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Explaining the theoretical model of place branding: an asset-based approach to regeneration of the historic district of Tehran

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Abstract
Over recent years, place branding has come to vogue as a tool for urban planning and management projects such as regeneration of historic districts. In line with the context-oriented nature of regeneration, place branding should also be based on contextual conditions. Using a method based on grounded theory, therefore, the present study aims at developing a contextualized model for place branding of the historic district of Tehran. For this purpose, 32 in-depth interviews were conducted. The extracted codes were classified into 173 concepts and 47 categories. The final model, which was the result of modification of the paradigmatic model, moves place branding toward an asset-based approach. This model introduces the identity of place brand as the core category of place branding; an identity which is made up of three types of identity, namely tourism, inhabitation, and bazaar. In this model, place brand is not a phenomenon imposed from outside but the result of interaction among various agents on the basis of their shared interests that pave the way for place branding in a strategic process by virtue of the assets of the place. Therefore, this model creates added value for the historic district which guides the task of regeneration.

Keywords Place branding · Regeneration · Asset-based approach · Grounded theory · Historic district of Tehran

Introduction

Attraction and retention of inhabitants, especially in historic neighborhoods, has become a major goal of urban regeneration. Different aspects have been recognized for regeneration of such districts. Economic aspects, physical and environmental aspects, social and sociological aspects, employment and professional training, and housing are some of the most

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important issues involved (Roberts and Sykes 2016). Currently, one of the most common tools for regeneration of urban centers, especially historic districts, is place branding (Prilenska 2012). A case in point is the regeneration of the historic center of Barcelona by recreating an image for this city on the basis of its historical, cultural, and artistic values (Rius Ulldemolins 2014).

As a central concern of urban managers, regeneration of the historic district of Tehran brings about a variety of issues ranging from physical to socioeconomic ones. In spite of its great physical and functional potential, the historic fabric of Tehran has been isolated from the urban structure chiefly due to the adverse effects of new urban developments and has lost its place prestige.

Over the last 100 years, numerous migrations from the historic districts of Tehran to more affluent neighborhoods in the northern part of the city along with the changing of the use of many residential areas to services that supply commercial land uses, e.g., warehouses, have strongly deteriorated the quality of settlement in historic districts. This has driven increasingly more population out of these areas. In spite of their multifaceted appearance, the strategies proposed in the Comprehensive Plan usually follow

one-dimensional and mostly physical procedures. There is an urgent need for a comprehensive approach to regeneration of the historic district of Tehran which could address all social, cultural, functional, environmental, economic, and historical issues. Such an approach should utilize the potential of these historic districts with the aim of urban regeneration. Our aim in this study is to build upon the literature of place branding in order to propose a model of place branding that could simultaneously address all aspects of the regeneration of historic district of Tehran. This aim indicates the importance of the social, cultural, economic, environmental, functional, and physical context of the historic district. To this end, review of the literature on different aspects and models of place branding will provide us with an analytical tool to conduct this study by using grounded theory. In this research method, different social, cultural, economic, physical, functional and environmental contexts are considered in the process of developing a model.

The concept of place branding

The evolution of the notions of place marketing and place branding consists of three stages. The first stage was the invention of place-based advertisements. In the second stage, i.e., the last 2 decades of the twentieth century, the notion of place marketing was developed and a tendency was formed to focus on eliminating the negative image of cities and replacing it with positive images as well as attraction of investors and tourists. Finally, at the beginning of the twenty-first century, the notions of urban branding and place branding were put forward. In this period, the emphasis is on place regeneration, local businesses, local inhabitants, creation of an interesting and stimulating external image, and psychological management of the city (Iversen and Hem 2008; Kavaratzis 2008; Kavaratzis and Ashworth 2006; Pike 2005; Hankinson, 2004).

The aims of urban branding include attraction of investors and tourists to the city, reinforcement of local identity, and making the citizens familiar with the city (kavaratzis 2004). Urban branding, therefore, is a tool for improving both the internal and the external images of the city (Vanolo 2008). Aims of branding vary from one region to another. For example, American cities aim at stimulating economic growth while European cities aim at an all-embracing development in both economic and social welfare. Kavaratzis emphasizes that the ultimate goal of all activities related to place branding is to improve the quality of life for local inhabitants (Prilenska 2012).

A survey of papers published in the field of place branding shows that a wide range of academic disciplines are built upon. Among these disciplines are marketing, urban studies, urban planning, social sciences, management, and tourism. Although this notion was first introduced in the field of marketing and business, it has gradually changed to an interdisciplinary concept (Acharya and Rahman 2016). Recurring key terms in these studies are the identity of place brand, the image of place brand, different beneficiaries with diverging aims, planning and strategies of place branding, sustainable development in place branding, architecture of place brand, personality of place brand, constructive events of place brand, creativity in place branding, and organization and institutionalization of place branding. These are indicative of the interdisciplinary nature of place branding (Acharya and Rahman 2016).

On closer inspection, there is a large overlap between place branding and urban development. More specifically, there is a close relationship between the image of place brand and the mental image of place. In place branding, the unique features of place are important and they are used to create a sustainable mental image for place (Rehan 2014). Given that brand is a multi-dimensional concept with both physical and socio-psychological characteristics, John Lang writes that, "to keep up with the competitive international market, cities must maintain and present their successful image, revive their past image, or rewrite themselves through new images" (Lang 2011: 542). It seems that this image of place brand, which is essentially the image of place, is what connects place development and place branding. This image is produced by the internal and external audience's conception of place identity and its constant reproduction over time. Underlying this process is an ongoing interaction and reproduction of the notions of culture, identity, and place brand image.

The formation of place brand results from the interaction between the identity of place brand, on the one hand, and the image and culture of place, on the other. Thus, the identity of place brand reflects the image of place and expresses the culture of the place in question. In addition, the identity of place brand actively affects the image of place while also creating new potentials and sometimes even transforming the culture of place.

According to the identity-based place branding approach proposed by Kavaratzis and Hatch (2013), effective place branding at the same time expresses the place's culture, leaves impressions on others (place brand image), mirrors these impressions on the identity, and reflects the changes evoked back into the place culture (Kavaratzis and Hatch 2013).

Therefore, place branding will have different effects on the process of place development. On the one hand, the image of place brand can result in cultural improvement, use of the internal capabilities of place, and elimination of undesirable social, cultural, and economic processes. On the other hand, it can lead to a culture of consumerism and trading and remove the cultural values of place. These negative consequences can be prevented by appropriate definition of

the aims, good knowledge of the context, and emphasis on the internal potential of the place.

