Bloom Consulting COUNTRIES, REGIONS & CITIES

CITY
NATION
PLACE

What Constitutes People´s Perceptions of Countries and Global Cities?

Nation and Place Branding impact on place economies research series

Technical Report №1
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FOREWORD

Nation and Place branding involves the systematic and coherent management of perceptions surrounding a country, region or city, encompassing political and social domains. However, conceptual debates about Nation Branding, City Branding, and Place Branding continue to proliferate among academics and professionals.

One of these debates involves reaching a consensus on defining the elements that build perceptions of countries, regions, and cities but the most important debate, in my opinion, is establishing methods to measure and quantify the tangible impact.

This research series aims to develop a common framework for measuring the impact of Nation, Place and City Branding on a place's economy, and **this Technical report №1** includes conclusions on what constitutes the perception of countries, regions and cities while the second part of the study (See Technical report №2) focuses on exploring the correlations between general perception (the Nation or Place Brand) and the local economy.

Welcome to the **first part** of the exciting study that challenges the so far unanswered question within the field of Nation and Place Branding – how much does a Nation or Place Brands contribute to the the local economy.

In partnership and special thanks to:

    I.   The collaboration of City Nation Place in the recruiting of the experts in the sample.
    II.   The technical support of Welphi, a research company specializing in the Delphi method.
    III.   The Advisory Board for the scientific supervision composed by Universitat Pompeu Fabra, Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona, Universidad de Salamanca.
    IV.   All Countries, Regions and Cities who participated in this study.

Kind regards,

José Filipe Torres
CEO, Bloom Consulting
Global Director for Nation and Place Branding

ABOUT THE STUDY

1.1

Perception, Nation Branding and Place Branding

When discussing perceptions of countries, cities, and places in general, we refer to the concept of a place as a social construct (Lefebvre, 1991), which is manifested through various dimensions: social practices, how individuals perceive a place through their senses, and the mental concepts they hold or conceive of regarding a place. Simultaneously, nations are viewed as "imagined communities" (Anderson, 2006), represented through national discourses constructed and reconstructed by political elites, mass media, and the public.

Building upon these theoretical foundations, we apply the concept of perception to both Nation Branding and Place Branding theory and practice as a crucial factor influencing individuals' choices and behaviors. We define perceptions as mental constructs continually shaped by what individuals hear and learn about a nation or place (discourses) on one hand, and by their direct experiences (physical reorientation of a place) or emotions felt through interaction with a city, region, or country on the other. It is important to note that these two dimensions are intertwined, as discourses significantly influence social practices and vice versa.

Despite the ephemeral nature of our study's objects, they undeniably have tangible effects. Perceptions surrounding a place or nation do indeed impact tangible outcomes, such as tourist bookings, investment decisions and talent attraction.

1.2

Challenge

Despite the increasing popularity of Nation Branding and Place Branding, a consensus regarding their definition and scope remains elusive in both practice and academia.

From an academic perspective, ongoing conceptual debates surrounding the definitions of Nation Branding and Place Branding span various disciplines, ranging from economics and marketing to urban studies, sustainability, political science, cultural studies, and social sciences. While this interdisciplinary approach to conceptualization is undoubtedly valuable, it presents the challenge of determining how to effectively measure the impact of Nation Branding, Place Branding, or City Branding on societies and economies, as well as which methods and indicators to utilize.

Nevertheless, as a strategic instrument, Nation Branding, Place Branding, or City Branding has become almost indispensable on agendas for territory development and governance. However, it is often limited to mere logos and, at best, promotional activities.

Therefore, this study aims to contribute to the discourse surrounding Nation Branding, Place Branding, or City Branding theory and practice by providing a tool for measuring the efforts in these domains, guided by an interdisciplinary approach. The challenge lies in moving beyond simplistic notions of good or bad perceptions of nations, defining the elements that shape these perceptions, and devising strategies to manage them in a manner that facilitates exports, tourism, and attracts talent and investment.

