



# Branding the City Through Events: The Influence of Cultural Events on Reputation from the Residents' Perspective

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**Abstract:** *This study examines the contribution of cultural events to the development of a city's brand identity. The case study focuses on Šibenik in Croatia. A survey was conducted to ascertain the perceptions of local residents regarding the impact of these events on the city's brand, across four dimensions: functional, social, mental and spiritual. The results of the statistical analyses, which included correlation and regression analyses, indicated that there is a statistically significant relationship between the cultural events and all four dimensions of the city's brand. The findings emphasise the strategic value of events for the development of city branding and provide practical guidance for those responsible for formulating policy and planning, as well as those involved in the promotion of tourism. By aligning the management of events with the objectives of branding, cities can foster a stronger identity, improve their competitiveness and create long-lasting value for communities and tourism. This research provides a practical framework for integrating events into cities' branding strategies.*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

In the contemporary era of globalized tourism, cities face intense competition to attract visitors, investments, and global recognition. Destination branding, which involves creating a distinctive identity and image for a place, has become a critical strategy for cities aiming to stand out from the competition (Bose et al., 2022; Inkinen et al., 2024). Scholars such as Anholt (2006), Morgan et al. (2004) and Ruiz-Real et al. (2020) have highlighted the multi-faceted nature of city branding, which combines cultural, economic and social elements to create a coherent and appealing image for a tourist destination.

The role of events, particularly cultural ones, in strengthening a destination's identity and appeal has become an increasingly prominent area of research within the academic community (Deng et al., 2023; Iversen et al., 2023; Kastenholz & Gronau, 2022). Events provide a distinctive opportunity to showcase a city's identity and appeal to a heterogeneous audience. Getz (2008) argues that events can transform a city's image, boosting its visibility and fostering emotional connections with visitors. Despite these insights, the local impact of cultural events on residents' perceptions and their contribution to brand dimensions remains largely underexplored.

The city of Šibenik, with its UNESCO-listed sites and rich cultural heritage, serves as an illustrative case study of these dynamics. In recent years, Šibenik has leveraged its rich cultural heritage and diverse events programme, promoted under the slogan "The City is a Stage", to reinforce its position as a prominent cultural and tourist destination. However, how these initiatives impact residents and the extent to which they shape the brand's key dimensions — functional, social, mental, and spiritual, as proposed by Gad (2016) — remains largely unexplored in the academic literature.

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This research aims to address this gap by investigating how Šibenik's events contribute to its brand from the residents' perspective. The study uses a quantitative survey methodology to examine the relationship between events and the four dimensions that constitute a brand, offering insights relevant to the development of city branding strategies. Furthermore, it explores previously under-researched aspects of this relationship, including the integration of residents' perceptions into brand strategies and the balance between cultural authenticity and tourism-driven innovation.

The study is organized as follows: The initial section provides an overview of the theoretical framework of destination branding, the significance of cultural events, and resident engagement. The subsequent section outlines the methodology used in the study and explains the application of a quantitative survey to analyze residents' perceptions of events and their impact on brand dimensions. Next, the results are discussed, highlighting the positive influence of all dimensions and underscoring their importance to Šibenik's identity. The conclusion summarizes the findings, confirms the hypotheses, and emphasizes the strategic value of events for the city's branding.

The study contributes to tourism marketing by analyzing event branding empirically and highlighting the pivotal role of resident engagement in developing a coherent and resilient city brand.

## **2. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND**

### **2.1. Destination Branding and Its Components**

Destination branding takes a strategic approach to create a distinctive and memorable identity for a place to differentiate it from competitors in the marketplace (Bose et al., 2022; Hanna et al., 2021; Inkinen et al., 2024). This process involves highlighting unique cultural, historical, and natural assets to shape positive perceptions and attract target audiences. Anholt (2006) states that effective destination branding occurs when tangible and intangible elements integrate to shape perceptions and foster emotional connections with target audiences. These elements include historical landmarks, local culture, and community values (Campelo et al., 2014; Qiu & Zuo, 2023). When harmoniously combined, these components create a compelling narrative that resonates with visitors and distinguishes the destination in a competitive global market. Kotler and Gertner (2002) argue that a destination brand goes beyond a logo or slogan; rather, it represents a comprehensive identity that communicates the distinctive essence of a place to tourists, investors, and residents. The brand dimensions offer a framework to assess the impact of branding efforts. Gad (2001) proposed a four-dimensional brand model, consisting of the functional, social, mental, and spiritual dimensions. The functional dimensions refer to the practical benefits and usability of the brand. The social dimensions reflect a sense of belonging and community. The mental dimensions pertain to self-expression and individual identity. The spiritual dimensions address ethical and environmental considerations. This comprehensive model proves valuable in evaluating the impact of brand initiatives on diverse stakeholders.