Different models of place branding

Implementation of place branding requires a strategic approach. In this approach, focus is on the competitive identity as well as the relative advantages of the place over other spaces and places. In line with the aim of this study which is to develop a model of place branding for regeneration of the historic district of Tehran, a review of the different existing models of place branding can be highly useful. Eight models will be examined here.

Beneficial image model associates the notion of branding with consumption values. It defines an optimal image for place branding as an image that responds to all values and preferences of the users in selecting a place. By considering the assumptions related to a beneficial image on the basis of consumption values, this model makes suggestions about all scales of place. Brand communications model views place branding as a communicative model and takes into account all communications required to realize place branding. Relational network brand model classifies all relationships concerning place brand into four main types: primary service relationships, consumer relationships, brand infrastructure relationships, and media relationships, all of which contribute to the formation of the brand's core (personality/situation/reality). In 7A destination branding model which was developed for branding small cities and tourist spots, branding begins by assessment of the current situation of place and seeks to activate the advantages of place through a strategic approach. Strategic place brand management model (SPBM) aims at implementing a comprehensive approach to the management of place brand. The basis of this model is to examine other models and recognize their strategic deficiencies. Lang (2011) presents the idea of place branding process with an emphasis on the image of place according to the process of urban planning. This process has a strategic structure and aims at recreating a new image in the mind of the audience to increase competitiveness at an international level. The 4D model of place brand management which has been implemented in Abu Dhabi, UAE, seeks to attract various audiences of place during the process of branding. Therefore, it could simultaneously pursue social and economic goals. Paradigmatic branding process model for megaprojects of entertainment, residential areas, sport and tourism uses grounded theory to determine the different aspects of recreational, residential, sport, and tourist megaprojects in Iran. Table 1 makes a comparison between the models of place branding in terms of their scale and key elements.

Regeneration is a multifaceted and context-oriented concept. The approaches, tools, and processes it requires may vary from one place to another. As a result, any approach used to regenerate historic districts needs to be context-oriented. Therefore, generic branding models introduced in this section cannot act as the basis for branding with the aim of regenerating the historic districts of Tehran. On the other hand, these models are more likely to explain the processes and steps of place branding while the purpose of the present study is beyond mere explanation of the steps of branding historic districts. Our proposed model is supposed to be able to link various dimensions of regenerating and branding historic districts and provide a comprehensive approach to regeneration of historic districts in Tehran. Therefore, the overview of the models in this section primarily aims at identifying the steps and concepts used in various models of place branding. This provides a theoretical background for interpreting the data in the course of our research.

Research methodology

This study essentially uses a qualitative research method. It makes use of grounded theory to devise a contextual model for place branding in a historic district of Tehran. The main reason for using this method is the context-oriented nature of the regeneration of historic districts which was mentioned earlier. The theory developed here is one which is confirmed by systematic collection and analysis of the data about the discovered phenomenon (Streubert and Carpenter 2000). In grounded theory, data can be collected from various sources (Strauss and Corbin 1998). Data in the present study consist of 32 in-depth interviews which were conducted in a semi-structured manner. The participants fall into two groups: external participants, i.e., experts, customers, and tourists; and internal participants, i.e., inhabitants, shopkeepers, and urban managers. Snowball sampling method was used to select the subjects from each group and the sampling continued until theoretical saturation was reached. The interviews were structured around statement of the problem and explaining the branding model for regeneration of the historic district of Tehran.

Coding is an essential part of our analysis (Corbin and Strauss 1990).The aim of coding is to find information bits in the data and determine similarities and differences by labeling those bits (Walker and Myrick 2006). There are three stages of coding, namely open coding, axial coding, and selective coding.

Open coding refers to naming, defining, and developing categories based on their dimensions and features. In this coding, data are broken down into their components and compared and contrasted. Similar conceptual elements form an abstract group which is called a category.

In axial coding, relationships are established between the categories that were developed in open coding stage. This is

Table 1 Different models of place (destination) branding

Models	Goals/scale	Key component(s)
Beneficial image model (Tapachai and Waryszak 2000)	Exploring perception and impressions of a beneficial image based on the consumption values and offering suggestions regarding to each position/country	Consumption values: (functional/social/epistemic/conditional) Beneficial image
Brand communications model (Kavaratzis 2004)	It sees the place branding as a communicating model and arranges all the communication needed/city	Image communication Primary communication: (landscape strategies, organizational and administrative structure, infrastructure projects, city's behavior) Secondary communication: (advertising, public relations, graphic design, use of logo) Tertiary communication: (word of mouth)
Relational network brand (Hankinson 2004)	Offers and organizes all the relationships related to place branding/not mentioned	Core brand (personality/positioning/reality) Primary service relationships Consumer relationships Brand infrastructure relationships Media relationships
7A destination branding model (Baker 2007)	Providing a branding process in small cities and destinations/ cities and destinations	Assessment Analysis and advantage Architecture and alignment Articulate Activation Adoption Action and afterward
The strategic place brand management model (SPBM) (Hanna and Rowley 2011)	Embracing a holistic approach to place brand management/not mentioned	Brand evaluation Leadership Stakeholder engagement Infrastructure (regeneration) Brand identity Brand architecture Brand articulation Marketing communications Brand experience Word of mouth
Place branding process (Lang 2011)	Providing a place branding process like planning process/cities and places	Place image Asset of place Visioning Projects planning Strategies Evaluation

Table 1 (continued)

Models	Goals/scale	Key component(s)
The 4D model of place brand management (Balakrishnan and Kerr 2013)	Definition a framework for creating and managing place brand in Abu Dhabi/city	Deciding: (linking strategies/innovative place brand strategy) Designing: (brand architecture/creative design/stakeholders relationships/demand analysis) Delivering: (brand value/brand loyalty/brand experience/brand management/brand promise/brand culture) Determining: (social and economic objectives/tangible and intangible outcomes)
Paradigmatic branding process model for megaprojects of entertainment, residential, sport and tourism (Divandari et al. 2014)	A branding process model for multipurpose megaprojects, which considers branding issues from the initial phases of planning and constructing regarding to local characteristic/megaprojects	Core categories (persian unique identity, project innovation, place-making, distinctive and unique landmarks, project distinctive theme culture building, synergistic composition of subprojects) Contextual conditions Intervening conditions Facilitators strategies

done by a comprehensive pattern called paradigmatic model. In this model, first a core category is determined to establish relationships among the categories. This core category is an idea, assumption, or image of the essence of the main phenomenon. Subsequently, the data are recoded in relation to the core category. The obtained categories are classified into themes such as causal conditions, contextual conditions, intervening conditions, actions and interactions which form and control the main phenomenon (i.e., strategies and actions), and consequences of the phenomenon (Böhm 2004).

