

# Key elements in defining Barcelona's place values: the contribution of residents' perceptions from an internal place branding perspective

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Revised: 19 October 2017 / Published online: 12 December 2017  
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**Abstract** According to numerous authors, residents play a decisive role in any place branding strategy, although paradoxically, they have played little or no role in the implementation of place branding strategies in recent years. It is for this reason that this study emphasises so-called “internal place branding”. Furthermore, we aim to determine whether the outwardly projected attributes of Barcelona (Spain) correspond to the attributes held by its residents. To achieve this aim, we undertook a cross-sectional descriptive study using a mixed method survey questionnaire in order to measure residents' perceptions, with both open-ended and closed-ended questions. We selected 300 participants using the snowball sampling strategy. Results showed that residents of Barcelona, as a whole, perceived their city as cultural, creative, cosmopolitan, touristic, entertaining and friendly, attributes that closely match those projected by the city over recent decades. However, we also found a certain distancing of residents with respect to other values projected by Brand Barcelona. We believe this study provides important managerial implications not only for Barcelona's brand managers, but also for professionals all over the world seeking to work with internal place branding.

**Keywords** Barcelona · Internal place branding · Stakeholders · Place identity · Place residents

## Introduction

Internal stakeholders have received scarce attention in the most relevant literature associated with place branding (Govers and Go 2009; Kavartzis 2012; Kavartzis and Hatch 2013). In recent times, however, they have taken on a central role in the map of stakeholders involved in deploying branding strategies. As Zakarevicius and Lionikaite (2013) point out, this is in large part due to the renewed need to measure the internal publics' satisfaction with place brands, to optimise their participation and to analyse the processes from which they create a collective place brand identity. As Konecnik and de Chernatony state (2013, p. 46): “Brand identity models offer the best foundation for understanding internal considerations about brands”. However, a clear model to manage the identity in a place branding strategy doesn't exist, because many authors place the focus on only one stakeholder, tourists, while forgetting residents and other stakeholders. It is for this reason that many scholars and practitioners of place branding call for an adapted model of brand identity, in order to develop a place branding strategy according to its different stakeholders (Govers and Go 2009; Kavartzis and Hatch 2013).

In this study, we share the “new” model of place brand identity offered by Konecnik and de Chernatony (2013), based on their research on the case study of Slovenia's country brand. The authors propose a model where the experiential promise, emotional value and functional value of a place brand are at the core of the strategy. After that, it is essential to define the personality, distinguishing preferences, benefits, mission, vision and values of the place brand that will be promoted both internally and externally. The sum of all these elements gives the place brand identity. This model proposes paying special attention to

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tactical thought and to the residents as key stakeholders in order to foster a powerful engagement with the place brand, and to define its identity values from an internal view.

If internal opinions regarding the values and/or attributes of a place are to be considered for their later external projection—to the detriment of the traditional purely external place brand communication strategy (Vasudevan 2008)—, then residents must be involved in defining the place brand. This article therefore comes under what is known as internal place branding, which Zakarevicius and Lionikiate (2013, p. 152) define “as a dual process overwhelming purposive activities as well as unruled formation of a brand within the place”. As early as 1993, Kotler, Haider and Rein defined four key publics in the deployment of a place branding strategy: visitors, residents and workers, businesspeople and exporters.

As Styliadis et al. (2015) state, residents play a critical role in the process of cocreation of a place brand because the images held by residents have a considerable effect on the tourist’s own image formulation, decision making and buying behavior. Likewise, as pointed out by Ryan and Aicken (2010), there exists an important gap between residents’ and visitors’ perceptions, and this issue will tend to provoke an apathetic attitude from residents towards tourism. For all of these reasons, it is necessary to expand the focus of any place branding strategy on the perceptions among its different and heterogeneous stakeholders, with the aim of including the criteria of all the publics that exist in any given place, as Zenker and Beckmann (2013) recommend. In the same way, and according to Insch and Stuart (2015), developing a participatory and co-creative process between residents and local governments is mandatory for building strong place brands.

The need to immerse residents in any place branding initiative has long been highlighted by many different authors, including Ashworth and Voogd (1990), Govers and Go (2009), Insch and Florek (2010), Kavaratzis (2012), Zenker and Seigis (2012) and Zenker et al. (2017). Despite this, these same authors state that residents’ contributions are largely ignored when considering stakeholders in a place branding initiative.

The main objective of this article is, therefore, to determine the principal values of the city of Barcelona as perceived by its residents. As described previously, this represents, per se, an internal place branding initiative. Additionally, this study also aims to determine whether these same attributes, gathered through a survey of 300 residents, match the attributes projected by the city through place branding strategies over recent decades. In short, this study aims to compare the spontaneous perception of the city’s values from an internal point of view (that of the

residents) with the externally and strategically projected values of the city.

This article begins with a brief introduction to orientate the reader. We then present the theoretical framework of this subject, focusing on the concept of ‘internal place branding’. We subsequently situate this case study within the context of the city Barcelona, and provide important data regarding the historical management of its city brand. The methodology, based on a survey questionnaire answered by 300 residents, is then set out. This article concludes with the results and the relevant discussion and conclusions.

## Theoretical framework

### Internal place branding: residents as a key stakeholder

In relation to internal publics, in this case, the resident population, Braun et al. (2013) point to the existence of three fundamental roles played by the resident population within the framework of a place branding strategy. Firstly, they consider them to form an integral part of the place brand due to their characteristics and behaviour; secondly, they argue that residents play the role of brand ambassadors, which increases the credibility of any message to be communicated; and thirdly, they are considered citizens and voters who play a crucial role in the political legitimization of any place branding initiative.

Similarly, Zenker and Erfgen (2014) emphasise the ambassadorial work carried out by the resident population in any place branding strategy. In fact, they consider it the most notable value to aim for when considering the inclusion of the resident population in the participatory process of defining a place brand. Overall, they consider that the branding shared by the local population needs to be defined in three stages: the projection of a shared vision of the object of branding; the implementation of a structure for their participation; and finally, the offer of support to residents in their own place branding projects.