### **2.2. The Role of Events in Destination Branding**

Events serve as an effective means to reinforce a destination's brand identity and provide a platform to showcase its cultural, historical, and innovative attributes. Getz (2008) categorizes events as a significant factor in the tourism industry, with the capacity to elevate a destination's profile and visibility while simultaneously attracting a diverse audience. In particular, cultural events allow cities to convey a distinctive image, highlighting their traditions and creativity. Deng et al. (2023) emphasize the dual role of events in strengthening the identity of the local community and

gaining external recognition. In the context of tourism, events make a significant contribution to brand equity by creating memorable experiences and enhancing the overall perception of a destination. As Bowdin et al. (2011) observe, well-managed events can transform a city's image, fostering emotional connections and loyalty among visitors and residents. However, insufficient consideration of local values or poor management practices may lead to adverse perceptions, highlighting the importance of strategic planning (Maddaloni & Sabini, 2022).

### 2.3. Resident Engagement in City Branding

Resident perception plays a critical role in the success of destination branding initiatives. As local ambassadors, residents significantly influence the authenticity and sustainability of a city's image (García et al., 2012; Su et al., 2020). To ensure coherence and community acceptance, Braun et al. (2013) argue that branding strategies must reflect residents' values and feedback. Community-oriented events act as a conduit between branding objectives and resident engagement (Hay et al., 2022). By involving residents in the planning and decision-making processes, cities can cultivate a sense of ownership and alignment with branding objectives (Golestaneh et al., 2022; Hanna & Rowley, 2011). When residents feel their voices are heard and valued, they are more likely to support branding initiatives, participate in city events, and promote their city through word of mouth and social media (Amani, 2024; Jain et al., 2022). This inclusive approach not only enhances community pride but also ensures the brand reflects the authentic character and values of the place (Hay et al., 2022; Zhao et al., 2025).

Despite extensive research on destination branding and the role of events, little attention has been given to examining the impact of cultural events on specific brand dimensions from the residents' perspective. Moreover, a significant gap remains regarding the integration of residents' perceptions into event-based branding strategies. This study aims to address these gaps by focusing on the City of Šibenik, Croatia, and exploring the impact of its cultural events on the functional, social, mental, and spiritual dimensions of its brand.

## 3. METHODOLOGY

This study investigates the influence of cultural events on the city branding of Šibenik, with a particular focus on residents' perceptions of these events' impact on four brand dimensions: functional, social, mental, and spiritual. A combination of theoretical and empirical methods ensures a comprehensive analysis, considering all relevant aspects. The research addresses several key questions: Do events reinforce the Šibenik city brand? Do events positively impact the functional dimension of the brand, focusing on the city's practical features and benefits? Do events enhance the social dimension of the brand, including social interaction and cultural diversity? Do events strengthen the mental dimension of the brand, which relates to the city's reputation and image? Finally, do events contribute to the spiritual dimension of the brand by reflecting the city's spiritual values and goals?

This study tests the primary hypothesis that events positively influence the strengthening of Šibenik's brand. This hypothesis is subdivided into sub-hypotheses aligned with the aforementioned brand dimensions. The sub-hypotheses propose that events favorably influence the functional, social, mental, and spiritual aspects of the brand.

The research employed a survey method, with an online questionnaire serving as the principal instrument. The questionnaire included 34 questions, divided into three sections. The introductory section contained two dichotomous questions, two multiple-choice questions, and one open-ended

question. The objective of this section was to determine respondents' familiarity with events in Šibenik and previous initiatives to promote the city.