Underlying selective coding is axial coding. By axial coding, we can obtain categories that are enriched and elaborated in terms of their features, dimensions, and pattern relationships. Selective coding, on the other hand, addresses the relationships among these categories. Selective coding is indeed the process of combining categories and refining the theory (Strauss and Corbin 1998). Strauss and Corbin (1998) suggest credibility as a criterion for the assessment of studies based on grounded theory. They introduce 10 indicators for examining the credibility of studies which use grounded theory. Table 2 represents these indicators as they are realized in the present study.

Open and axial coding

532 codes were extracted from the entire coded data. In open coding stage, these codes were coded into 173 concepts and 47 categories. Afterward, in axial coding stage, the paradigmatic model was used to explain the major components of place branding in the historic district of Tehran. This stage resulted in a paradigmatic model of concepts and categories as well as their relationships. The model revolves around the core category of place brand identity and can be seen in Fig. 1.

Core category: place brand identity

In this study, place brand identity was selected as the core category of place branding model in the historic district of Tehran. Place brand identity has been also used in several other studies as a central category (e.g., Kavaratzis and Hatch 2013; Hanna and Rowley 2011; Ruzzier and De Chernatony 2013). Here, the concept of brand is composed of four categories. "*Touristic Identity,*" "*Settlement-Based Identity,*" and "*Bazaar Identity*"[1] are three categories that were mentioned by the majority of participants. The fourth category is the uniqueness of brand identity.

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[1] In addition to being the commercial and economic center of the city, the bazaar in Iranian historic cities such as Tehran has a historical, social, cultural, and political role that has formed many social movements in various historical periods. On this basis, this study assumes bazaar identity as one of the three types of identity shaping the identity of place brand.

Table 2 The indicators of credibility as reflected in the present study

Indicator	Definition	Realization in this study
Fitness	Agreement between the findings and the experience of experts and other participants	The findings of the study were explained to three experts from among the participants and confirmed by them after slight modifications
Concepts	Appropriate conceptualization of the findings	Complete and in-depth explanation of categories and concepts for achieving correct interpretations
Applicability or usefulness	Formation of a new conception of the phenomenon	Developing a new approach to regeneration of the historic district of Tehran
Contextualization of concepts	Suitability of concepts and categories for their context	The concepts and categories are rooted in the social, cultural, economic, historical, environmental, physical, and functional context of the historic fabric of Tehran
Logic	Pursuing a logical path in presenting theoretical narratives and interpreting the phenomenon	Establishing a meaningful relationship among the concepts and presenting a consistent, comprehensive narrative of place branding in the historic district
Depth	Complete explanation of details	Development of a final model with detailed explanations for the relationships among the concepts and the categories
Variation	Variation and sophistication of concepts and categories that form the theory	Variation of the concepts as well as their interrelationships with different aspects of place branding was confirmed by experts
Creativity	Creative and innovative results	(1) Branding approach to the historic fabric of Tehran is unprecedented (2) The process of branding is explained by means of an asset-based approach
Sensitivity	Sensitivity to data and participants	The interpretations of the concepts and categories were given to the participants in order to achieve consensus
Evidence of memos	Recording and making note of concepts and their interpretations throughout the study for monitoring the trends of change in interpretations of the phenomenon	All concepts and interpretations were recorded throughout the study and referred to in different stages

The most important step in branding is to create a unique image in the form of a prominent function, architecture, or design. (An urban design expert)

The terms "brand identity" and "brand reputation" have been distinguished and widely used in research literature (Walker 2010). Brand identity includes the brand's central attributes (Barnett et al. 2006). This identity is an internal perspective created by the branding team before presentation of the brand to the external audience (Balmer and Greyser 2006). On the other hand, brand reputation arises from the perspective and past experience of foreign stakeholders and target audience of branding (Siano et al. 2011). The contradiction between the preferences of the external and internal audiences of the place brand usually lies in the difference between the internal identity of place and the identity sought by external audiences which can appear problematic

in branding process. This problem has often led to a distance between the internal audience (local community) and branding objectives in the Iranian context of branding. Simultaneous attention to touristic, settlement-based, and bazaar identity (with particular emphasis on touristic identity) at the very beginning of the branding process was intended to avoid this problem and to form a common mental image of the place in a diverse range of audiences.

Causal conditions

Causal conditions refer to the causes of a phenomenon. In this study, causal conditions are presented as external and internal aims of the place. External aims are those which are beyond the historic district of Tehran and are comprised of four categories. The first category is the "*Historical Identity of Tehran*." Foregrounding of this identity can improve the general identity of the city. The second category is to "*Improve Tehran's Competitive Ability*." Revival of the historic district can increase Tehran's competitiveness on both regional and international scales.

Fig. 1 The location of the historic district of Tehran
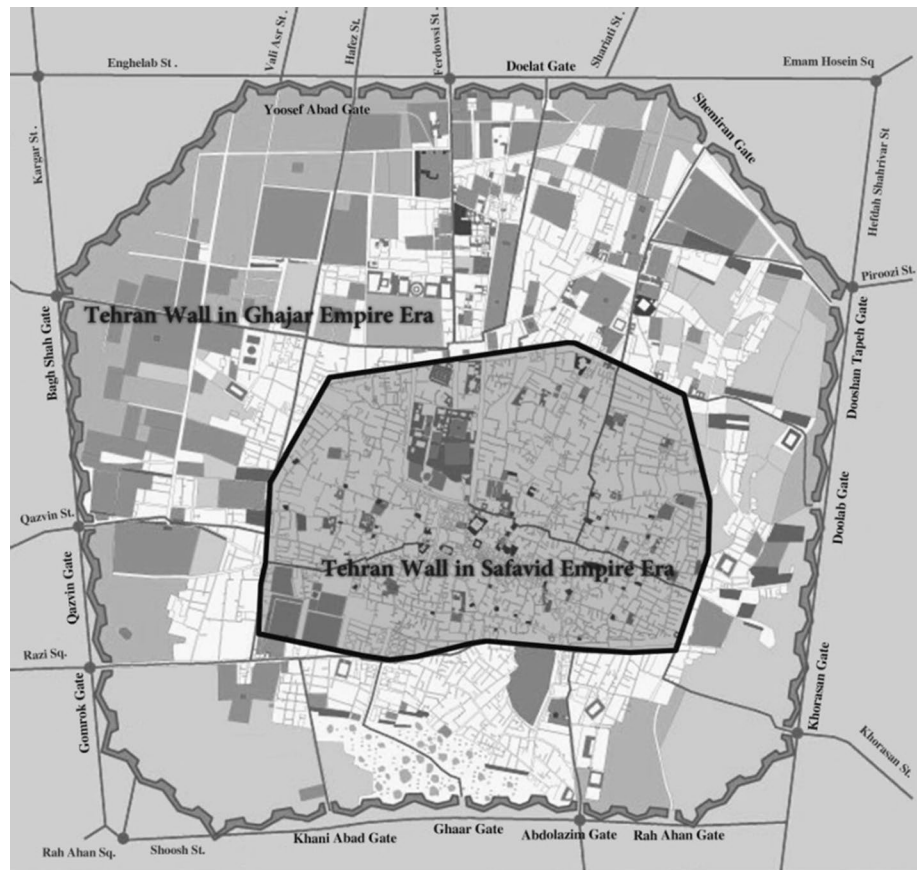
The third category is to "*Develop the Historic Center of Tehran*."