Along the same lines, Kavaratzis and Hatch (2013, p. 82) and Kladou et al. (2016) emphasise the need to enter into dialogue with the different publics involved in the place brand in order to implement a bottom-up strategy. In this sense, “place branding is best understood as dialogue, debate, and contestation. This is obviously a dialogue between stakeholders because brands are built out of the ‘raw material’ of identity and identity emerges in the conversation between stakeholders and what brings them together” (Kavaratzis and Hatch 2013, p. 82).

All this forms part of what Kavaratzis (2012) terms ‘participatory branding’, where stakeholders such as



citizens, the public administration and companies offer a valuable and oriented vision of what the place brand that represents them should look like, as well as showing how the brand should be built. This stance is the reverse of the classical view that marketing is done by 'marketers' who only think of their customers (Kavaratzis 2012, p. 13). In this respect, this same author calls for the involvement of stakeholders in the processes of defining place brands as the necessary path towards the co-creation of brands associated with places.

Kavaratzis and Kalandides (2015) emphasise the need to understand the practice of place branding from the viewpoint of participation and an openness to the intervention of interested publics based on a diversity of views and objectives, thereby facilitating the creation of discussion forums and enabling the discussion of the values and/or attributes of place brands. With regard to this, our article raises awareness of the resident population's perception regarding the values and/or attributes of the city of Barcelona, thereby implementing the concept of 'internal place branding'.

For Thelander and Säwe (2015), the key aspect that lends meaning to an 'internal place branding' strategy lies in the possibility of local communities participating in a process that results in the co-creation of the place brand. Thus, the relational aspect established between brand promoters and residents emphasises not only the necessary involvement of residents in defining a brand they should feel represented by, but also the possibility of creating an internal brand value among residents, which leads to their subsequent adhesion and commitment to the brand.

For their part, Kavaratzis and Hatch (2013) highlight the relationship between place brand and place identity. In this context, they state that brand and identity are shaped from a complex process based on debate and dialogue between stakeholders. In fact, these authors conclude that it is the stakeholders who end up producing the brand and therefore represent the most important element of a place branding strategy.

### Barcelona as a brand

In terms of place branding, there are many studies that define Barcelona as one of the cities with the greatest awareness, image and reputation on a worldwide scale. In this sense, we can state that Barcelona has a very powerful global brand, to the point that the 2014 City Rep Track conducted by the Reputation Institute (2015) ranked it as the 9th city worldwide with the best reputation. Moreover, the Guardian Cities Global Brand Barometer, produced by Saffron in 2014, ranked Barcelona as the sixth best city brand in the world (Michael and Sedghi 2014), while the Globalization and World Cities (GaWC) Research Network

(2013) classified it as a "very important world city that links major economic regions and states into the world economy". Moreover, many global reports define Barcelona as one of the leading Mediterranean hubs in terms of quality of life, safety and health security, and education, as well as in attracting talent, business, ideas and capital, tourism, innovation, commerce, design, marine transportation and cruises, among others (e.g. Bremner 2014; Hales et al. 2014; Mercer 2015; QS Top Universities 2014; The Economist Intelligence Unit 2015; The Innovation Cities Program 2015). In short, in agreement with Tintoré et al. (2015), we can say that, as a brand, Barcelona currently enjoys "good health".

Belloso (2011) mentions cosmopolitanism, creativity, innovation, culture and quality of life as the pillars of this great image. For her part, Reventós (2007, p. 287) also adds the symbolic values of diversity, tolerance and its Mediterranean character, while others include design (Montaña and Moll 2009), its Catalan identity (Portabella 2010, p. 115), authenticity in general (Dordevic 2014, pp. 58–59), interculturalism (Zapata-Barrero 2017), sustainability (McDonogh 2011; Sánchez-Belando et al. 2012) and sport (The Place Brand Observer 2015).

Smith (2006) summarises that the success of the communication of Barcelona lies in the fact that it is a "capital" without being one politically. And it has achieved this through positioning itself as a capital of sport, as the capital of Catalonia and as the capital of southwest Europe, ideas that, according to Smith (2006), it has transmitted not "through traditional marketing channels, but by coveting independent media attention". To this we would add that Barcelona has gained an additional status as a capital: that of the capital of the mobile phone, since Barcelona has hosted the Mobile World Congress since 2006.

According to Belloso (2011, p. 19), six key factors explain Barcelona's success as a brand:

1. The branding of Barcelona is grounded in a profound transformation of the city;
2. The vision and leadership of the municipal leaders;
3. The involvement and participation of civil society;
4. The key role of the 1992 Olympic Games;
5. The unique and differentiated identity of the city;
6. Creativity, innovation and boldness as a common denominator.

Hildreth (2008, p. 11) also shares with Belloso (2011) the importance of the vision of leadership of the various municipal leaders of recent decades, who knew how to strengthen "what the city already had". To this, Crossa et al. (2010, p. 85), Sutton (2013, p. 4) and The Place Brand Observer (2015) add the increasing role of the private sector in decision-making processes guaranteed through mechanisms such as the Strategic Metropolitan Plan of



Barcelona and the creation of business groups—mainly financial—such as Barcelona Global. Such private influence would have been especially reflected in the promotional prioritisation of certain sectors over others. Specifically, the communicative focus would have shifted from key sectors such as gastronomy, design tourism and universities, toward an increasing commitment to cultural industries and information technologies (Crossa et al. 2010, p. 85).

For their part, Vitello and Willcocks (2011, pp. 308–309) are of the opinion that the key to the success of Brand Barcelona lies in the “public gathering spaces” scattered throughout the city, which seek “to create intimate scenarios and encourage positive interaction”.

