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Neighborhood identity and branding: challenges and trends in place branding

Identidad y branding de barrio: retos y tendencias para la marca-lugar

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Abstract

Purpose. This study examines the relationship between neighborhood identity and neighborhood branding using a mixed-methods approach that integrates bibliometric analysis and qualitative conceptual synthesis. The objective is to analyze the evolution of these concepts in academic literature and identify their intersections and divergences. **Methodology.** A total of 161 peer-reviewed articles indexed in Scopus and Web of Science were analyzed. The study employed a systematic literature review framework, focusing on the most influential publications, conceptual approaches, and research trends. Key variables such as disciplinary scope, geographical distribution, and citation impact were examined to map the academic landscape of neighborhood identity and neighborhood branding. **Results and Conclusions.** The findings indicate that research on neighborhood identity is well-established across multiple disciplines, including social sciences, urban studies, and social psychology. In contrast, neighborhood branding is an emerging field with a predominant focus on urban planning and public administration. Both concepts share concerns about gentrification but from different perspectives: neighborhood identity emphasizes residents' perceptions and sense of belonging, whereas neighborhood branding explores its impact on commercialization and urban repositioning. The study underscores the need for greater transdisciplinary integration to develop more equitable and sustainable branding strategies at the neighborhood level. **Novelty.** This research provides a comprehensive and updated overview of the academic development of neighborhood identity and neighborhood branding, two interrelated but often separately studied concepts. By synthesizing knowledge from multiple disciplines, the study contributes to bridging theoretical and methodological gaps, offering insights for researchers in place branding as well as marketing and urban planning professionals interested in developing inclusive and context-sensitive branding strategies.

Keywords

Gentrification; Neighborhood identity; Neighborhood branding; Urban studies; Place branding; Branding strategies

Resumen

Propósito. Este estudio analiza la relación entre la identidad de barrio (neighborhood identity) y el branding de barrio (neighborhood branding) con el objetivo de comprender su evolución en la literatura académica, identificar sus intersecciones y divergencias, y explorar su impacto en la planificación urbana y la percepción de los residentes. **Metodología.** Se llevó a cabo una revisión sistemática de la literatura basada en el análisis de 161 artículos indexados en Scopus y Web of Science. Se empleó un enfoque mixto que combina análisis bibliométrico y síntesis conceptual cualitativa, evaluando las principales contribuciones académicas, tendencias conceptuales y disciplinas involucradas en el estudio de estos conceptos. **Resultados y conclusiones.** Los hallazgos indican que la investigación sobre identidad barrial está más consolidada y se desarrolla en múltiples disciplinas, como las ciencias sociales, los estudios urbanos y la psicología social. En contraste, el branding de barrio es un campo emergente con un enfoque predominante en la planificación urbana y la administración pública. Ambos conceptos comparten preocupaciones sobre la gentrificación, aunque desde perspectivas diferentes: la identidad de barrio se centra en la percepción y el sentido de pertenencia de los residentes, mientras que el branding de barrio examina su impacto en la comercialización y el reposicionamiento de los espacios urbanos. Se destaca la necesidad de una mayor integración transdisciplinaria para desarrollar estrategias de branding más equitativas y sostenibles. **Aportación original.** Este estudio ofrece una visión integral y actualizada de la evolución de la identidad y el branding de barrio, dos conceptos interrelacionados pero que han sido estudiados de manera separada. La combinación de enfoques metodológicos permite identificar vacíos teóricos y oportunidades de investigación futura. Además, se presentan recomendaciones clave para investigadores en place branding y profesionales del marketing y la planificación urbana interesados en desarrollar estrategias de branding inclusivas y adaptadas al contexto local.

Palabras clave

Gentrificación; Identidad barrial; Branding barrial; Urbanismo; Marca de lugar; Estrategias de branding

1. Introduction

The relationship between identity and branding is essential for both companies and places, grounded in the alignment between what an entity truly is, how it presents itself, and how it is perceived by others (Kapferer, 1992). For businesses and organisations, brand identity encompasses core values and mission, while branding involves the strategic communication and management of these elements to shape public perception. Ensuring consistency between identity and branding is key to building trust, fostering loyalty, and strengthening reputation (Muhonen et al., 2017). When branding accurately reflects identity, it minimises the risk of disconnects that could cause confusion or distrust (Nandan, 2005), and helps prevent reputational crises (Dowling, 2001).