> Taking into account the historic district of Tehran in urban planning and management is an urgent need because, in spite of its great potential, a major part of the problems of the city has its roots in this district. (An urban manager)

The fourth and final category is "*The Need for Development of Cultural and Recreational Spaces in Tehran*." Tourism-based branding can fulfill part of this need.

The internal aims of the place are directly related to the historic district of Tehran. They consist of three categories. The first category is to "*Increase the Prestige of the District*." Place branding on the basis of the defined identity components may improve the prestige of the place. The second category is to "*Motivate Different Social Groups to Attend the Historic District*." Branding through creating an interesting image of the place plays a major role in arousing motivation in the audience. The third category is to "*Increase the Competitiveness of the District*." Competition for attracting people is only successful by making use of the relative advantages of the place.

Intervening conditions: limitations and requirements

In this study, intervening conditions are divided into requirements and limitations. The first limitation is "*The Stance-Taking of the Beneficiaries*." A positive agreement on divergent interests and goals can reduce opposition against a branding approach. This requires interaction among all agents of the place. The second limitation category is "*Urban Management's Disbelief in the Idea of Place Branding*." Given that urban management and planning is often confined to instruments such as the comprehensive development plan, changing the dominant approach and replacing it with a strategic plan such as place branding will be a complicated long-term task. The third category includes the "*Contextual Limitations of the Historic District of Tehran*." This refers to issues such as low security, large number of criminals, environmental pollutions, low penetrability of the district, traffic problems, and crowdedness.

Requirements are principles that should be considered in place branding. The first category of requirements is "*The Contribution of Public and State Organizations*." This can be done through preparation of plans, providing legal consultations, financing, etc. The second category *is* "*Recognition and Involvement of All Agents*." Involvement

not only engenders trust in the place brand on the part of all agents but also functions as a strategy to use their capacity in the process of branding. The third category is to "*Identify All Target Groups*." Among these groups are clients, tourists, investors, and potential inhabitants. The preferences of internal and external audience groups should be coordinated. The fourth category is "*Strategic Planning and Management*." To realize a proper place brand, strategic approach should replace comprehensive development plans since place brand is a competitive notion which is intended to pursue strategies for realization of potentials and advantages of the place with the aim of recreating images. The fifth category is to "*Create Perspectives for Convergence of Aims*." Participation in creating perspectives will result in the convergence of aims. The sixth category is an "*Endogenous Approach to Place Branding*." Place brand is not an externally imposed phenomenon but a socially formed process within a place. The seventh category is "*Collective Knowledge*."

> Expertise is central to place branding; but elitism should be avoided. If interaction takes place among people and experts, the result will be knowledge which is superior to theoretical knowledge. (An urban planning expert)

The eighth category is "*Acculturation*." This will cause place brand to be accepted as an established approach by the agents. The ninth category is "*Process-Orientedness*." Place brand is formed gradually and requires a cyclical process consisting of revision of aims, strategies, and concepts. The tenth category is "*Contextualized Creativity*."

> The uniqueness lies in the branding of a place, and this uniqueness is realized through creative solutions. (A tourism expert)

"*Making Place and Meaning*" is the last category in this part. Factors like legibility, flexibility, functional variety, and possibility of reflection on the environment can improve the sense of place and make a place meaningful.

Contextual conditions

Contextual conditions refer to features that affect strategies and actions. The first category of these conditions is the "*Culture of Place*."

> The unique lifestyle of the people of Tehran has been formed in this district. This culture should be studied and taken into account in the process of place branding. (An urban planning expert)

The next category is the "*Historical Background of Place*."

Some of the most important events in our contemporary history have occurred in this district; and there are a number of important historic monuments and neighborhoods here. This historical identity can form the basis of branding in the district. (Director of the Office of Renovation Services in one of the neighborhoods in the historic district)

The third category is the "*Social and Cultural Assets of Place*." The social capital of the inhabitants, values, and religious as well as national ceremonies are among the most important social and cultural assets in the district. The fourth category is "*Physical-Functional Assets of Place*." There is a great number of historic buildings and areas in the historic district of Tehran. These assets provide useful resources for place branding. The next category is "*Economic Assets*." If channeled toward place branding, the flow of financial transactions can be regarded as a type of asset.

Strategies and actions

In this study, strategies and actions are divided into two groups which are which are equally important: preparatory strategies and actions, and strategies and actions related to the establishment and development of place brand. As preparatory strategies pave the way for the development of brand, place brand can facilitate creation of place infrastructure by creating added value on different scales and improving the economic and social processes of place. Preparatory strategies and actions are referred to in different models of place branding under various names such as primary communication (Kavaratzis 2004), brand infrastructure relationships (Hankinson 2004), and infrastructure/regeneration (Hanna and Rowley 2011). This component consists of six categories including "*Transportation Infrastructure*," "*Pedestrian-Orientedness*," "*High-Quality Public Service*," "*Environmental Qualities*," "*Public Green Spaces,*" *and* "*Functional Refinement*." The latter denotes refinement of uses and activities in the area as well as elimination or reduction in the adverse effects of incompatible uses and functions.

> A lot of attempts have been so far made to replace disturbing uses. But the main hindrance is the right of possession and the value of their fixture properties. A solution is to create a use in the district that can compete with them and replace them gradually. (Urban manager)

Strategies and actions related to the development of a brand consist of nine categories. The first category is a "*Unique Language of Design*."