Nevertheless, many authors point out that the truly fundamental element in the city’s repositioning has been the establishing of culture as the axis of the global strategy of municipal development to differentiate it from its competitors (Crossa et al. 2010; De Carlo et al. 2009; Dordevic 2014; Ganau 2008; García 2004; Reventós 2007; Rius-Ulldemolins 2012, 2014; Rius-Ulldemolins and Sánchez-Befando 2015; Rius-Ulldemolins et al. 2016; Sánchez-Belando et al. 2012; Sansi 2015). In this regard, Ganau (2008, p. 7) goes further by considering Barcelona as “the city that has best equated its name to that of culture in the international panorama in recent years”, while De Carlo et al. (2009, p. 10) rank it alongside Berlin or Vienna, and Dordevic (2014, p. 58) defines it as the “new cultural capital city of Spain”.

Its positioning as a cultural city—deeply connected with the idea of a unique and authentic place (Rius-Ulldemolins 2014)—has been set out, on the one hand, in the promotion of certain heritage assets to the detriment of others—especially those aimed at supporting a cosmopolitan, modern vision—and, on the other, in a shift towards the organisation of large, one-off events, such as the Universal Expositions of 1888 and 1929, the 1992 Olympic Games and the World Culture Forum in 2004.

### *Barcelona’s branding strategies*

Like many other European cities, throughout the twentieth century, Barcelona worked with different planning strategies with the aim of reinforcing its prestige at both a national and international level.

From the end of the nineteenth century to the beginning of the twentieth century, Barcelona sought to impress visitors with public buildings and monuments. The City Council dreamt about a “great monumental Barcelona” and used a particular slogan: “The Paris of the South” (Monclús 2000, p. 58). Throughout most of the twentieth century, Barcelona sought to become “Spain’s second

capital, ‘the’ cultural capital, ‘the’ industrial capital and the capital of Catalonia” (*Ibidem*: 57).

For García (2013, pp. 281–282), the element that truly stands out in the communication of Brand Barcelona is the period between 1979 and 1992, particularly in terms of the campaigns “for the city and aimed at its inhabitants”, which were oriented at fostering “public self-esteem” and generating greater resident participation in management policies, and which took into account that rather than a city to visit, what should be conveyed was the idea of “the ideal city in which to live”. Such campaigns were based on the belief that a truly successful external communication would be achieved simply by managing to get the idea of Brand Barcelona to permeate into the minds of residents.

In 1990, Barcelona became the first Spanish city to have a strategic plan for city development (González-González and López-González 2015), coinciding with the Olympic Games of 1992. This document was followed by two more consecutive strategic plans (1994 and 1999). Together, these three documents shaped the milestones in what was later to be known as the “Barcelona model” (*Ibidem*: 56; Rius-Ulldemolins and Sánchez-Befando 2015; Sansi 2015).

In terms of place branding, the last decade of the twentieth century can be summarised by the “social and political consensus for changing the city and its images from an industrial city to one more in tune with the demands of modernity (or post-modernity)” (Monclús, 2000, p. 61). Similarly, McDonogh (2011, p. 137) states that “since 1992 Barcelona has become a branded destination offering history, leisure, the postmodernities of star architects and cosmopolitan buzz”. Some ideas promoted by the city brand managers during this period were: “the capital of West Mediterranean” and the “Southern Door of Europe” (Monclús 2000).

The twentieth century began with Barcelona having a very powerful brand in terms of tourism (Datzira-Masip and Poluzzi, 2014). For that reason, the city brand managers started to work on “a new brand not specific only for tourism purposes, but to promote also the rest of the city’s cultural and economic activities, based on the programme ‘Do it in Barcelona’ concept of ‘living, working and enjoying’” (*Ibidem*: 54). Specifically, the city council has recently changed its brand positioning to that of a city of innovation, entrepreneurship and creativity—precisely the areas in which the city council wanted to improve its international reputation in order to become a real open-for-business city. Even if this rebranding process was consolidated in 2010, with the new Vision 2020 strategic plan (González-González and López-González 2015), which has recently given place to the communication campaign “Barcelona Inspires”, many initiatives to internationally maximise the values “creative” and “smart” originated a few decades ago. For example, the different projects of



urban regeneration in different districts of the city, which sought to create different kinds of cultural and creative clusters, such as the Raval district (Rius-Ulldemolins 2014), Montjuïc (Zarlenga et al. 2016), and, above all, the 22@ district, a project approved in 2001, that aimed to transform a whole old industrial quarter in the city centre into an innovative productive area that could attract more foreign knowledge and creativity (Cohendet et al. 2011; Charnock et al. 2014; Zarlenga et al. 2016).

As pointed out by Trueman et al. (2008), the concept of a “creative city” as a vehicle for urban regeneration is attractive, but has problems associated with managing the city, such as gentrification, that can only be solved with the empowerment of local communities. However, March and Ribera-Fumaz (2016, p. 816) suggest that Barcelona's residents are not really being put “at the centre of urban debate” and that the city needs “to repoliticise the debates on the Smart City”.

In any case, Barcelona's brand managers keep fostering the idea of a creative and smart city (McDonogh 2011), following the path of many other cities all over the world (March and Ribera-Fumaz 2016), even though researchers such as March and Ribera-Fumaz (2016, p. 827) recommend starting “to imagine and construct alternative urban utopias (...) beyond the actually existing Smart City”.

The commitment to these values may also affect Barcelona's competitive advantage (Morillo 2016), because every global city is trying the same brand positioning in order to attract foreign investment in the creative industries, which is key for the economic development of cities (Kotler et al. 1999). As Jacobsen (2009) notes, the decision to invest in a certain place depends on the assessment of the place brand values, which in turn are derived from the perception of place brand assets. In the case of Barcelona, the city seems to have both assets and values connected to the place brand, since its “impressive image as a dynamic and creative urban centre can hardly be questioned” (Amelang 2007, p. 173).

Finally, García (2013, p. 283) is of the opinion that, as a result of the communicative policies of the local government in recent times, which were centred basically on reductionist branding strategies that “in addition to attracting investment, seek to project an image of the city in the eyes' of tourists and the lenses of cameras”, Brand Barcelona risks losing the backing of its residents.