The second section featured 24 Likert-scale statements grouped into five constructs: events, functional dimension, social dimension, mental dimension, and spiritual dimension. Respondents indicated their level of agreement with each statement on a scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). This section aimed to identify the extent to which respondents perceived the influence of events on the various brand dimensions.

In the third section, respondents provided socio-demographic information, including age, gender, level of education, and average income. This was achieved through two dichotomous questions and four multiple-choice questions. Data were collected online via Facebook groups, including "Volim Šibenik" and "Iz Šibenika si ako...", between 15 April and 3 May 2023. A total of 184 properly completed surveys were received, in accordance with the instructions provided.

The data underwent analysis using descriptive statistics to summarize the results for each construct, correlation analysis to examine relationships between events and brand dimensions, and regression analysis to evaluate the strength and significance of the impact of events on the brand dimensions.

#### 4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The findings of this study underwent analysis to determine the impact of cultural events on the branding dimensions of the city of Šibenik. The analyses utilized descriptive statistics, correlation analyses, and regression analyses to evaluate the relationships between events and brand dimensions (functional, social, mental, and spiritual). The study tested the primary hypothesis that "events have a positive impact on strengthening the Šibenik brand" through a survey of 184 participants. The sample consisted predominantly of females (79.9%), with an even age distribution across all groups. Most respondents were residents of Šibenik (77.2%), while 22.8% lived in surrounding areas. The majority of respondents were employed (73.4%), and 43.5% held a university degree. The results indicate that participants are generally familiar with the events in Šibenik and attend them several times a year. Additionally, respondents highlighted the importance of investing more in the organisation and promotion of events to enhance the city's brand. However, 51.6% of respondents were unaware of the branding proposal under the slogan "The City is a Stage."

Table 1 provides the descriptive statistics for the five constructs analyzed in the study: Events, Functional, Social, Mental, and Spiritual. The mean values and standard deviations offer insights into respondents' overall perceptions.

**Table 1.** Research constructs

<i>Construct</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>SD</i>
Events	3.79	0.80
Functional Dimension	3.98	0.88
Social Dimension	3.83	0.93
Mental Dimension	4.20	0.90
Spiritual Dimension	4.10	0.95

**Source:** Own calculations

The participants expressed predominantly positive perceptions across all constructs, with the highest mean score recorded for the Mental Dimension (4.20) and the lowest for the Events construct

(3.79). These results suggest a generally favorable perception of the impact of events on Šibenik's brand dimensions.

Table 2 summarizes the correlation coefficients for the relationships between cultural events and each brand dimension (functional, social, mental, and spiritual).

**Table 2.** Pearson's correlation coefficient

Brand Dimension	Correlation (r)		Relationship Strength
	Events	Functional Dimension	<i>Strong positive</i>
Events	1		
Functional Dimension	0,630579788	1	
	Events	Social Dimension	<i>Strong positive</i>
Events	1		
Social Dimension	0,576696195	1	
	Events	Mental Dimension	<i>Strong positive</i>
Events	1		
Mental Dimension	0,578956458	1	
	Events	Spiritual Dimension	<i>Moderate positive</i>
Events	1		
Spiritual Dimension	0,483617789	1	

**Source:** Own calculations

The correlation analysis evaluated the strength of the relationships between the constructs, with Pearson's correlation coefficients calculated to determine significance. A strong and statistically significant positive correlation was found between the "Events" construct and the "Functional Dimension" ( $r = 0.631$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ). Similarly, strong and statistically significant positive relationships were observed between "Events" and both the "Social Dimension" ( $r = 0.577$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ) and the "Mental Dimension" ( $r = 0.579$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ). Additionally, a moderate but statistically significant positive correlation was identified between the "Events" construct and the "Spiritual Dimension" ( $r = 0.484$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ). Table 3 presents the results of the regression analysis for brand dimensions.

**Table 3.** Regression Analysis Results for Brand Dimensions

Indicator	Functional Dimension	Social Dimension	Mental Dimension	Spiritual Dimension
Multiple R	0.631	0.577	0.579	0.484
R <sup>2</sup>	0.398	0.333	0.335	0.234
Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	0.394	0.329	0.332	0.230
Standard Error	4.82	3.03	3.67	3.32
F-statistic	120.14	90.69	91.76	55.56
Significance (p-value) Events	<0.05	<0.05	<0.05	<0.05
Beta Coefficient ( $\beta$ )	1.223	0.669	0.816	0.573
t-statistic for $\beta$	10.96	9.52	9.58	7.45
Significance for $\beta$ (p)	<0.05	<0.05	<0.05	<0.05

**Source:** Own calculations

**Functional Dimension:** The regression reveals a strong, positive, and statistically significant association between events and the functional dimension of the brand ( $R^2 = 0.398$ ,  $F = 120.14$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ).