> *The historic district of Tehran should be distinct if it is to be easily kept in mind. Urban landscape has a*

crucial role. A certain unique feature must flow into the body of this district. (An urban design expert)

The second category is "*Logo, Slogan, and Unique Narrative*." The logo or slogan should be selected collectively by all the agents of the place and act as a basis for further narratives. The notion of place brand articulation which was mentioned in the literature review (Hanna and Rowley [2011]) is associated with this category. "*Place of the Event*" is the third category. In the majority of experiences around the world, place brand has been formed around a seasonal or annual event. If an event coordinates with its social and environmental context and encourages both the internal and external audience of the place to attend that event, it can create an enduring positive image and form what is called "the place of the event." The fourth category is "*Spatial Network-Making of Place Brand*." The concept of place brand can be interpreted at two levels. First, in branding, a network of concepts and themes should be organized around a central identity (for example, a set of events, functions, and physical elements around a certain seasonal or annual event). At the second level, a spatial network is formed among the important functional and physical elements of the place brand which usually provides access through pedestrian paths. The fifth category is "*Renovation, Revival, and Recreation of Functions*." Avoiding a museum-bound view and recreating functions which suit the identity of the place brand may help to attract investors for renovation and revival.

For example Vaali Mill, the water mill from the Qajar Period in the historic district, has a good situation for being changed to a café or restaurant. There are a lot of people out there who are looking for this opportunity to invest their money. (An inhabitant of the district)

The sixth category is to "*Increase the Appeal of Living in the District*." One of the problems of the historic district of Tehran is decrease in population and the changing of residential uses to commercial ones or sometimes to commercial support services such as warehouses. One solution is to attract such groups as famous artists, athletes, academic staff, or teachers who may bring about creativity in the district. The seventh category is "*Institutionalization with the Aim of Place Branding*."

Brand management requires organization. Institutions like municipalities alone cannot be good leaders for this task. In addition, these management structures are only one of the agents in the historic district. (An urban manager)

"Managing and Retaining the Value of Brand" is the eighth category. Retaining and developing the value of a brand requires long-term strategies and constant monitoring. The ninth category is the "Advertising Network." Advertisement is central to development of a brand.

After all, the most important advertisement for a place is the personal experience of the visitors which is related and transferred to others. (A tourism expert)

Consequences

Consequences refer to the effects of place branding on the historic district of Tehran. Consequences fall into two categories. The first category is to "*Change the Historic District of Tehran to a Recreational Tourist Destination*." In addition to creating a unique identity for the district, this will increase motivation for an active life as well as for investment on place branding. The second category is "*Regeneration of the Historic District of Tehran*."

We need an approach that simultaneously guides all aspects of regeneration. Just as a physical attitude alone is bound to fail, pretension in social issues will not be successful. This means adoption of a comprehensive approach, an instance of which could be branding. (An urban planning expert)

Selective coding

The core of our paradigmatic model is a combination of programmable identities for place branding. These identities are affected by the history of the place, the culture of the place, and the creativity which stems from interaction among the agents. Place brand requires that all images and identities of the place be formed around a central identity. This identity connects the preferences of the internal and external audience of the place and coordinates with the cultural and historical context of the district. As a stimulant, this identity should organize the problematic issues such as reduction in the prestige of the place, excessive commercialization, and diminishing environmental, functional, and physical values. With a view to this fact, we selected touristic identity as the basis of branding in the historic district of Tehran. The reason for this selection is that, by creating added value for culture, recreation, and entertainment, touristic identity can refine the functions in the district and redefine the bazaar identity as well as the settlement-based identity.

Bazaar identity and settlement-based identity can be strategies for converting the preferences of the internal stakeholders (local community including residents, local executives, and local business owners and commercial figures) and the external audiences (target audience of tourism and customers). The importance of paying attention to the local community, especially the residents, has been emphasized in various studies and many strategies have been proposed for

this purpose. Zenker et al. (2017), for example, have noted in their research that residents play a major role in branding as one of the target groups and act as place ambassadors. They emphasize that local residents have a thorough knowledge of their place and its characteristics and usually disagree with simple, superficial, and top-down branding. Brand complexity which is acquired through local community participation in the branding process could increase citizens' positive place attitude and place behavior (Zenker et al. 2017). Creating a coherent identity that guides the divergent goals and preferences of regeneration among different groups is the solution proposed in the final model of this study. This solution is based on the definitions and overlaps of touristic, settlement-based, and bazaar identity.

What makes this model different from other place branding models is that it directly addresses the notion of place assets. In this model, place brand is not an externally imposed concept, but a result of interaction among the inherent factors of place. The major concepts that were extracted and coded in this study include involvement of all agents in the process of place branding, use of collective knowledge instead of elitism, acculturation and increasing potentials, endogenous view of place brand, interactive processes instead of top-down processes, and identification of internal assets through interacting with the local community. These concepts can form the process of place branding on the basis of an asset-based approach. Originating in the studies of local community development, this approach has been also applied to the fields of urban management and development. Arefi (2014) distinguishes this approach from need-based and opportunity-based approaches to place branding. In comparison with opportunity and need, asset implies a mental, inner, invisible, and spiritual aspect. Assets vary from place to place and depend on the person who defines them. Generally speaking, assets include the potential of the local community as well as historical, social, cultural, financial, and physical assets (Arefi 2014). An asset-based approach seeks methods for identifying and investing on the assets rather than focusing merely on the needs and weaknesses of local communities (need-based approach) or searching for external opportunities (opportunity-based approach). In this approach, identification and use of assets take place in the context of interaction among different agents (inhabitants, practitioners, investors, managers, and experts). This will result in production of a certain type of collective knowledge which is based on contextual conditions and which can be called combined situated knowledge (Arefi 2014).

New approaches to brand management now consider brands, particularly place brands, as a social process that results from the participation of various stakeholders of different origins. In the organic view of the brand (OVB), the special value of a brand is the result of interaction among various stakeholders in a collaborative and flexible context.

This value is usually beyond the original strategic objectives of place branding and has a dynamic nature, thereby encouraging brand management to develop an open and collaborative leadership style (Iglesias et al. 2017). The use of an asset-based approach in this study aims at directing place brand management in Tehran's historic districts toward such a management style.

The asset-based approach offers a different process of place development: identifying and utilizing internal assets, and management of place which takes place in the context of cooperation between local knowledge and expert knowledge. As shown in Fig. 2, this approach underlies the final model of place branding in the historic district of Tehran (Fig. 3).

In this model, place branding is a tool for making use of place assets in order to regenerate the historic district of Tehran. In this way, a touristic identity is formed on the basis of internal place assets and becomes meaningful through the history and culture of the place as well as the creativity of the process of interaction among the agents. This interactive process was also emphasized in the above-mentioned models of place branding (Hanna and Rowley 2011; Balakrishnan and Kerr 2013). This identity draws upon a core idea that depicts the basis of image making and place marketing. Most of the subjects in this study mentioned annual events as the core idea in this district. Alongside these concepts, it seems necessary to study the preferences of the internal agents of place brand to find their shared motivations and also to study the preferences of the external audience groups (i.e., the target group of branding). Beneficial image model (Tapachai and Waryszak 2000) emphasizes the preferences of the audience of brand to achieve the image of a desirable brand.