### *Barcelona residents' perceptions*

In this regard, many media outlets, both national and international, general and independent, are reporting on the increasing irritation of residents towards tourism (e.g. Attac Catalunya; Justícia 2015), a discontent apparently

being taken up by recent tourism policies of Ada Colau, the mayor of Barcelona since June 13, 2015.

Nevertheless, the supposed hostile attitude of residents towards tourism is not so apparent in studies of residents' perception conducted by the local government itself in recent years, as can be seen in the survey carried out in 2015 by Turisme de Barcelona (2016) on the perception of tourism in Barcelona by residents, according to which 88.4% believed that tourism conveyed a positive image of Barcelona to the rest of the world, 85.9% believed that tourism brought a significant amount of money into the city, 79.9% believed that it contributed to creating work and 75.3% believed that it helped maintain the city's cultural infrastructure. In more negative comments, 67.7% were of the opinion that tourism resulted in increased antisocial behaviour in certain areas, 64.6% believed it raised prices in the city and 48.4% felt tourism led to overpopulation and overcrowding in Barcelona. This same study asked residents what type of tourism they would like to see visiting Barcelona, to which they responded firstly cultural tourism (38.2%) followed by business and conference tourism (25.3%) and holiday, family and leisure tourism (22.9%). We should specify that the profile of the cultural tourist was not the only one preferred by residents of Barcelona; 93.3% of the participants also want Barcelona to promote more cultural tourism in the future. a type of tourism that, according to Dordevic (2014, pp. 58–59), has increased by almost 150% since 1994, while during this same period, the main reason behind more than 50% of visits to the city was to see works by Gaudí, Miró and Picasso.

In order to determine what residents think in terms of other activity sectors beyond tourism, the local government relies on the Barcelona Quarterly Barometer, which in December 2014—the period closest to that in which this empirical study was carried out—reported that residents' image of Barcelona had worsened by 37.4% compared to the previous year (Ajuntament de Barcelona 2015). This same study rated unemployment and work conditions as the most serious problem for residents (30.3%), followed by economic problems (6.6%) and traffic (5.0%). It also highlighted that for 57.5% of the participants, the state of the economy in Barcelona was bad or very bad, and that only 22.8% considered it good or very good.

Another barometer used to measure the state of public opinion, although not just in Barcelona but throughout the whole of Spain, is carried out monthly by the Centro de Investigaciones Sociológicas (CIS). In July 2014, the results of the CIS barometer showed that residents cared mainly about the following issues: unemployment (77%), corruption and fraud (41.5%), economic problems (28%) and politics (26.4%).





## Research goals and research justification

This article seeks to determine whether Barcelona's new place branding strategies are consistent with the identity of a place that its residents share. According to our literature review, this is something that hasn't been studied to date. In fact, previous studies do not really examine place branding from an internal point of view, that is to say, focusing on Barcelona's residents.

To do so, we posed three research questions:

**RQ1** Which are the key values that define Barcelona according to its residents?

**RQ2** Do residents think that Barcelona's different key stakeholders (tourists, foreign workers, young students, etc.) share similar city values?

**RQ3** Are the city values promoted of late by the Barcelona City Council shared by most of Barcelona's residents?

The interest of this study focused on Barcelona lies in the definition of the existing intersection between a destination branding strategy—which historically has been conceived to strengthen the touristic possibilities of a city, and mainly aimed at external publics (potential tourists)—and an emerging city branding initiative, more focused, according to Zucco et al. (2017, p. 43), on the definition of city brand positioning in accordance with residents and investors. Thus, the aim is to create a tool to accompany public management in the creation of competitive advantages for the city. In this sense, the combination of internal and external branding strategies is crucial for achieving a balance between the internal and external projection of Barcelona, consistent with tourists and residents. This also leads us to reflect on the new role adopted by the Barcelona brand, from a perspective of internal management which is more interested in supporting place government processes, thereby abandoning merely promotional interests.

Our results will not only help Barcelona's current city brand managers, but also other professionals working for cities all over the world, who may adapt our methodology to their geographical circumstances.

## Methodology

To answer our research questions, we undertook a cross-sectional descriptive study using a mixed method survey questionnaire (Tashakkori and Teddle 2003) to measure residents' perceptions, with both open-ended and closed-ended questions. Cross-sectional surveys provide a snapshot of what is happening in a group at a particular time, and they usually take a descriptive or exploratory form that

sets out to describe behavior or attitudes (Mathers et al. 2007).

The research instrument was specifically created by a group of international researchers from different universities, who joined the European project "Features and specificity of international communication while creating a favourable country image" (2012–2015), promoted by the European Public Relations Education and Research Education (EUPRERA). The methodology was presented during the V International Scientific and Practical Distance Conference "Branding of small and medium-sized cities: experience, problems and prospects" held in Yeakterinburg (Russia) on April 2015.

The questions were designed based on a multi-item measure of destination image, in accordance with previous destination image research (Baloglu and McCleary 1999; Beerli and Martin 2004; Bonn et al. 2005; Cui and Ryan 2011; Delgado-Ballester and Munuera-Aleman 2001; Echtner and Ritchie 1991; Lin et al. 2007; Low and Lamb 2000; Martin and del Bosque 2008; Merrilees et al. 2009; Prayag 2009; Taylor and Hunter 2003; Tasci and Holecek 2007; Styliadis et al. 2015; among others) and with the aim of analysing the cognitive, affective, social and physical dimensions of image formation (Stachow and Hart 2010). The instrument was firstly tested in Yekaterinburg (Russia) by researchers from the Ural Federal University. After testing the questionnaire with Yekaterinburg residents, the researchers defended the suitability of the questionnaire for studying residents' perceptions in other cities, despite the instrument being mainly based on destination image measurements. In this regard, we point out that other authors such as Zenker et al. (2017) have recently shown that tourists and residents have different needs when it comes to brand complexity. Thus, the real suitability of this instrument for "internal place branding" studies cannot be considered as entirely free of discrepancy.