This same principle can be applied to places - countries, cities, etc - through place branding or nation branding, where a country's cultural identity is projected with the aim of enhancing its global reputation (Olins, 2002; Olins, 2005). Once again, the effective management of this identity and its alignment with public perception are key elements in this field (Mueller & Schade, 2012). For companies, institutions and for cities, consistency and authenticity in managing identity and branding are essential for creating lasting impressions and building strong relationships with audiences (Ross & Harradine, 2011). Recent studies emphasise that the active involvement of communities in the brand-building process is crucial to achieving a balanced approach that integrates economic, cultural, and social interests, thus strengthening territorial identity and cohesion (Del-Ponti et al., 2022; García-Carizo, 2021).

Within this context, place branding at the local level (neighbourhood branding) has received significantly less attention in academic research than nation or city branding. One key reason for this may be the difficulty of clearly and practically defining a neighbourhood as a unit of analysis. Unlike cities, which usually have fixed geographic and administrative boundaries, neighbourhoods often have fluid, shifting borders and, in contemporary urban environments, this complexity is only heightened. Many neighbourhoods have lost the social cohesion and hierarchical structures that once defined traditional communities, making it increasingly difficult to distinguish them from adjacent areas (Gharavi, 2018). Recent studies have called for a theoretical framework that integrates social and functional aspects of neighbourhood branding for effective analysis and practical application (Ghanem et al., 2024).

The work of Pasalar and Hallowell (2019) represent a key precedent, directly linking identity and branding within the context of districts. The authors emphasise that a district's identity is shaped not only by its physical and economic attributes, but also by the perceptions of residents and their sense of belonging. This work provides a valuable framework for addressing the challenge of defining neighbourhoods as units of analysis, the central challenge in the study of neighbourhood branding.

Other approaches, such as that of Taecharungroj (2018), examine the relationship between a city's brand and the individual districts within it, proposing different strategies based on brand architecture and depending on the degree of similarity or differentiation between the districts and the city as a whole.

In light of the above, our aim is to understand the evolution of scientific research into *neighbourhood branding* in parallel with the concept of *neighbourhood identity*. This will permit not only the identification of connections between these two concepts but also reveal new lines of research which explore the application of *branding* to neighbourhoods. Thus, the principal objective of this work is to analyse the current state of research into neighbourhood identity and branding.

To achieve this, a bibliometric analysis was conducted using data collected from two major academic databases: Scopus and Web of Science (WOS). The structure of the article follows a systematic approach to both concepts, beginning with *neighbourhood identity* and then turning to *neighbourhood branding*. For each, the analysis covers the most influential countries, key authors, main conceptual approaches, and relevant fields of knowledge. This is followed by an identification of major research trends, providing a comprehensive overview of each term. Finally, the conclusions section will compare the findings and propose potential avenues for future research based on the gaps identified in the existing literature.

2. Methodology

To evaluate scientific activity, analyse the state of the art, and identify the main research trends in neighbourhood identity and branding, a systematic bibliometric review was conducted. Bibliometrics involves the application of statistical and mathematical methods to books and other publications (Pritchard, 1969) and has recently been used to explore the research opportunities for place branding (Ruiz-Real et al., 2020).

This study employed the Systematic Search Flow (SSF) method by Ferenhof and Fernandes (2016), a rigorous framework for conducting systematic searches in scientific databases. This procedure ensures a clear and repeatable structure, reducing the risk of bias in article selection. The following section outlines the phases of the protocol and the specific decisions made in its implementation:

Phase 1 - Definition of the Research Protocol: The keywords "Neighbourhood AND identity" and "Neighbourhood AND branding" were used in the search. The use of the logical connector "AND" with quotation marks allowed each term to be treated as a unified concept. An important decision in terms of methodology was to use terms that best encapsulate the social reality to be defined. While city administration is generally organised by districts, neighbourhoods represent smaller social units, typically shaped through closer relationships and with a historical and organic configuration (Smith, 2010).