Some of these assets act as a facilitator in the process of place branding. For example, the social capital of the inhabitants of a historic district can facilitate the process of social networking to attract agents to the process of place branding. In addition, some assets are of an operational nature in place branding. For instance, the physical and functional assets of a historic district act toward creation of an identity for place brand.

The most important strategies and actions for place branding include establishing a public institution for interaction among the agents in the process of place branding, development of a unique language of design, creating unique slogans, logos, and narratives of place, preparing a place for events, pedestrian-oriented spatial network-making on the basis of cultural, recreational, and touristic functions, improving the quality of services that support inhabitation and tourism, creating construction rules that conform to the aims of place brand, adoption of an approach based on repair, renovation, and introduction of new functions instead of a museum-bound view, improvement instead of destruction and construction, and establishment of advertising networks for place are among
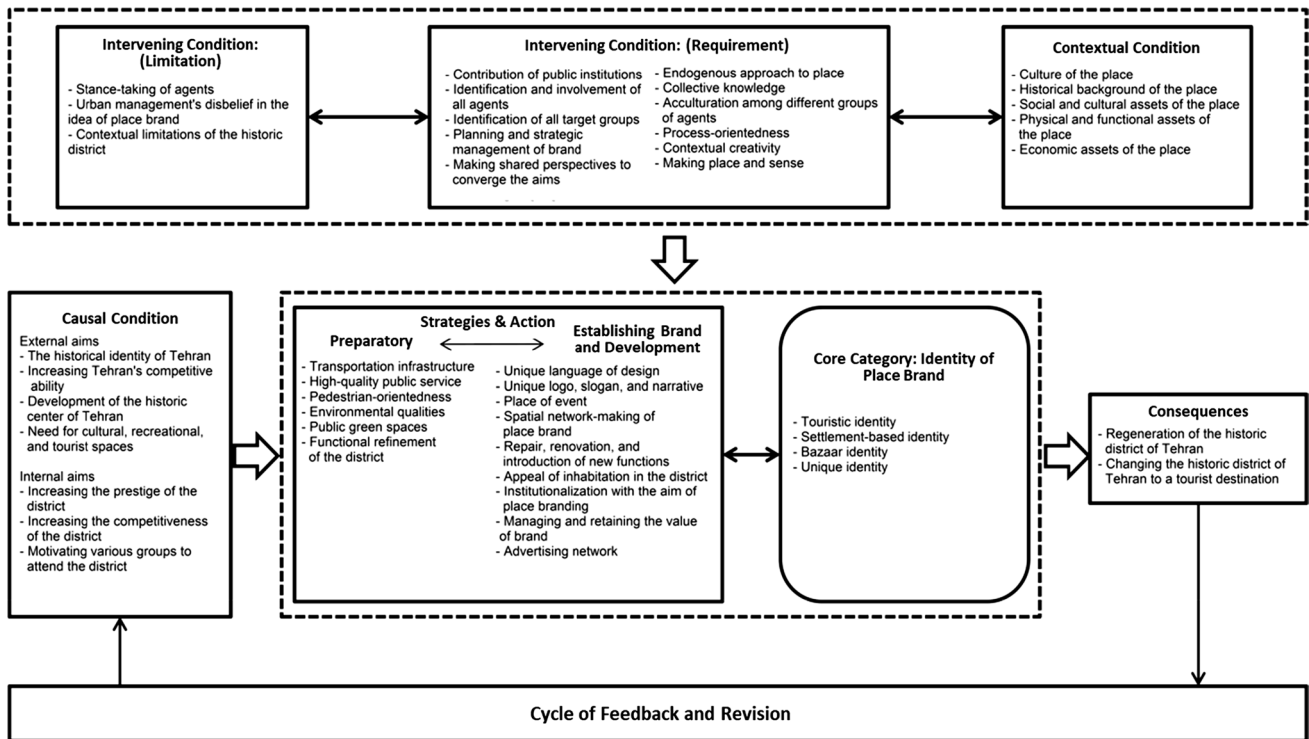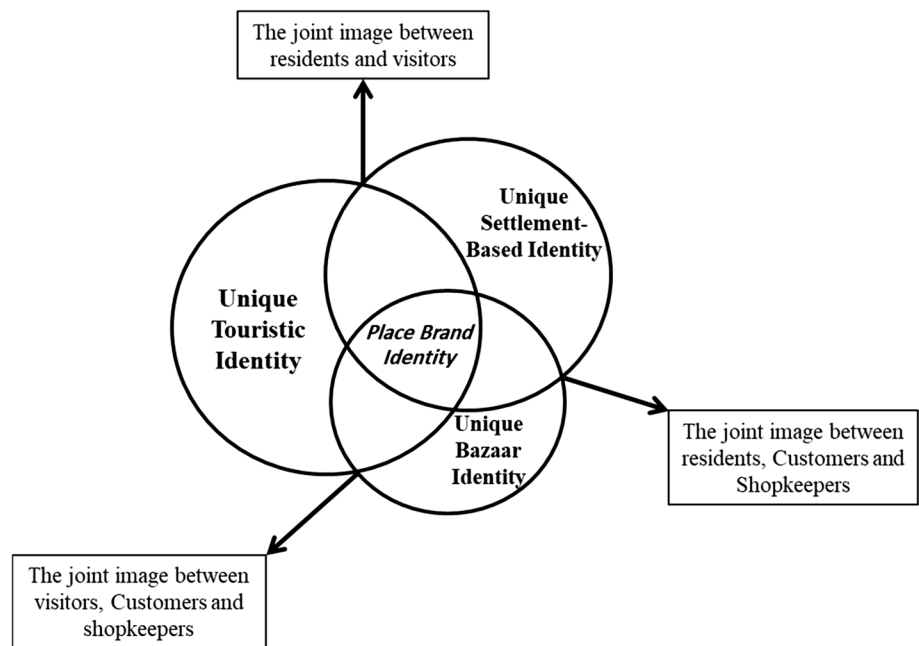
Fig. 2 Axial coding on the basis of the paradigmatic model

Fig. 3 How to create the place brand image based on triple identities in historic district of Tehran

the most important strategies and actions for place branding. These strategies and actions take place on the basis of contextualized creativity and combined situated knowledge. Here, creativity is the result of interaction among different actors in a place, each of which possesses part of the knowledge of place.