A language editor translated the English version questionnaire into Spanish, the most widely spoken language by Barcelona residents. Then, we tested the survey questionnaire in Barcelona, carrying out a pilot test on 30 individuals to ensure clarity, relevancy and suitability of the research instrument. A few wording problems were corrected, but no other substantial changes were required.

Participants received a written explanation of the purpose of the study and its anonymous nature, together with specific completion instructions. Only residents who were older than 16 years and had lived in the city of Barcelona for 10 years or more could fill out the form.

Participants were selected using the snowball sampling strategy (Sadler et al. 2010), which identifies an individual who has the desired characteristics and uses the person's social networks to recruit similar participants in a multi-stage process. One particular advantage of snowball



sampling is the cultural competence and the inherent trust it engenders among potential participants (*Ibidem* 2010).

Snowball sampling is a non-probability method, that is, it does not recruit a random sample. Thus, any conclusion that is reached might be biased (Mathers et al. 2007). However, as pointed out by Sadler et al. (2010), even probability sampling strategies have inherent bias.

As suggested by authors such as Bhutta (2012) or Unkelos-Shpigel et al. (2015), we used the snowball sampling strategy by posting the online questionnaire throughout social networking sites, such as Facebook and LinkedIn, which enables survey research to be undertaken faster, cheaper and with less assistance than ever before (Bhutta 2012; Francois 2016). Moreover, as stated by Baltar and Brunet (2012), the virtual response rate is higher when using Facebook than the traditional snowball technique.

More specifically, we used local communities' groups on Facebook (Chu 2011; Park et al. 2009) and LinkedIn (Chiang et al. 2013; Unkelos-Shpigel et al. 2015) focused on Barcelona, to try to narrow the sample as much as possible to Barcelonians. The resulting specialised groups, such as alumni groups, local associations, etc., were selected by researchers and experts in this area.

The Internet is an effective medium for the posting, exchange and collection of information in psychology-related research and data (Riva et al. 2003) and it can be an especially rich domain for communication researchers (Wright 2005). However, to avoid a sampling bias regarding people who didn't have computer or Internet access, such as low-income, elderly and minority groups, we adopted a dual-media survey system (Andrews et al. 2003; Bhattacharjee 2012). Specifically, we combined computer-assisted self-interviewing (CASI)—using the snowball technique through social media—with computer-assisted personal interviewing (CAPI; Statistics Canada 2010)—using tablets connected to the Internet and with direct access to the online questionnaire on the streets of different areas of Barcelona.

We tried to minimise potential differences in nature of responding between online non-presential and online presential methods, pointed out by Gunter et al. (2002), by letting respondents use the interviewers' tablets by themselves, giving them more sense of privacy and anonymity.

Likewise, we used the quota sampling technique to stratify the sample in terms of age and sex (Mathers et al. 2007, p. 13). Data collection was performed during the period between December 10, 2014 and January 30, 2015, until we reached a minimum of 300 participants that included all ages and genders correctly represented in terms of percentages, according to Barcelona's population (see [www.bcn.cat](http://www.bcn.cat)).

We conducted the quantitative analysis using SPSS. For the qualitative data obtained from the open-ended questions, we used mixed inductive-deductive procedures. As stated by Rodríguez Gómez et al. (1996), to categorise data involves making a value judgment and making decisions that may be affected by subjectivity and the particular view of the encoder. For this reason, in order to minimise the bias, categories generated by coding were proposed and agreed by three independent researchers, taking into account previous literature in place and destination image.

## Results

Three-hundred responses from 317 unique visits to the questionnaire were obtained, indicating a 95% completion rate. We note that 300 participants from a population of 1,401,822 (which is approximately the population of over-16s in the city of Barcelona in 2013, according to [www.bcn.cat](http://www.bcn.cat)), means a sample of 0.021% that, with a 95% confidence level, implies a confidence interval of 4.25.

Regarding socio-demographic characteristics of respondents, we questioned 159 women (54%) and 138 men (46%), practically identical percentages to the sample of the city's population (53% women and 47% men, according to [www.bcn.cat](http://www.bcn.cat)). Correspondingly, there was a sex deviation of only 1%.

Additionally, deviations of age were around 1% in the 16–25-year-old segment, 9% in the 26–65-year-old segment and 13% in the >65-year-old segment.

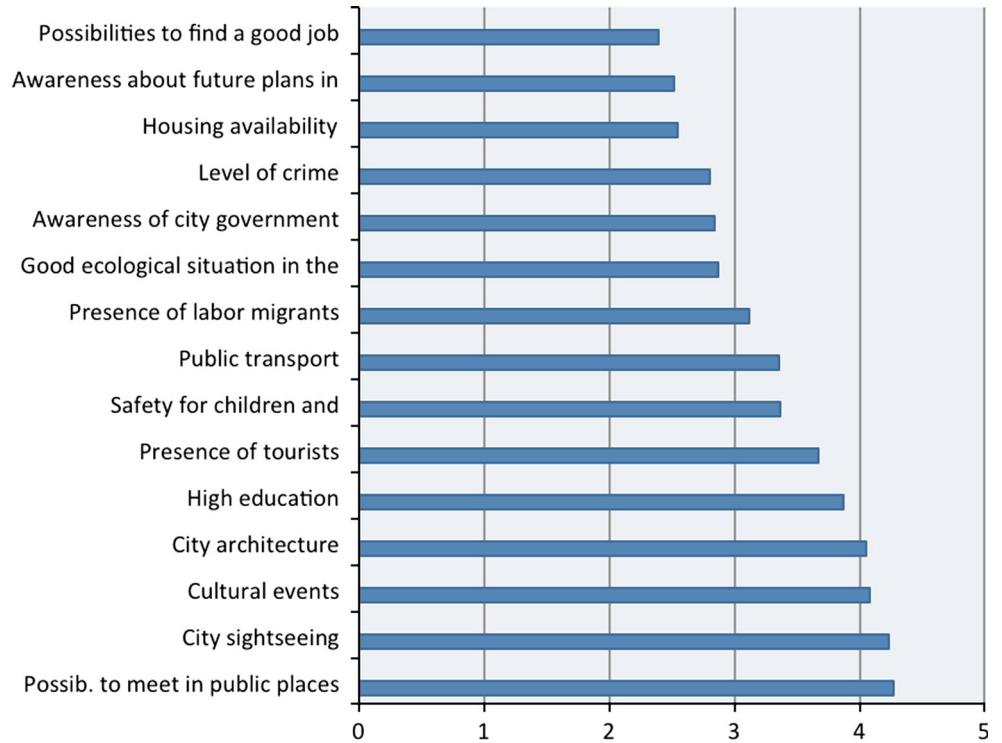
Regarding the global level of education, 66% of respondents held graduate or postgraduate studies, 22% had secondary studies and 12% had only primary studies.