Searches were conducted in two highly regarded databases: Scopus and Web of Science (WOS), both valuable sources for retrieving data on citations and abstracts of peer-reviewed articles (Van Raan, 2014). The search parameters included scientific articles and the time frame was established up to the year 2023, the last full calendar year prior to this study.

To organise the retrieved bibliography, the Zotero® tool was used. With this tool, the titles, abstracts, and keywords of the resulting articles were reviewed, excluding those which did not meet the research objectives. During this process, some documents in the field of biology were identified, since the term *neighbourhood identity* is also used in that context. After a careful review of the abstracts, the initial number of documents (215 articles) was reduced to a final corpus of 161 articles considered directly relevant to the analysis, as shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Corpus of articles in Scopus and WOS

	<i>Neighbourhood branding</i>		<i>Neighbourhood identity</i>	
	Scopus	WOS	Scopus	WOS
Preliminary results	14	5	150	46
Articles	10	5	121	46
Final Corpus	10	5	109	37

Source: the author

Phase 2 - Analysis: With the final corpus of articles, a bibliometric analysis was conducted based on a set of indicators providing insights into the impact of scientific research. The most important indicator is the number of citations of articles published in a journal. In our study, the H-index of each article was considered although the H-index of individual researchers was not taken into account, as this is not recommended when comparing researchers from different disciplines (Matos et al., 2023). The analysis identified the most influential countries and authors, the evolution of scientific output over the years, fields of knowledge, and the most cited articles.

A qualitative conceptual synthesis of the articles was also performed to "identify the main thematic trends or research areas" (Barboza-Palomino, 2021, p. 40). The aim was to extract and synthesise key concepts and prevailing theoretical approaches to *neighbourhood branding* and *neighbourhood identity*. A complete reading of the articles permitted the identification of main concepts and lines of research for a fuller understanding of thematic and theoretical trends in the field (Snyder, 2019). Conceptual synthesis is an essential method in literature reviews, facilitating the development of new perspectives and the identification of gaps in existing research (Fink, 2019). Finally, to reinforce the conceptual analysis, the keywords of the articles were examined using VOSviewer, a tool which facilitates the creation of maps of publications, authors, or journals based on a network of co-occurrences (Arruda et al., 2022). This tool enables the creation of various bibliometric maps that reveal the structure of a scientific field from different perspectives, showing connections between authorship and journals through co-citation, while also highlighting the relation between keywords through co-occurrence (Sánchez & Cancino, 2013). In this study, co-occurrence maps of keywords associated with the articles were created. This permitted the identification of clusters based on the frequency of co-occurrence and thus revealing key thematic areas and facilitating the identification of trends and connections within a field of study (Van Eck & Waltman, 2017).

3. Results

For clarity, the research results for each concept, *neighbourhood identity* and *neighbourhood branding*, are presented separately. The findings from both analyses will be brought together and compared in the conclusions.

3.1. Bibliometric analysis of *neighbourhood identity*

3.1.1. Most influential countries

The most influential countries in terms of number of publications on *neighbourhood identity* in the Web of Science (WOS) are the United States, the United Kingdom, and Spain (Table 2), with the U.S. leading with 19 articles. In terms of citations, the United States also ranks first with 301 citations, followed by the UK with 63 and Australia with 44. In Scopus, the United States again leads with 42 publications, also topping the citation count with 692 citations, followed by the United Kingdom with 270 and Australia with 67. This highlights the strong presence of English-speaking countries in both databases. However, Spanish-speaking countries are also represented, although to a lesser extent, with Spain and Chile appearing in both datasets.

Table 2. Most influential countries

WOS					Scopus				
Countries	A	C	C/A	H	Countries	A	C	C/A	H
USA	19	301	15,84	8	USA	42	692	16,48	14
ENGLAND	4	63	15,75	4	UNITED KINGDOM	14	270	19,29	10
SPAIN	3	32	10,67	2	SPAIN	10	58	5,80	4
AUSTRALIA	2	44	22,00	2	CANADA	6	65	10,83	5
CHILE	2	3	1,50	1	CHILE	5	5	1,00	1
CUBA	2	0	0,00	0	ITALY	5	33	6,60	3
ITALY	2	19	9,50	2	AUSTRALIA	4	67	16,75	4
ARGENTINA	1	0	0,00	0	CHINA	3	17	5,67	2
BANGLADESH	1	10	10,00	1	COLOMBIA	2	2	1,00	1
BELGIUM	1	6	6,00	1	FINLAND	2	12	6,00	2

A: N° of articles, C: Citations, C/A: Average citations per article, H: Accumulated H-index.