1.3

Objectives of the study

It is essential to emphasize that this study is a collaborative endeavor that engaged industry professionals from around the globe. This collaboration was pivotal in bridging
the typical gap between theoretical knowledge production, often detached from practical realities, and practical experiences that may overlook theoretical perspectives.

This research is structured around two primary objectives:

I.   **Define what constitutes perceptions of countries and cities.**
II. Understand how much positive perceptions of a place impact its economic or social performance. (downloadable here)

This Technical report addresses the first objective: defining a taxonomy of perceptions towards countries and cities.

METHO-
DOLOGY

2.1

Methodology

Firstly, the Bloom Consulting team and researchers from Universitat Pompeu Fabra, Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona and Universidad de Salamanca carried out desk research to identify the potential taxonomy of perceptions. This was based on a literature review, as well as Nation Branding, Place Branding, City Branding practices and indexes that measure country and place development, such as OECD and WEF resources.

The literature recap touches on three interrelated research and theoretic disciplines that correspond with Nation, Place and City Branding:

- Nation-building: sociological and anthropological perspectives on national discourses, policymaking, and national and international development.
- Place (city, destination, country, region, etc.) Branding: place identity, place narratives, placemaking.
- Urban development: sociological, geographical and anthropological perspectives on city and place construction, policymaking, their embeddedness within international context and global development.

The outcome of the first part of the study (Round 1 and Round 2), which resulted in the **Bloom Consulting Nation Brand Taxonomy Model ©**, showed that establishing Perception Elements for City Brands may call for adjustments to address the specifics of these places. The initial taxonomy was therefore re-evaluated and adapted in Round 3 to the context deemed relevant for regions and cities. As a result, the **Bloom Consulting City Brand Taxonomy Model ©** was produced.

The initial taxonomy served as a base for the Delphi panel — an instrument that meets the objectives of the collaborative approach to the study.

2.2

Delphi process

The aim of this digital Delphi panel was to collect experts' views on the *Perception Elements* — the elements that contribute to changing people's perceptions of countries, regions, and cities. The Delphi method is regarded as a structured group communication process that allows a group of experts to move forward on a complex problem (Linstone, H. A., Turoff, M., 1975). Briefly, every Delphi process consists of a series of questionnaires deployed in several rounds in which the experts (also referred to as participants, panellists, or respondents) complete the questionnaires. Between each round, the group responses are summarised and fed back to the participants (Hasson, F., Keeney, S., McKenna, H., 2000).

Therefore, the key aspects that characterise the Delphi process are:

I. Controlled feedback,
II. Iteration, given that the questionnaire is iterated over a few rounds by allowing respondents to modify their judgements,
III. Anonymity, since the questionnaires are filled in in private, thus avoiding peer pressure (Rowe, G., Wright, G., 2001).

These features enable involving a high number of diverse and geographically dispersed experts (Bana e Costa, C. A. et al. 2023; Landeta, J., 2006, Freitas, Â. et al., 2018) which was deemed appropriate in our context.

2.3

Participants/ Experts: Round 1 and Round 2

Given the international scope of this study, we aimed to select participants from a broad range of nationalities while also trying to maintain a balance between different regions.

Additionally, we paid special attention to ensuring that participants' expertise related to the different *Perception Elements* is diverse.

In rounds 1 and 2 of the study, which resulted in defining the *Perceptions Elements* for countries, the questions were anonymously answered by **47 experts**, all of them Nation, Destination and Place Brand managers of countries (23), regions (4) and cities (20) from all over the world.

Figure 1 illustrates the complete list of countries, regions and cities represented by the study's participants/ experts in rounds 1 and 2.

Countries
Cities

2.4

In round 3 of the study, which resulted in defining the *Perception Elements* for cities, the questions were answered anonymously by **19 experts**, all of them Destination and Place Brand managers from cities (16) and regions (2) around the world.

Participants/ Experts: Round 3

Figure 2 illustrates the complete list of regions and cities represented by the study's participants/ experts in round 3.