The first question of the questionnaire asked respondents to assess 15 specific aspects of living in the city using a Likert scale (Likert 1932) of 1–5 (see Fig. 1). Participants rated the possibility of meeting people in public places as the most valuable characteristic of the city (4.27 out of 5), closely followed by city sightseeing (4.23), cultural events (4.08) and the city's architecture (4.05). By contrast, residents least valued housing availability (2.54), awareness of future city development plans (2.52) and the possibilities of finding a good job (2.39).

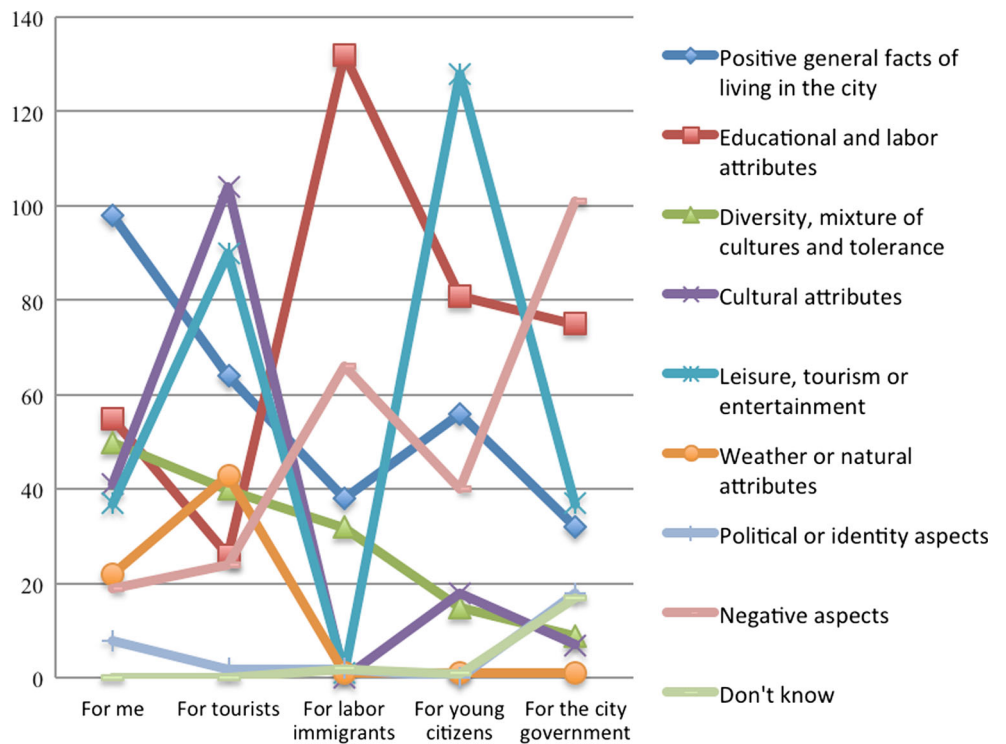
In question 2 of the questionnaire, interviewees had to think about the city's attributes as perceived by the residents themselves and the various visitor profiles: tourists, immigrants, young people and the city government. Results of these multiple open-ended questions were analysed using content analysis (Berelson 1952) and classified into a personal proposal, based on our knowledge of place branding literature, of larger categories according to their shared meaning, and later presented in Fig. 2, where it can be stated that residents mainly valued the 'positive general



**Fig. 1** Answers to the question: Please, evaluate the different facets of living in Barcelona using a 5 points scale, 1 being 'not valued' and 5 'highly valued'. *n* = 300. *Source:* Authors



**Fig. 2** Attributes of the city mentioned by residents according to various hypothetical points of view. *n* = 300. *Source:* Authors



facts of living in the city' (98 votes), while for tourists, residents were of the opinion that the most outstanding value of Barcelona was its cultural heritage and attributes (104 mentions).

Similarly, local communities perceived that the city's main assets from the perspective of migrant workers were its educational and work assets. In terms of young residents, respondents believed that the most notable feature was its association with leisure, tourism and entertainment





opportunities. Finally, in relation to residents' perceptions of the city government, the most frequent variable was that related to negative aspects of the city (taxations, incomes, making money, fines and penalties, etc.).

In question 5 of the questionnaire, residents were asked to choose among different distinguishing characteristics of the city, to determine which were the most unique and valuable to them. Results of this question are shown in Fig. 3. With 81.4% of the votes received, Barcelona's architecture was rated as the distinguishing feature most appreciated by residents. Its world popularity (57.9%) and the creative projects occasionally hosted by the city (40.7%) occupied second and third places, respectively, in the interviewees' preferences. Next, cultural traditions (32.6%) and ethnic diversity (32%) were the values that make Barcelona a unique city. Finally, in terms of the most notable values obtained, mention should be made of the role played by the city in famous historical events (22.5%).

Qualitative results obtained from question 6 (where participants were asked about the most unacceptable peculiarities of living in Barcelona), added to those obtained from question 2 (that included any kind of opinions, positive, neutral and negative, about their hometown), were mixed and presented in a ranking of the main topics related to the city in terms of residents' perceptions (see Table 1).