Source: the author

The H-Index provides a measure of both the productivity and impact of academic publications. In the Web of Science (WOS), the United States has an H-Index of 8, while in Scopus it reaches 14, indicating that U.S. articles in Scopus have had a greater impact and recognition within the academic community. Similarly, the United Kingdom shows an H-Index of 4 in WOS and 10 in Scopus, suggesting a stronger influence in the latter database. When looking at average citations per article, Australia stands out in WOS with an average of 22 citations per article. In Scopus, the United Kingdom leads, with an average of 19.29 citations per article.

3.1.2. Annual scientific output

An increase in scientific research into *neighbourhood identity* was observed in both Scopus and WOS. In WOS, although there is no data prior to 2014, from that year until the most recent date there has been a steady growth in the number of publications related to *neighbourhood identity*. For example, in 2014, 2 articles were recorded, and this number has gradually increased, reaching a peak of 6 articles in 2019. In Scopus, the first publication dates back to 1984. In this work, Smith (1984) highlights the role played by *neighbourhood organisations* and active minorities in the creation of *neighbourhood identity*. In the following years, a gradual increase in scientific output was observed, with an average of 4 to 6 articles per year since the mid-2000s.

In Scopus, the analysis of cumulative citations of articles shows a general upward trend since the 2000s. For example, between 2007 and 2009, citations doubled, rising from 6 to 10, and between 2012 and 2013, they increased from 23 to 34. The most recent years there has been a notable increase in the number of citations, reaching a peak of 174 citations in 2023. In WOS, although citation data prior to 2014 is not available, a gradual increase in the number of citations was observed from that year onward, with more pronounced growth in recent years. Between 2018 and 2019, citations nearly doubled, rising from 20 to 45, and rising further between 2022 and 2023 from 67 to 81.

The increase observed in both scientific output and the number of citations since 2008 may be linked to a key phenomenon: the 2008 global financial crisis, which had a transformative impact on traditional neighbourhoods and vulnerable communities (Lees, 2008). At the same time, urban social movements emerged, such as those associated with the concept of the 'right to the city' (Harvey, 2013), raising questions about who has the right to define and control urban spaces. The rise of urban tourism and platforms like Airbnb also altered the use of neighbourhoods, which encouraged further study of notions of belonging and neighbourhood identity (Guttentag, 2015). Finally, the growing affordability crisis in cities has exacerbated tensions around exclusion and access to neighbourhoods, recurring themes in studies on neighbourhood identity (Marcuse, 2009).

3.1.3. Fields of knowledge

Table 3 presents the fields of knowledge associated with the articles identified in Scopus and WOS, using the specific classification systems of each database. As shown, the topic is primarily approached from the fields of the social sciences, urban studies, and arts and humanities, reflecting its interdisciplinary nature. However, there is a notable absence of contributions from fields directly related to branding or marketing, suggesting a possibly promising area for further research and especially relevant to the aim of exploring the connections with *neighbourhood branding*.

Table 3. Fields of knowledge

WOS	Scopus
Urban studies (10)	Social sciences (89)
Geography (5)	Arts and humanities (28)
Sociology (5)	Environmental sciences (15)
Social psychology (3)	Psychology (12)
Architecture (2)	Business and management (9)
Area studies (2)	Engineering (9)
Business (2)	Computational sciences (5)
Communication (2)	Earth sciences (5)
Ecology (2)	Medicine (4)
Economics (2)	Economics and finance (3)

Source: the author.

3.1.4. Principal conceptual approaches and research trends in *neighbourhood identity*

For a clearer understanding of the main conceptual approaches to *neighbourhood identity*, the ten most cited articles in Scopus and WOS were analysed. Specifically, articles were examined in terms of the perspective with which the neighbourhood was approached, the factors influencing the construction of its identity, and the future research directions suggested. Table 4 presents a summary of these notions, along with their authors, publications and dates.