The above-mentioned strategies and activities correspond to some of the steps of the branding models discussed in the literature section (Table 1). For example, "secondary and tertiary communication" in the "Brand Communications Model"; "Brand Infrastructure Relationships" and "Media Relationship" in the "Relational Network Brand"

model; "Architecture and Alignment" and "Articulate" in the "7A" model; "Brand Architecture," "Brand Articulation" and "Marketing Communications" in the "SPBM" model; "Project Planning" and "Strategies" in the "Place Branding Process"; and "Designing" in the "4D" model have a corresponding element in our model.

The output of this process is a dynamic, interesting, motivating, legible, and sustainable image which arouses curiosity in the mind of both internal and external audience groups and provides an ability to compete to attract new audience. This image increases people's attendance and creates an added value based on the internal assets of the district. The added value will gradually substitute the value of the excessive commercialization of the district. This, in turn, will result in increased motivation for inhabitation, investment motivations, functional refinement of cultural and recreational uses, physical rearrangement with an emphasis on repair, renovation, and improvement, reinforcing the role of internal agents, and cultural improvement. These factors form the notion of place regeneration. This model is complemented by the cycle of feedback and constant monitoring of the value of place brand.

One of the features of this model, which has not been mentioned in the above models or is not fully addressed or adequately emphasized, is the importance of a dynamic concept of place brand and the impact of the time factor. Accordingly, the present authors are aware of the changing nature of the identity and value of place brand over time as well as the effect of political, economic, social, cultural, and technological changes and consider branding as a constant process rather than a final product that requires constant monitoring and even revision of strategies and aims. Therefore, the constant feedback/monitoring cycle of place brand value has been suggested to complete this model (Fig. 4).

Conclusion

This research shows that the branding approach can integrate all social, cultural, economic, functional, physical, and managerial aspects of the regeneration of Tehran's historic districts through a strategic approach. An essential condition for this is the endogenous attitude toward place branding, which was explained in the form of an asset-based approach. Assets vary from place to place and depend on who defines them (i.e., local community). It should be noted that, despite the impact of these assets on the lives of different members of the community, most of them are not aware of the capacity of these assets to develop a place (Callon et al. 2002). The synergy of planning and branding, however, can lead to the highlighting of these assets in line with identity formation and regeneration of a place (Van Assche and Lo 2011). This synergy is the result of the participation of all stakeholders and forces shaping a place in the context of collective situated knowledge (a combination of local with expert knowledge).

The asset-based approach to place branding which is the framework of the present study can be theoretically categorized as participatory place branding (Kavaratzis and Kalandides 2015; Zenker and Erfgen 2014) or collaborative place branding (Hudak 2019). However, its main difference from other participatory approaches is that it takes into account all place agents, including both internal and external ones, and seeks to create synergy between internal and external factors through participatory identity production. The challenge of establishing a logical connection between internal and external audience groups has been addressed in a number of studies (e.g., Kavaratzis 2017; Zenker et al. 2017). The majority of these studies put special emphasis on the role of residents as an important group of internal audience. It should be noted that, in most of the practical experiences of place branding (e.g., the branding of Isfahan in Iran and of Athens in Greece), the main focus has been on external audience and visitors, which has usually prevented the internal development of the place. In contexts like Iran where concentrated, bureaucratic structures prevail urban management and planning, factors like the government, municipalities, and open economy can play a major role. The proposed model, therefore, emphasizes participatory mechanisms as well as identification of all the forces that may affect the formation and management of place. The management and regulatory structures should be organized in a way that they could provide all the agents with opportunities for active, rather than passive, cooperation in the process of place branding. The main challenge, particularly in concentrated urban management structures, is that local forces may become suppressed by official power structures. To create this kind of participatory structure in centralized political systems such as in Iran, we need further research and development with the aim of modifying the structure of urban planning and management.

The proposed model is also closely related to the identity-based approach to place branding which was developed by Kavaratzis and Hatch (2013). Their study puts emphasis on the complicated nature of place identity as well as on the role of place branding in the formation of a dynamic place identity. On this basis, place identity results from interaction among the internal and external agents of the place and is shaped over time in the context of the place branding process. This identity arises out of the place culture and ultimately forms the place image. The image, in turn, affects the identity and the place culture over time, thereby resulting in a cycle of place identity formation which is at the core of the branding model of the present study and which acts as the main stimulus of place development and regeneration.
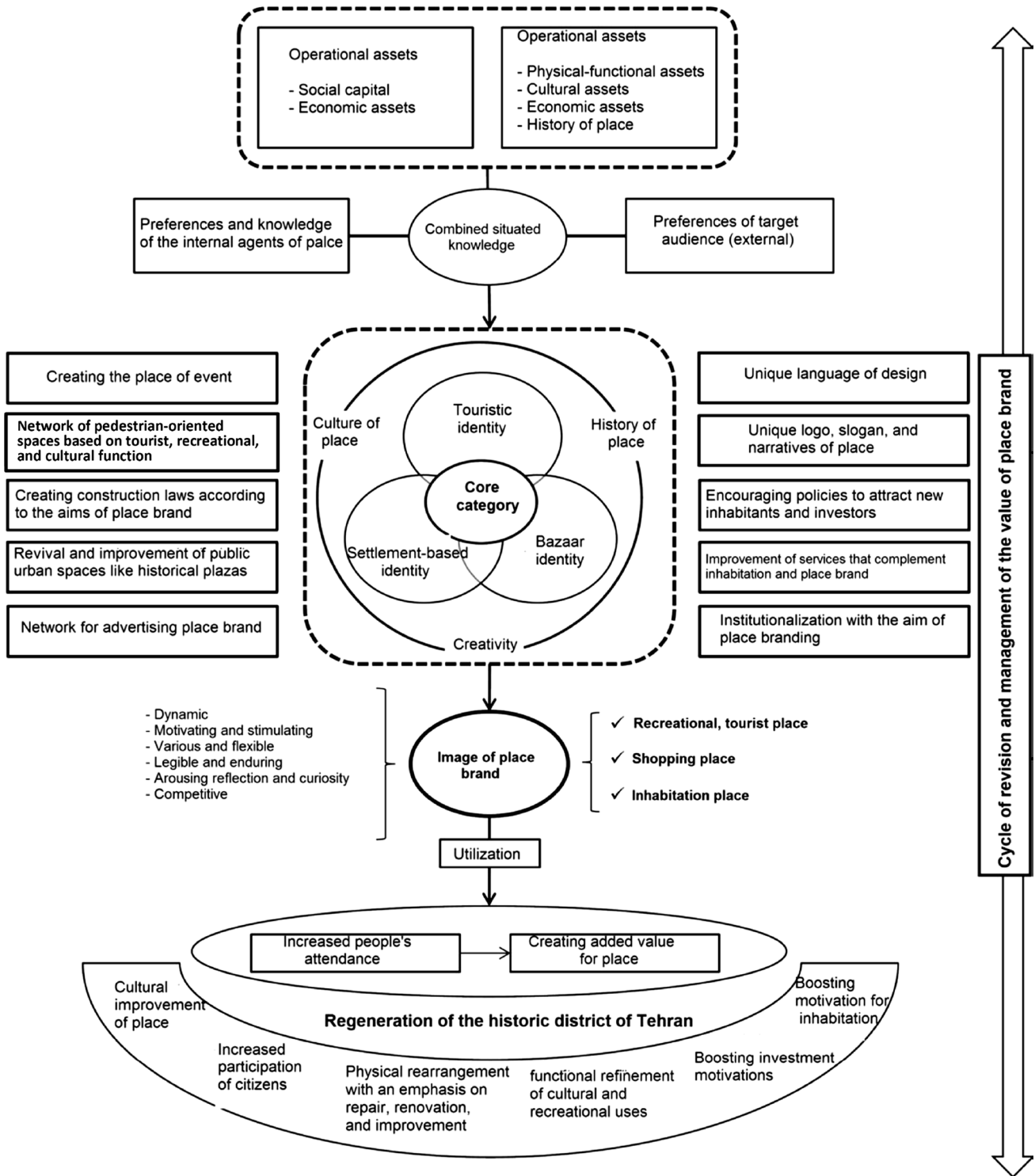
Fig. 4 Model of branding of the historic district of Tehran according to an asset-based approach