We note that most of the final ideas presented in the ranking had a positive meaning (9, 64.3%) and only 5 could be considered as negative (35.7%). Thus, we could state that the "pros" outweigh the "cons" in terms of resident perceptions.

## Discussion and conclusions

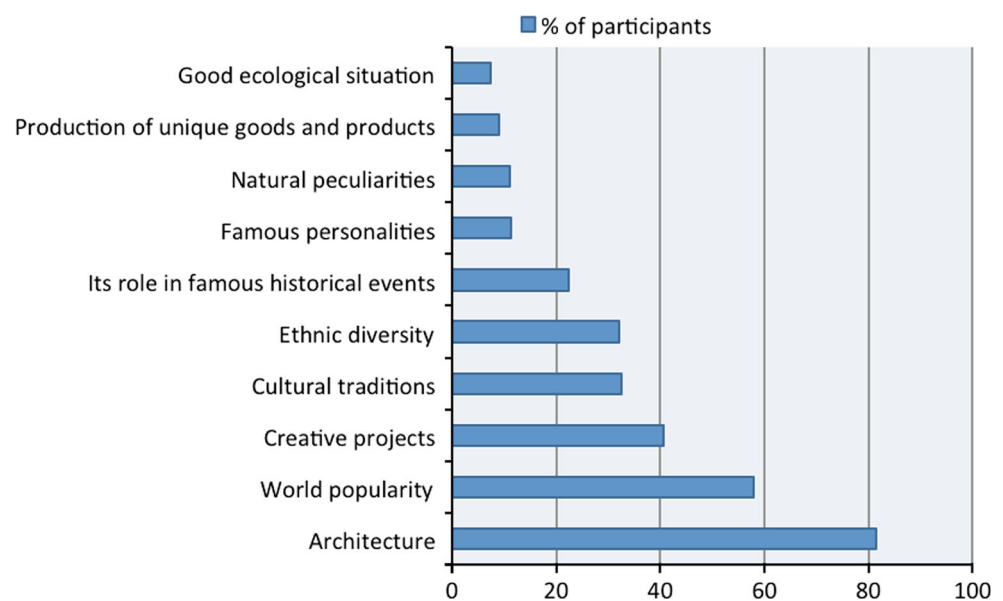
Barcelona, as a whole, is perceived by its residents as cultural, creative, cosmopolitan, touristic, entertaining and friendly (RQ1). These attributes are closely related to those projected by the city over recent decades (RQ3), according to the bibliographical and document review carried out in this study. However, Barcelona is also seen as unsafe and suffering from a high degree of unemployment and uncertainty.

There is an extensive body of research in destination branding literature that emphasises the critical significance of the image that local residents have of their place (Concu and Atzeni 2012; Stylidis et al. 2017; Lin et al. 2017). This is a key point in understanding their attitude and behaviour towards visitors and tourists. Correspondingly, this study shows a perceptual bias between the values and attributes of the city projected by the public administration, and those held by its residents.

If we compare our results with those obtained by recent global reputation studies (Bremner 2014; Hales et al. 2014; Mercer 2015; Michael and Sedghi 2014; The Globalization and World Cities Research Network 2013; The Reputation Institute 2015; among others), it seems that, locally, the image its residents have is not as positive as its global image, especially in terms of work and safety.

The generalised perception of residents that Barcelona is an unsafe city is particularly notable when taking into consideration the fact that Barcelona is considered the 15th safest city in the world—and the 4th in Europe—according to the 'Safe Cities Index White Paper' published by The Economist Intelligence Unit (2015).

**Fig. 3** Answers to the question: In your opinion, from the characteristics listed below, what might be considered as unique and distinctive of Barcelona?.  $n = 300$ . Source: Authors



**Table 1** Ranking of main ideas and concepts given by residents when asked about their perception of their city (Barcelona)

Ranking position	Concept or idea that defines the city of Barcelona	% of participants
1st	Opportunities	41
2nd	Leisure and entertainment	28.5
3rd	Incivility (dirtiness and noise)	24.8
4th	Partying	18.2
5th	Gaudí and modernism	16
6th	Insecurity	14.5
7th	City of “my life” or “my roots”	13.8
8th	Problems with traffic and public transport	13.1
9th	Expensive life (especially housing and public transport)	12.8
10th	Tourism (neutrally or positively perceived)	12
11th	Tourism (negatively perceived)	11.7
12th	Fun	10.8
13th	Education and learning	10.5
14th	Future	10.1

*n* = 300. Source: Authors

However, it should be pointed out that, according to the CIS Barometer of Opinion conducted on Spanish citizens in January 2015, work and safety were also perceived very negatively throughout Spain during the period when the survey was carried out. In this sense, even though these negative aspects happen to be better in the city of Barcelona than in the country overall, it is possible that national perceptions, both supported and diffused by the media, may have had an effect on local perceptions of the Catalan capital.

It is also worth mentioning that the most valued aspect of living in Barcelona was the possibility provided by the city for meeting in public spaces, a result that supports the hypothesis of Vitello and Willcocks (2011, pp. 308–309), in which they consider that the key to the success of Brand Barcelona was the widespread provision of “public gathering spaces” and its efforts to foster satisfactory interpersonal relationships.

It is also notable that Barcelona’s heritage—and more especially Barcelona’s modernist architecture—is valued as “excellent” by its residents. Moreover, its heritage is presented as the city’s true identity in the eyes of its residents, since it is the asset that best represents their hometown. This widespread perception of residents concurs with the actual positioning the city has projected in recent years, which is based fundamentally on culture and heritage (Cossa et al. 2010; De Carlo et al. 2009; Dordevic 2014; Ganau 2008; García 2004; Reventós 2007), a strategy that is in line with the recommendation of Kotsi et al. (2016), who recently pointed out that any destination branding should be grounded in its heritage.