Table 4. Conceptual approaches to neighbourhood identity

Author (Year)	Notion of neighbourhood identity	Publication
Hwang (2016)	Neighbourhoods in gentrifying areas are perceived differently depending on the social class of the residents. Minorities tend to view the neighbourhood as a broad and inclusive area, while more recent residents define smaller, more exclusive zones. Therefore, neighbourhood identity is redefined based on the demographic and economic changes associated with gentrification.	<i>Urban Affairs Review</i>
Karaman (2014)	The neighbourhood represents a contested social space, especially in contexts of urban renewal, where networks of solidarity among residents play a key role. Neighbourhood identity is strengthened when residents face external threats such as redevelopment projects or displacement.	<i>Urban Geography</i>
Ye & Chen (2014)	The neighbourhood is a crucial social environment for the most vulnerable individuals, such as the elderly, providing them with emotional and practical support, especially when they cannot rely on their families. In this context, neighbourhood identity reinforces a sense of belonging and has a positive impact on the psychological well-being of those who are most dependent.	<i>Aging & Mental Health</i>
Talen et al. (2015)	The neighbourhood is a key unit of urban planning, defined by walkability, street design, and the diversity of land uses. However, a strong neighbourhood identity, while valuable, can also contribute to social exclusion when it becomes associated with gentrification and strained affordability.	<i>Journal of the American Planning Association</i>
Elahi et al. (2018)	The neighbourhood is a crucial support space, mitigating the impact of work-related and financial stress. Neighbourhood identity, grounded in an emotional connection with the local community, can have a protective effect on residents' mental health, especially during times of economic hardship.	<i>Journal of Social and Clinical Psychology</i>
Pemberton & Phillimore (2018)	In neighbourhoods where no single ethnic group predominates, identity is based on diversity and difference, although this may also lead to new forms of exclusion for some migrants.	<i>Urban Studies</i>
Stevenson et al. (2021)	The neighbourhood is a community of mutual support, which became evident during the COVID-19 pandemic. Neighbourhood identity plays an important role in social cohesion and mutual aid.	<i>British Journal of Social Psychology</i>
Oja et al. (2018)	The neighbourhood is a unit of collective identity influenced by major events held in the city to which it belongs. Neighbourhood identity tends to diminish after such events, as residents are more likely to identify with the city or the event itself, leading to social disorientation and a weakened feeling of local belonging.	<i>Journal of Sport Management</i>
Hays & Kogl (2007)	The neighbourhood is a space where networks of social capital are fundamental, especially in low-income areas. Neighbourhood identity is closely linked to civic participation and community empowerment, fostering a stronger connection with local and national political systems.	<i>Journal of Urban Affairs</i>
Campbell et al. (2009)	Families, especially parents and adolescents, define the boundaries of their neighbourhood. Neighbourhood identity is shaped by factors such as physical characteristics, social composition, and perceived threats from both within and outside the area.	<i>Journal of Urban Affairs</i>

Source: the author

The analysis of the ten most cited articles in Scopus and WOS reveals several key conceptual approaches and trends in research on neighbourhood identity. In many of these studies, gentrification and urban renewal are presented as processes that redefine neighbourhood identity. Hwang (2016) and Karaman

(2014) highlight that neighbourhood perception varies across social groups, with minorities and long-term residents viewing the neighbourhood as an inclusive space, while new residents establish more exclusive boundaries, reflecting dynamics of inequality.

Another approach considers the psychological well-being associated with neighbourhood identity. Ye and Chen (2014) and Elahi et al. (2018) emphasise that neighbourhood identity can have a positive impact on mental health, particularly among vulnerable populations such as the elderly or those suffering financial hardship. This points to an emerging trend that links neighbourhood identity with the emotional and social health of residents, suggesting the importance of public policies that strengthen this identity as a protective factor.

In terms of urban design, studies such as that by Talen et al. (2015) warn of the risks of a strong neighbourhood identity which can contribute to social exclusion, especially when urban planning creates desirable environments that are inaccessible to certain socioeconomic groups. This highlights the need to explore planning approaches that promote inclusion without sacrificing the quality of the physical space.