Cities

DELPHI PROCESS IN DETAIL

3.1

Delphi process

We conducted the Delphi questionnaire online using the Welphi platform (www.welphi.com). The questionnaire was designed to be carried out in three rounds to reach a recommended level of agreement of no less than 70%[2]. The goal of the first round was to define a list of *Perception Elements* with which to proceed to the subsequent round that aimed to define a consensual list of *Perception Elements*. The second round was the final one in defining the Perception Elements for countries and producing the **Bloom Consulting Nation Brand Taxonomy Model ©,** thus completing the first part of the study. It also provided a basis for the third round, in which the *Perception Elements* were refined and adapted to the context relevant for cities. The goal of the third round was to evaluate these *Perception Elements* for regions and cities and, consequently, create the **Bloom Consulting City Brand Taxonomy Model ©.**

3.2

Outcomes of Round 1

In the first round, we presented participants with the list of **12 *Perception Elements*** created by Bloom Consulting and its academic partners. We then asked them to comment, for example, by proposing changes to the *Perception Elements*, and to add any new items they believed were missing from the list. After analysing the information that the participants provided in the first round, the initial list was updated, leading to a revised list of ***13 Perception Elements.***

3.3

Outcomes of Round 2

This list was then used to structure the second round, in which participants had to indicate whether they agree that the *Perception Element* "may constitute general perception of a country, nation, region or city." The question was – "How much do you agree or disagree that each of the elements (*Perception Elements*) may constitute the general perception of a country, nation, region, or city? Please express your level of agreement for each Perception Element."

Participants could respond by means of a 5-level Likert scale with answers ranging from *Totally Agree* to *Totally Disagree*. Additionally, they could indicate *Unable to rate*. As in the first round, participants could also add comments whenever they felt the need to.

Here are some examples of the comments received:

> **Governance and Internal Policies:** "Applies mostly for countries, and in particular the well-known/important ones. In my opinion, the less well-known the country, the less this influences the perception." (Representative of a public institution of international relations).

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[2] Based on a review of benchmark studies that also used Delphi method.

Well-being and Healthcare: "The health service and health of people is a good addition; however, I suspect it will be difficult for individuals to be able to know and assess this... Perhaps it is more about access to healthcare and good living conditions and infrastructure, such as clean water, quality housing, power, sanitary systems rather than aspects such as mental health." (Respondent responsible for marketing and insights for a Nation Branding institution).

Product and Services: "This is key, with innovations, experience and uniqueness becoming increasingly important as a decision driver." (Representative of a public institution for tourism promotion).

Urban and/or Rural Environment: "Probably more applicable to city rather than nation, but it depends on how well known a particular institution is and its association with city vs nation, e.g., the Louvre is more strongly associated to France or Paris, or even a place like Hollywood, and its association to the USA." (Representative of a public institution for Nation Branding).

Sports: "People pursue wellbeing under the influence of City or Nation Brands, and lifestyle sports will be activated accordingly, but it does not seem to have a big impact on professional sports teams or players. Conversely, sports teams or famous athletes affect City Brand reputation." (Representative of a public institution for City Branding).

The second round allowed for the establishment of the Bloom Consulting Nation Brand Taxonomy Model ©, consisting of 13 *Perception Elements*. One of the outcomes of the second round was that, given the specifics of a city, especially when it comes to place governance, the *Perception Elements* cannot be fully applied to the city scale. Although the panel proved the initial hypothesis that certain *Perception Elements* should be adjusted to specific scales, most of the *Perception Elements* defined in this round are applicable to places of any scale, from city to country. Still, the interpretation for cities might differ, and that is why we launched a third round to this study, focused on defining what constitutes perceptions of cities.

Figure 3 illustrates the complete list of elements that impact perceptions of a country.

100%	Culture, Heritage and Art
94%	Product and Services
92%	Foreign Affairs
91%	Safety and Crime
90%	Governance and Internal Policies
86%	Natural Assets and Scenery
86%	Urban and/ or Rural Environment
86%	Economy and Business Ecosystem
80%	Society and Values
78%	Sports
75%	Well-being and Healthcare
72%	Mitigation of Global Causes
70%	Education System

(The percentages indicate the sum of *Totally Agree* and *Agree* responses.)