Moreover, we believe that the city’s current reputation among residents is in line with the new brand strategy

“Barcelona Inspires” (RQ3), since both are rooted in the concept of *creativity*, an idea deeply related not only to Modernism (Barcelona’s brilliant past), but also to innovation, design and the concept of a smart city (its encouraging future). Moreover, the umbrella concept chosen by the city’s brand managers allows its heritage to be communicated not only directly but also indirectly, since stakeholders can easily understand the connection between creativity and their city’s identity. In conclusion, although it is true that city brand managers generally overuse attributes of innovation and creativity, it is also true that in the particular case of Barcelona, this connection is not seen as merely fashionable, but as a decision based on the true heritage of the city.

Internally, Barcelona is seen increasingly as a theme park, a place that is losing its soul in favour of low-cost tourists, and one that is ‘forgetting’ its residents. However, residents still see it as a place with high standards of quality of life and full of leisure and culture.

Residents’ opinions of the city government, which are mainly negative, highlight what authors such as Beckmann and Zenker (2012), Kavartzis (2012) and Zakarevicius and Lionikaite (2013) point out regarding place branding campaigns which are solely dedicated to attracting external investment and/or tourism, two aspects at odds with the interests of local communities. And to all this, we should add the deep image crisis that the public administrations have suffered in the last 5 years as a result of the political corruption seen in Catalonia and Spain. This leads us to think that the much-heralded transition towards a strategy of positioning of Barcelona, which was initially conceived for tourists (destination branding), and recently



reconsidered for internal publics and investors (city branding), has not taken place.

This implies, at a minimum, taking into consideration two areas for improvement: the government's deployment of internal place branding campaigns aimed at capturing residents' opinions of the city (while including them in a brand project that should include all stakeholders interested in the launch of Brand Barcelona); and secondly, the creation of place branding initiatives aimed at residents.

This adherence to the brand, in the form of co-participation in its design and strategy, would avoid what Beckmann and Zenker (2012) and Zakarevicius and Lionikaite (2013) signal regarding the low levels of identification and, therefore, adherence shown by local communities when asked about the brand representing their place of residence.

Similarly, the results obtained reveal the need to recover the value that residents confer on a place brand. Residents should therefore be considered as a key element in the decision-making process regarding Brand Barcelona, based on the design of bottom-up participation strategies, something that is close to what Kavartzis (2012) defines as 'participatory branding'.

This would possibly enable the political legitimisation of public administration-led place branding strategies, which entail, in addition to an imposition, a political connotation that conditions the affiliation of residents to values projected by a place brand that are not usually in line with its resident population.

Therefore, the internal and external projection of shared values of a place brand entails the establishment of a dialogue, of a co-creational brand initiative, as pointed out by Thelander and Säwe (2015), or, rather, of 'community building' that enables the rollout of a true initiative of 'stakeholder involvement' (Kavartzis 2012) in which the construction of a brand is co-participatory and not solely implemented on the basis of a traditional vision of brands run by 'marketers'.

The perspectives of residents, or rather, 'internal place branding' strategies, gathered in this article highlight the undeniable need to understand the effective practice of place branding from the point of view of participation (Kavartzis and Kalandides 2015). This implicitly entails an unalienable negotiation regarding the internal and external values to be projected by a place brand.

The results show that residents' perceptions of the values of Barcelona evidently vary as a function of the profile that 'consumes' it (RQ2). Thus, while the 'positive general facts of living in the city' are rated highest by local communities, their vision changes as a function of the city's attributes considered desirable for tourists (heritage and cultural tributes), migrant workers (the value of work and education), the young (leisure, tourism or entertainment) or in terms of the city government (negative aspects).

The distinct perceptions of the city's most valued aspects portray a city that is not compact, in the sense of not perceiving a "Barcelona for all", but a city that is fragmented according to the profile that "consumes" the city. It can therefore be concluded that there is no "shared identity" of Barcelona, if we take into account claims by Kavartzis and Hatch (2013), who stress the undeniable relationship between a place brand and the identity it should project at the internal (residents) and external level (tourists and investors, among others) as a direct result of previous stakeholder involvement; in other words, of the establishment of a dialogue between interested stakeholders. Residents should therefore be 'producers' of the brand, forming in this way one of the most important elements of a place branding strategy.

The situation described here reveals a certain distancing of residents with respect to the values projected by Brand Barcelona at the external level, possibly as a result of the failure of regulatory authorities to connect them to the specific task of creating and then projecting the city brand. This has led to Barcelona being thought of as an "attractions park", something akin to a "theme park", that can be moulded to the public that wishes to consume it, rather than a homogenous space suitable for every type of public, regardless of their preferences in the city.

## Limitations and implications

This study is limited in some regards. First, the fact that the study was conducted on a single city (Barcelona), and the fact that we used the snowball sampling technique, a non-probability method discussed above (Sadler et al. 2010), doesn't allow us to generalise our results. Additionally, mixing two different data collection methods, CASI and CAPI, could have had some influence on the results, despite our attempts to avoid this.

Moreover, the research instrument also faced some limitations: the survey questionnaire was created by other authors and it only was tested once (in Russia) before we adapted it to the geographical context of the survey and carried out the pilot in Barcelona (Spain). Thus, we didn't work with a consolidated instrument and it may need further future validation and criticism from more international experts before it stands as a reference questionnaire survey in place branding.

Finally, another limitation of this study is that it does not take into account the view of other stakeholders apart from residents, at least not directly. There are some questions asking residents to give their view on how their city was perceived by other stakeholders (tourists, foreign workers, students, etc.), questions that can be considered relevant to capture the "whole picture" in terms of self-image



perception: how do I see myself and how do I think others see me. However, and even if the intention of this research focuses only on opinions that may shape the key city values and its identity, it could be argued that we are using “imaginary questions” that, according to Bhattecherjee (2012), “have imaginary answers, which cannot be used for making scientific inferences”.

In any case, we believe this study provides important managerial implications not only for Barcelona’s Brand managers, but also for professionals all over the world seeking to work with internal place branding.

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