Finally, studies on civic participation suggest that neighbourhood networks play a key role in shaping neighbourhood identity. Hays and Kogl (2007), and Pemberton and Phillimore (2018) note that these networks can promote community participation and empowerment in low-income neighbourhoods. Additionally, Stevenson et al. (2021) suggest that situations of crisis, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, can strengthen neighbourhood identity by fostering supportive behaviours.

3.2. Bibliometric analysis of neighbourhood branding

3.2.1 Most influential countries

Scientific research into neighbourhood branding is more limited compared to neighbourhood identity, with a smaller number of publications in both databases. Here again, the United States leads in the volume of articles in both WOS and Scopus (Table 5), although Canada and Italy stand out in the latter for their higher average citations per article. Notably, despite the limited number of scientific articles, studies in these countries show a significant impact, reflected by their high average citation rates in Scopus.

Table 5. Most influential countries

WOS					Scopus				
Countries	A	C	C/A	H	Countries	A	C	C/A	H
USA	4	14	3.5	3	USA	5	75	15	4
IRAN	1	1	1	1	CANADA	2	80	40	2
					ITALY	2	84	42	2
					NEW ZEALAND	1	16	16	1

A: N° of articles, C: Citations, C/A: Average citations per article, H: Accumulated H-index.

Source: the author

3.2.2. Annual research output

The term *neighbourhood branding* was first used in an article by Levy and Lee (2011), found in the Scopus database. Their study explores the identity-related factors that influence housing choice, beyond affordability or proximity to work although branding *per se* is not the central focus of the study and is mentioned only tangentially. Following this initial work, there was a slight increase in research activity in 2021 and 2022, with two articles published each year. In the Web of Science (WOS) database, publications on *neighbourhood branding* began to appear in 2021.

3.2.3. Fields of knowledge

In the Web of Science (WOS), research on *neighbourhood branding* is led by the fields of urban studies and civil engineering, with a strong emphasis on urban planning and public administration (Table 6). In contrast, Scopus shows a concentration of studies within the social sciences, followed by business and management. This distribution highlights a broader interest in the economic and organisational dimensions of branding at the neighbourhood level.

Table 6. Fields of knowledge

WOS	Scopus
Urban studies (2)	Social sciences (7)
Civil engineering (1)	Business and management (2)
Public administration (1)	Engineering (1)
Regional urban planning (1)	

3.2.4. Principal conceptual approaches and research trends in *neighbourhood branding*

In this case, all 11 articles that explicitly use the concept of *neighbourhood branding* were examined in depth (Table 7). The analysis focused on the perspective from which the concept is approached and the future research directions proposed by each study.

Table 7. Conceptual approaches to *neighbourhood branding*

Author (Year)	Publication	Notion of <i>neighbourhood branding</i>
Ferilli et al (2017)	European Planning Studies	Branding relies on the inclusive participation of residents, rather than top-down projects driven by commercial and real estate marketing interests.
Masuda & Bookman (2018)	Progress in Human Geography	Branding facilitates gentrification and dispossession, erasing local histories. Counter-branding has emerged as a research topic for analysing the right to the city.
Wherry (2012)	Politics and Society	Neighbourhood branding is a set of narratives that shape perceptions of the neighbourhood's value in the market.
Keatinge & Martin (2016)	Urban Studies	Branding is linked to commercial revitalisation strategies that promote middle- and upper-class consumption, excluding "undesirable" uses and residents.
Levy & Lee (2011)	Journal of Place Management and Development	Neighbourhood branding is used by real estate agents to attract buyers, basing perceived value on the neighbourhood's identity.
Coletti & Rabbiosi (2021)	Urban Research and Practice	Neighbourhood branding is in tension with the "right to the neighbourhood," affecting the quality of life of residents.
Willer (2022)	Urban Geography	Rebranding seeks to rebuild the community in a declining city, but it has contradictory social and economic outcomes.
Zavattaro (2021)	Public Performance and Management Review	Reflecting on the challenges of researching neighbourhood branding, but without developing a specific concept.
Rabii (2023)	Critical Sociology	Branding uses the symbolic capital of immigrants as part of a neoliberal strategy, bypassing racism and creating dynamics of exclusion.
Ramezi et al. (2022)	Frontiers in Built Environment	Branding is key to promoting social capital and cohesion, influencing safety and the sense of belonging in neighbourhoods.
Collins (2024)	Journal of Planning Education and Research	Neighbourhood branding, although often controlled by elites, can also involve residents, although often in a more limited role.