With 100% agreement, the most agreed-upon element is **Culture** in a broad sense. This includes art, heritage, traditions, gastronomy, history and relevant characters. It is the only element to achieve absolute assent, receiving 69% *Totally Agree* and 31% *Agree* responses.

Product and Services (94% agreement) is the second-most agreed-upon element, and is judged in terms of quality, authenticity and level of innovation. So, in this case, perception stems from how one rates a place's commercial offering.

The only other three elements that exceed 90% agreement are **Foreign Affairs** (public diplomacy, international presence, political leaders, foreign policies), **Safety and Crime** (taking into account the relevance of conflicts, security, terrorism, police brutality, jurisdiction, political stability, and digital security) and **Governance and Internal Policies** (comprising, as well the level of transparency, the quality of the legal system, political leaders or public policies).

Some elements received between 80% and 90% agreement, and these are: **Economy and Business Ecosystem** (business culture, labour market, legal system, financial services, etc.) **Urban and/or Rural Environment** (quality of public and living spaces, water availability, pollution rate, quality of public transport and services, city resilience, inclusive public spaces, etc.), **Natural Assets and Scenery** (landscapes, natural reserves, national parks, flora, fauna, aquatic ecosystem, etc.) and **Society and Values** (inclusiveness, solidarity, hospitality).
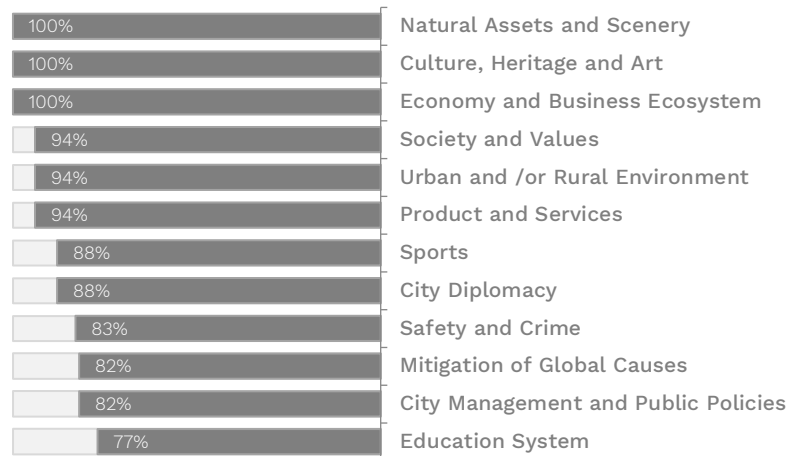
Other elements are **Sports** (78% agreement), **Well-being and Healthcare** (75%), **Mitigation of Global Causes** (72%), and **Education System** (70%).

3.3

Outcomes of Round 3

Based on the feedback received in the previous round, Bloom Consulting adapted the list of *Perception Elements* to reflect what constitutes perceptions of cities. Whilst most elements that were defined and agreed upon for countries were also deemed applicable to cities, two elements were adapted – Governance and Internal Policies (changed to City Management and Public Policies) and Foreign Affairs (changed to City Diplomacy). The revised list was then sent to the participants for subsequent evaluation, applying the same methodology of using the Likert Scale as described above regarding Round 2. As a result of this round, one *Perception Element* – Health and Well-being – did not receive the 70% agreement score and was thus eliminated. Consequently, a Bloom Consulting City Brand Taxonomy Model © was produced, consisting of 12 *Perception Elements*.

Figure 4 illustrates the complete list of elements that impact perceptions of a city.

100%	Natural Assets and Scenery
100%	Culture, Heritage and Art
100%	Economy and Business Ecosystem
94%	Society and Values
94%	Urban and /or Rural Environment
94%	Product and Services
88%	Sports
88%	City Diplomacy
83%	Safety and Crime
82%	Mitigation of Global Causes
82%	City Management and Public Policies
77%	Education System

(The percentages indicate the sum of *Totally Agree* and *Agree* responses.)

