of this review. The database of articles could be improved and further developed in various ways, and this ongoing study could monitor how the literature is evolving over time. As for going into greater depth, the classification system could be refined with the addition of new subcategories and new types of classifications that focus, for example, on more specific descriptions of methodology or content. Furthermore, other aspects describing the literature could be highlighted, such as the location of the places studied or the references assembled by the authors. To broaden the review, other criteria could be considered when selecting journals, additional keywords could be used and more publication languages could be included.

7 Future research

As presented in this literature review, the current state of place marketing and place branding research underscores the need to meet several challenges if this field of study is to achieve legitimate scientific status. The first challenge is to eliminate the lack of conceptual clarity that enables an array of almost magical effects to be attributed to branding. Second, it is important to discourage a silo mentality in the field as it prevents authors who work with different approaches from referencing (and thus reading) each other. This would definitely help prevent the constant reinvention of the wheel. If we look at the changes that have occurred over time, some of these challenges are being met; for example, the proportion of explanatory articles is (very slightly) on the rise. However, such articles continue to represent a very small proportion. In fact, the vast majority (three-quarters) of the papers analyzed adopt either a descriptive or prescriptive perspective.

Moreover, we concur with Parker (2015) and encourage authors to provide details about their methodological choices, clarify (or even discuss) the perspective adopted (Is it an academic article designed to explain or is it a practical case illustrating recommendations?), and refer to the theories mobilized in a comprehensive and transparent manner. If place branding and place marketing are to be considered a scientific field of study, we must do more than simply declare—and we owe this expression to Giovanardi et al. (2013)—they are more than “a cacophony of logos slogans.”

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The complete and detailed database of the 1172 publications analyzed is available upon request to the author: Renaud.Vuignier (2016b) at unil.ch. All these references are also mentioned in the bibliography of the IDHEAP working paper from the same author entitled “Place marketing and place branding: A systematic (and tentatively exhaustive) literature review.”