This model provides an endogenous identity for place brand rather than an externally imposed identity. The identity is divided into three types, i.e., touristic, settlement-based, and bazaar identity. This endogenous identity is the basis for the formation of authentic participation and the creation of a positive outcome of the goals of various actors. The resulting synergy from this participation will enhance the level of creativity in the branding of the historic districts of Tehran. This creativity is based on the

Table 3 The evolution of the phenomenon of place branding *Source*: Authors

Period	The early period of place branding	The late period of place branding	Proposed model of place branding
Disciplinary field	Marketing	Multidisciplinary	Interdisciplinary
Effective dimensions	The importance of visual and tangible dimensions (logo, slogan, etc.)	The importance of environmental function and event planning in the place	The generally recognized importance of place
Nature	Place brand as a marketing tool	Place brand as an environmental planning and management tool	Place brand as an comprehensive approach
Purpose	Attracting new audience groups	Increasing competitive ability/improving quality of life	Regeneration/place-making
Process	Top-down process	Superficial participation	Interactive process
Effective agents	Professionals	Professionals/target audience groups/some local agents of place	Internal agents of place, external audience (target groups)/professionals/creative groups
Scale	Often at the level of country and city	Added regional scales and urban spaces	Network-based and hierarchical approach to place brand
The fundamental nature of branding	Focus on the outbound opportunities of place	Recognized importance of the relative advantages of place	Focus on the internal assets of place

realities of the place, including the culture and the historic nature of the district (context-oriented creativity).

Another feature of this model is its inherent ability to enhance social capacity. Enhancement of social and cultural capacity is one way to empower the local community (Arefi 2014). The proposed model is based on the creation of formal and informal local networks with the aim of place brand development. This network reinforces intangible social capacities such as social capital in the local community (Lin 2017) and these intangible capacities can result in the economic and cultural empowerment of the community (Zal et al. 2013).

Instead of concentrating on providing a solution to the problems of Tehran's historic districts, which has often led to purely economic or physical solutions, the proposed model relies more on the activation of internal assets in order to increase the capacity of the historic districts. Accordingly, the overall process of this model is based on strategic planning models. In fact, the crucial and focal point in this model is identifying assets, redefining them in the place brand, and creating a common perspective among all actors around this concept. The process of perspective creation which is central to strategic planning is also dealt with in place branding (for example see Stubbs and Warnaby, 2015; Hultman et al., 2016). In fact, a shared perspective contributes to a consensus among different groups and stakeholders with various preferences. Thus, place branding is not a development stimulus project (see Prilenska, 2012), but a comprehensive approach to regeneration. This approach has a process-oriented nature, thereby emphasizing the continuous revision/monitoring cycle of brand value as well as the adoption of long-term strategies. Fola (2011) saw the lack of long-term objectives and strategies in the branding of Athens after the

2004 Olympics as the main reason behind the lack of continuity of its place brand.

Here, place brand eventually turns into one of the assets of the place and begins to shape the mental image of the actors in a place. In fact, the image of place brand in this model will become a dynamic image and stimulus for developing historic districts as well as increasing the sense of attachment. This mental image can act as leverage (Arefi 2014) for using historic assets in the direction of its regeneration. It can also offer a new approach to creating value added for the place, not through increasing fabric density (construction value) but through creating brand value.

One of the differences between this model and previous branding models is its context-oriented nature. This feature is derived from the in-depth interviews conducted with the internal actors (residents, business people, activists, and managers) and external actors (experts, visitors, and customers) involved in the historic districts of Tehran. This model also associates place branding with a strategic urban planning approach. As this aim was also pursued in Lang's (2011) branding model, this model can be considered as a generalized form of Lang's model applied to Tehran's historic districts which, however, has been elaborated in terms of its perspectivization process based on an asset-based approach. Another difference between this model and Lang's is that the former better explains the implications and results of branding, which can provide a better opportunity for planners and administrators of Tehran's historic districts to guide the regeneration process. It also provides a common language between professionals and managers to understand the concept of branding and to refine the insights of city executives and specialists (a purely physical look concerning logo, slogan, or

characteristic architecture). The reason is that the output of this model represents the multi-dimensional and complicated nature of place branding, especially in a historic district.

This study showed that focusing on specific audience groups, particularly external audiences such as visitors and tourists, which has been emphasized in almost all the basic approaches to place branding is not sufficient for inducing place development and, even if it could bring about economic added value in the long term, it is unlikely to improve the quality of the residents. Instead, we require complex identities that could create a common mental image (i.e., place brand) among all the agents of a place. This image will induce development and regeneration in places with great branding potential including historic districts.

Finally, this study can be conceived as a contribution to the evolution of the concept of place branding. This evolution can be studied in terms of different aspects including disciplinary field, effective dimensions, nature, purpose, process, effective agents, scale, and the fundamental nature of branding. Table 3 summarizes the evolution of place branding since when it was first proposed and compares it with the model proposed in the present study.

Research in other areas such as operational models of enhancing the participation of actors in the branding process, reforming the management structure for place brand leadership in a collaborative and bottom-up manner in concentrated political systems such as Iran, interaction among the three types of identity, and formation of place brand networks can enrich the present research and progress the field of the branding of historic districts.

Compliance with ethical standards

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