With 100% agreement, the three most agreed-upon elements are: **Natural assets and Scenery, Culture, and Economy and Business Ecosystem.**

Of these three elements, **Culture** received the highest amount of *Totally Agree* responses – 71%. This is followed by **Natural Assets and Scenery** with 65% *Totally Agree* responses, and **Economy and Business Ecosystem** scoring 53%. These three elements are suggested to have the strongest impact on people's perceptions of cities.

Three elements have an aggregated score of 94%: **Society and Values, Urban and/or Rural Environment, and Products and Services.** Of these three, **Urban and/or Rural Environment** scored the highest percentage of *Totally Agree* responses (59%), highlighting that the liveability and quality of public spaces are seen as a major factor in driving people's perceptions of cities. It was followed by **Society and Values** (41% of *Totally Agree* responses), and then **Product and Services** (35%).

Five elements scored between 80% and 90%. These are: **Sports** (88% agreement), **City Diplomacy** (88%), **Safety and Crime** (83%), **Mitigation of Global Causes** (82%) and **City Management and Public Policies** (82%).

Only one perception element – **Education System** – received less than 80% agreement (with 25% of *Totally Agree* and 53% of *Agree* responses). This element represents the number and quality of schools and universities, libraries, and the accessibility of educational institutions.

STUDY RESULTS

4.1

Takeaways and study limitations

Definition of a framework
The first objective of the "Nation and Place Branding impact on place economies" research series – to define what constitutes perceptions about countries, regions and cities – allowed establishing a framework for further research. The framework allows deconstructing an image of a nation, region, or city, measuring its distinctive elements and understanding exactly what impacts their reputation.

The second objective of measuring how positive perceptions about a place impact its economic and social performance is available in **Technical Report Nº2**, which can be downloaded here.
The *Perception Elements* themselves serve as a guide to later define the policies required to improve the general perception of a country, region, or city.

Comprehensive yet flexible tool for measurement
Although the *Perception Elements* model can be applied to various scales and cases, it is important to consider certain factors when evaluating and interpreting perceptions. As we saw from the various levels of agreement in the Delphi panel, not all *Perception Elements* have an equal influence on general perception. For example, Mitigation of Global Causes is more volatile and depends on how nations, regions and cities respond to the global events and challenges like pandemics, climate change, poverty and inequality issues.

Thus, it is crucial to measure the type of perception to understand whether a place's real efforts in the field are reaching key audiences. Moreover, certain *Perception Elements* may be of high importance to certain countries, regions, and cities due to ongoing political, social or economic factors, while others may have different priorities.

A step towards reaching industry consensus
Apart from providing a comprehensive tool for measurement, the study aims to contribute to the ongoing theoretical debates around Nation Branding, Place Branding and City Branding. The distinctive methodology developed together with academics is based on a collaborative approach that derives neither purely from expert opinions, nor academic theories, but rather creates a theory together with place stakeholders, drawing from their insights. Thus, the study and its results are validated by academia – researchers from leading universities, as well as practitioners – Country, Region, and City Branding managers from around the world.

4.2

13 Perception Elements of the Bloom Consulting Nation Brand taxonomy model ©

Here we present the final taxonomy of Perception Elements – The **Bloom Consulting Nation Brand Taxonomy Model ©** – that constitute how countries are perceived. Nation Branding professionals can use this model to measure the impact of their efforts, track how perceptions change over time, and what other factors influence these changes (for example, how certain crises influence certain perceptions).

Figure 5 illustrates the complete list of elements that impact perceptions about a nation and an approach for measuring each of them based on the 6-level scale 0 – Extremely negative 1 – Negative 2 – Moderately negative 3 – Moderately positive 4 – Positive 5 – Extremely positive.

The Bloom Consulting Nation Brand Taxonomy Model ©
2023 © Bloom Consulting - Any country is welcome to use this model.

13 Perception Elements in detail

Perception Element 1: **Governance and Internal Policies**
Transparency, Legal system, Political leaders, Public policies

Perception Element 2: **Foreign Affairs**
Public diplomacy, International presence, Political leaders, Foreign policies

Perception Element 3: **Mitigation of Global Causes**
Poverty, Inequalities, Peace, Nature conservation, Sustainable development goals etc.