The beta coefficient ( $\beta = 1.223$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ) shows that a one-unit increase in events correlates with a 1.223-unit increase in the functional dimension. Events notably enhance the practical aspects of the city's brand, such as infrastructure improvements and economic benefits.

**Social Dimension:** A strong, positive, and statistically significant relationship exists between events and the social dimension ( $R^2 = 0.333$ ,  $F = 90.69$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ). The beta coefficient ( $\beta = 0.669$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ) demonstrates that events moderately contribute to social cohesion and cultural diversity. Events positively influence community interaction and the social attractiveness of the city.

**Spiritual Dimension:** A moderately positive and statistically significant relationship exists between events and the spiritual dimension ( $R^2 = 0.234$ ,  $F = 55.56$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ). The beta coefficient ( $\beta = 0.573$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ) demonstrates a moderate contribution of events to ethical and environmental values. Events focused on sustainability and spiritual goals appear to reinforce this dimension.

All auxiliary hypotheses and the main hypothesis were confirmed, highlighting the significant role of events in strengthening the Šibenik brand. The findings of this research highlight the necessity for strategic initiatives in event planning and promotion to reinforce the city's brand identity and facilitate greater engagement from residents and visitors.

## 5. FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

Future research should expand the scope of the study by incorporating broader socio-demographic and numerical parameters to ensure greater representativeness of the results. Additionally, involving the public in the research process when developing a brand strategy would prove beneficial. Exploring visitors' and tourists' perceptions of the impact of events on Šibenik's brand image could enable a more nuanced analysis of the city's brand. The involvement of residents in the branding process can strengthen their sense of ownership and connection with the brand, thereby enhancing the city's overall brand image. Examining the impact of co-creation on the mental and social dimensions of city branding would offer further valuable insights.

Future research in city branding and cultural tourism should address emerging trends and challenges to enhance the understanding and application of event-driven branding strategies, including those leveraging virtual and augmented reality as well as artificial intelligence. An additional avenue of inquiry could explore the impact of these tools on city brand perceptions and compare their effectiveness with more traditional marketing methods.

Subsequent studies should examine the influence of eco-friendly events on a city's brand, particularly regarding its functional and spiritual dimensions. Given the growing global awareness of climate change, research could assess the role of eco-friendly practices in enhancing community well-being and environmental awareness. Longitudinal impact analysis is also essential to understand the lasting effects of cultural events on city branding and resident attitudes. Most current studies focus on short-term outcomes. However, longitudinal research could reveal how repeated events shape brand dimensions and engagement over decades.

## 6. CONCLUSION

This study investigated the impact of cultural events on the branding of the city of Šibenik, with a particular focus on their influence on the functional, social, mental, and spiritual dimensions of the city's brand. The findings show that events significantly influence these four dimensions,

with the most substantial effects observed in the mental and functional dimensions. These results highlight the importance of cultural events in defining Šibenik's identity as an attractive and distinctive tourist destination.

The research concludes that cultural events have a twofold impact on the city. They enhance its practical attractiveness, evidenced by increased economic benefits and infrastructure improvements, and foster community cohesion. The favourable impact on the mental dimension demonstrates that events play a key role in developing the city's reputation and image. While the spiritual dimension exhibits a moderate positive impact, it remains an area for potential growth, particularly through initiatives aligned with sustainability and ethical values.

The confirmation of all auxiliary and main hypotheses highlights the strategic importance of integrating cultural events into city image efforts. The outcomes of this study provide invaluable insights for policymakers, event organizers, and tourism stakeholders, emphasizing the need for greater investment in the organisation and promotion of events to strengthen Šibenik's competitive position. By applying the findings of this research, Šibenik can reinforce its brand identity, deliver long-term benefits to residents and visitors, and establish itself as a leading cultural destination.

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