Source: the author

The analysis of articles on *neighbourhood branding* reveals a predominantly critical vision of this practice. Authors such as Masuda and Bookman (2018), and Keatinge and Martin (2016), point out that neighbourhood branding is often linked to processes of gentrification and social exclusion. It typically promotes an image designed to attract a more affluent population, leading to the displacement of the original residents and the transformation of local identities. In this context, branding is portrayed as a tool that facilitates displacement and commercial restructuring, ultimately diluting the original character of the neighbourhood.

Similarly, Rabii (2023) argues that neighbourhood branding can construct a narrative of diversity that masks underlying dynamics of social and racial exclusion. While the symbolic capital of certain groups, such as immigrants, is used to project a positive image of the neighbourhood, this approach often reinforces existing hierarchies rather than fostering genuine inclusion.

Other studies, such as those by Ferilli et al. (2017) and Ramezi et al. (2022) recognise that, when applied thoughtfully, *neighbourhood branding* can have positive effects, such as fostering community cohesion, but only when local residents are actively involved in the process. These studies emphasise that the success of branding efforts hinges on the ability to authentically reflect community values, rather than imposing externally driven narratives that serve primarily commercial interests.

Similarly, Willer (2022) highlights the contradictions inherent in neighbourhood branding. While economic investment may lead to the physical revitalisation of an area, it does not necessarily rebuild the social fabric or create a lasting sense of community. This underscores the limitations of branding as a tool for social transformation, particularly in neighbourhoods facing socioeconomic pressures.

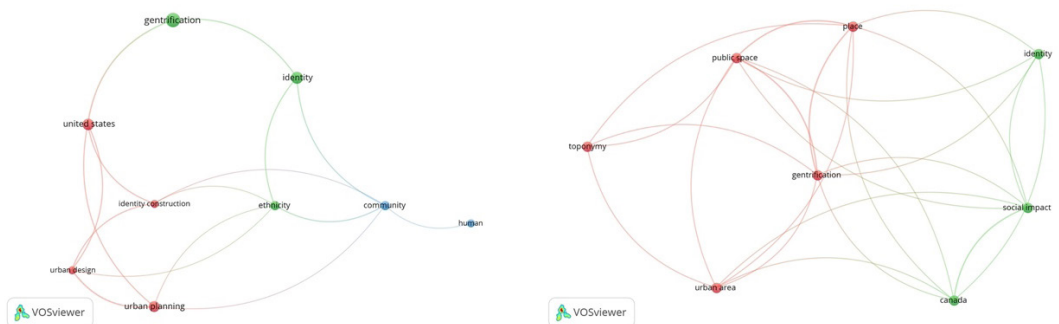
Ultimately, the research suggests that while branding can be beneficial in certain contexts, it is often driven by commercial interests that can undermine social cohesion and reinforce exclusionary dynamics within neighbourhoods.

3.3. Co-occurrence maps

To carry out the co-occurrence analysis of articles that include the term *neighbourhood identity*, a minimum occurrence threshold of five was set, resulting in 639 keywords. The analysis (Figure 1) revealed three main clusters. The first cluster brings together concepts such as *identity construction*, *urban design*, *United States*, and *urban planning*, reflecting an approach to neighbourhood identity predominantly from the perspectives of urban design and planning, particularly in the United States, the leading country in scientific research into this concept. The second cluster includes terms such as *ethnicity*, *gentrification*, and *identity*, highlighting the tensions that arise from gentrification and ethnic-related issues. The third cluster is associated with terms such as *community* and *human*. This map aligns with and complements previously observed trends, where topics like gentrification and urban planning emerge as key issues in academic research.

Regarding the co-occurrence analysis of articles that include the term *neighbourhood branding*, a minimum occurrence threshold of two was set, resulting in a total of 91 keywords. The analysis revealed two main clusters. The first cluster brings together concepts such as *gentrification*, *place*, *public space*, *toponymy*, and *urban area*, reflecting a focus on gentrification as well as the importance of place names (toponymy) in the neighbourhood branding process. The second cluster includes terms such as *identity* and *social impact*, highlighting the analysis of the social impact of branding. Comparing both maps, we can see that in both areas there is a shared concern about the phenomenon of gentrification

Figure 1. Co-occurrence maps of neighbourhood identity (left) and neighbourhood branding (right)



Source: the author

4. Conclusions

The bibliometric analysis of the concepts *neighbourhood identity* and *neighbourhood branding* reveals clear differences in their development within scientific literature, both in terms of output and conceptual focus.