Perception Element 4: **Economy and Business Ecosystem**
Business culture, Labour market, Legal system, Financial services etc.

Perception Element **5: Product and Services**
Quality, Authenticity, Innovations

Perception Element **6: Culture, Heritage & Art**
Traditions, Art scene, Gastronomy, Historic events and
personas, Tangible and intangible heritage

Perception Element **7: Sports**
Sport teams, Athletes, Celebrities, Sports culture

Perception Element **8: Urban and/or Rural Environment**
Quality of public and living spaces, Water availability,
Pollution rate, Quality of public transport and services, City
resilience, Inclusive public spaces, etc.

Perception Element **9: Natural Assets and Scenery**
Landscapes, Natural reserves, National parks, Flora, Fauna,
Aquatic ecosystem, etc.

Perception Element **10: Education System**
Accessibility of educational institutions, Public engagement in
science, Digital literacy etc.

Perception Element **11: Society and Values**
Inclusiveness, Solidarity, Hospitality

Perception Element **12: Well-being and Healthcare**
Public health infrastructure, Life expectancy, Mental health
services, Access to medical assistance

Perception Element **13: Safety and Crime**
Conflicts, Security, Terrorism, Police brutality, Jurisdiction,
Political stability, Digital security etc.

4.3

12 Perception elements of the Bloom Consulting City Brand taxonomy model ©

Here we present the final taxonomy of Perception Elements – The **Bloom Consulting City Brand Taxonomy Model ©** – that constitute how cities are perceived. City Branding professionals can use this model to measure the impact of their efforts, track how perceptions change over time, and what other factors influence these changes (for example, how certain crises influence certain perceptions).

Figure 6 illustrates the complete list of elements that impact perceptions of a city and an approach for measuring each of them based on the 6-level scale 0 – Extremely negative 1 – Negative 2 – Moderately negative 3 – Moderately positive 4 – Positive 5 – Extremely positive.

The Bloom Consulting City Brand Taxonomy Model ©
2023 © Bloom Consulting - Any region is welcome to use this model.

12 Perception Elements in detail

Perception Element **1: City Management and Public Policies**
City management, Urban and public policies, City resilience, Corruption, Level of public services

Perception Element **2: City Diplomacy**
Public and cultural diplomacy, International presence, Political leaders, Inclusion policies

Perception Element **3: Mitigation of Global Causes**
Poverty, Inequalities, Peace, Nature conservation, Sustainable development goals etc.

Perception Element 4: **Economy and Business Ecosystem**
Business culture, Labour market, Legal system, Financial services etc.

Perception Element 5: **Product and Services**
Quality of services, Economic sectors etc.

Perception Element 6: **Culture, Heritage & Art**
Traditions, Art scene, Gastronomy, Historic events and personas, Tangible and intangible heritage

Perception Element 7: **Sports**
Sport teams, Athletes, Celebrities, Sports culture

Perception Element 8: **Urban and/or Rural Environment**
Liveability, Quality of public and living spaces, Quality of public transport and services, Water availability, Pollution rate, Public spaces, Accessibility etc.

Perception Element 9: **Natural Assets and Scenery**
Skyline, Beauty of parks and natural spotlights etc.

Perception Element 10: **Education System**
Number and quality of schools and universities, Libraries, Accessibility of educational institutions

Perception Element 11: **Society and Values**
Inclusiveness, Solidarity, Hospitality

Perception Element 12: **Safety and Crime**
Crime, Terrorism, Police brutality, Security, Political stability etc.

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Thank you very much!

Research performed by:

Bloom Consulting COUNTRIES, REGIONS & CITIES

Bloom Consulting, founded in 2003, specialises in the development and evaluation of Nation Brand, City Brand, and Placemaking strategies for governments around the world. We collaborate with prime ministers, presidents, mayors, tourism bureaus, and trade and investment agencies. Bloom Consulting has extensive experience in the field of Place Branding, having worked across six continents. Additionally, Bloom Consulting is an official data partner of the World Economic Forum.

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