Scientific output on *neighbourhood identity* is considerably more extensive and well-established, with 109 references in Scopus and 37 in WoS up to 2023. This concept has been explored from various disciplinary perspectives, predominantly in the social sciences (46% in Scopus) and urban studies (27.02% in WoS). The volume of publications has grown steadily over the past two decades, with a significant increase in the number of articles and citations since the mid-2000s. Research has examined how neighbourhood identity is shaped by phenomena such as gentrification, residential mobility, and demographic changes, as well as its impact on social cohesion and the psychological well-being of residents. Countries such as the United States, the United Kingdom, and Australia lead in terms of scientific output and citations, reflecting a strong Anglophone presence in this field.

The concept of *neighbourhood branding* has received much less attention. Scientific output is significantly lower compared to that on neighbourhood identity, with a limited number of articles, mostly published in recent years, with a total of 11 articles across both databases. Although its development is more recent, a number of studies have had a notable impact in terms of citations. Articles related to neighbourhood branding have received an average of 28.25 citations in Scopus and 4 in WoS. Canada and Italy are the countries that have produced the most frequently cited articles. Research on neighbourhood branding has largely focused on its relation to gentrification and urban revitalisation, highlighting the tensions between the commercialisation of neighbourhoods and the preservation of their original identity.

One of the main contributions of this study is the identification of points of convergence and divergence between the concepts of *neighbourhood identity* and *neighbourhood branding*. Research shows that while neighbourhood identity is organically constructed through the history and lived experiences of residents, neighbourhood branding is a strategy most often promoted by external actors for commercial or urban planning purposes. This fundamental difference stirs debate around the social and economic impacts of both concepts.

One area where both concepts converge is gentrification. Three of the ten most cited articles on neighbourhood identity address this issue, while in the case of neighbourhood branding, eight out of the eleven articles adopt a critical perspective and express concern about this phenomenon. A co-occurrence analysis of both concepts confirms that gentrification is a shared area of concern. From this perspective, neighbourhood identity has been studied as a factor that helps residents resist processes of displacement and urban homogenisation. In contrast, *neighbourhood branding* has been identified in several studies as a mechanism that can facilitate gentrification by attracting new, more affluent populations, altering the perception of the neighbourhood and straining the ability of original residents to remain. Nevertheless, some studies suggest that branding can play a positive role when used as a participatory rather than a merely commercial tool.

Another key difference lies in the role of residents in the construction of each concept. While *neighbourhood identity* develops from the bottom up, strongly influenced by social networks, local culture, and collective memory, *neighbourhood branding* has traditionally been a top-down process, led by public institutions or private companies with strategic objectives. However, some studies suggest that participatory branding models could help reduce tensions and promote more equitable urban development.

In conclusion, the analysis indicates that no study has been identified that explicitly links the concepts of identity and branding within the context of neighbourhoods. However, our study has shown that both share common concerns and approaches, suggesting the need for greater theoretical and empirical integration in future research.

This study aims to serve as a useful tool for both researchers and professionals interested in branding as applied to neighbourhoods. However, it is important to acknowledge a methodological limitation: the selection of keywords was restricted to the term *neighbourhood*. While this choice was helpful in focusing the analysis, it may have excluded relevant studies that use synonyms or related terms. Therefore, it is recommended that future research broaden the range of keywords, exploring terms such as *local* or *community*. These notions carry a degree of conceptual ambiguity. For example, *local branding* often refers to the phenomenon whereby brands incorporate local attributes into their branding strategies. Meanwhile, *community branding* can sometimes extend beyond the neighbourhood and be associated with a broader range of human groupings. Nonetheless, these concepts can be valuable in taking a more comprehensive view of existing research and different approaches to neighbourhood identity and branding.

5. Declaration of conflict of interest

The author declares there are no conflicts of interest.

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