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URBAN ICONS AS A FOUNDATION OF CITY BRAND: THE CASE OF CITY ZAGREB

Abstract

Purpose: This paper explores urban icons (e.g., buildings, monuments, natural elements) as essential elements of a city brand, their usage in the strategic development and communication of a city brand, and in the capacity of the primary motivators for visiting a particular city. Furthermore, the paper aims to discover urban icons of one city brand (Zagreb) and its citizens' perceptions about urban icons (pre-global, natural, and contemporary).

Methodology: A qualitative research approach encompassing a three-phase study was applied. The first phase consisted of a detailed overview of the Zagreb Tourist Board web pages to identify which urban icons are used in marketing communication. In the second phase, mental maps were used to investigate associations related to the term "Zagreb urban icons." Finally, 16 in-depth interviews with Zagreb citizens were conducted to gain more insight into the most significant urban icons associated with the Zagreb city brand.

Results: The research discovered 82 urban icons used in marketing communication of the Zagreb Tourist Board. Results identified many urban icons from the pre-global period (before 1960). Among the most important, the top three were St Mark's Church, Croatian National

Theatre, and Zagreb Cathedral. As for natural urban icons, park Zrinjevac is the essential one. Contemporary urban icons are less associated with the Zagreb city brand.

Conclusion: The first academic paper that discovers urban icons of the Zagreb city brand and its citizens' perceptions proves the importance of the theoretical grounding for using urban icons in city brand management and offers useful insight for practitioners engaged in the Zagreb city branding.

Keywords: authentic city brand, urban icons, qualitative research

1. Introduction

City branding has become a way of competing between cities to attract resources, markets, opportunities, and attention (Zhang & Zhao, 2009). Cities nowadays strive to attract tourists and foreign investors to achieve economic development (Boisen et al., 2011). Their leaders think more and more about how to embrace branding techniques (Dinnie, 2011) in order to develop, establish and maintain a competitive position in attracting, besides tourists and investors, knowledgeable and skillful workforce and talents.

Although the practice of city branding exists for hundreds of years, there is still a gap between the theory and practice of city branding (Green et al., 2016). One neglected area of city branding is related to urban icons and their role in city branding development (Castillo-Villar, 2016). Urban icons are usually landmarks that became iconic symbols such as Big Ben (in London), the Eiffel Tower (in Paris), Statue of Liberty (in New York), Christ the Redeemer (in Rio de Janeiro) (Muratovski, 2012).

Even though literature points out that iconic architecture contributes to city image and possibly to its brand (Evans, 2015), there is only one study that empirically investigated and demonstrated the importance of urban icons (pre-global, contemporary, and natural) in city branding development (Monterrey, Mexico) (Castillo-Villar, 2016).

Therefore, the topic of urban icons requires additional empirical confirmation in the context of other cities (and cultures). To fill the identified gap, the paper aims to discover the role and importance of urban icons for the city brand using the selected case (city of Zagreb). More precisely, it seeks to elucidate the role of pre-global, contemporary, and natural icons and their significance for the Zagreb city brand. So, following the qualitative research method approach,

two research questions were posed. RQ1: What are the most important urban icons for the city of Zagreb brand from the perspective of residents? and RQ2: What are the reasons for accepting or rejecting urban icons among residents?

After the short introduction, the theoretical background follows and deals with city brand management, focusing on urban icons as part of a city brand. Then, the methodological approach is presented, and three phases of the qualitative research (analysis of marketing materials and websites, mental maps, and in-depth interviews) are described. The following section presents the research results (emphasising those of the second and third research phases). The paper ends with a discussion of the major findings, conclusions, and limitations.

2. Theoretical background

2.1 City brand management

In the last decades, academic interest in the area of city branding has increased (Merrilees et al., 2012; Florek et al., 2019). Although city branding has been studied in different disciplines, its origins are rooted in marketing science (Kavaratzis & Ashworth, 2010).

City branding is defined as "a process whereby the place is associated with wider desirable qualities in the perceptions held by relevant target audiences" (Kavaratzis & Ashworth, 2007, p. 16). The concept of city branding is frequently associated with city marketing; however, there are some differences (Bayrakdaroğlu, 2017).

Green et al. (2016) detected four different waves (stages) of city branding research, explaining that the current setting of city brand research is in the "progressive" wave, which started in 2010. They point out two defining philosophies and assumptions. The first one is related to the multiple stakeholders (e.g., residents, media, tourists) that co-create city brands. The second one views city brands as "inherently complex and uncontrollable," which requires a collaborative and participatory approach to city brand management (Green et al., 2016, p. 10).

Braun (2012) points out that most scientists have focused on the concept of city branding, while the implementation has been neglected. The author stresses the need to observe the city branding process as part of the administrative and political process that positively or negatively affects the city branding implementation. More precisely, he identifies two groups of factors that potentially influence city branding 1) governance factors concerning the fit of city branding

with the city's broader policy framework, and 2) factors that are intrinsically linked to the concept and application of branding itself.

Furthermore, city branding has two crucial aims, "to form a unique selling proposition that will secure visibility to the outside and reinforce local identity to the inside" (Kavaratzis & Ashworth, 2010, p. 175). In that vein, Green et al. (2018) have pointed that city brand needs to be seen more broadly because it consists of socially constructed elements that emit symbolic messages, such as urban reminders, the arts and residential behavior. The authors explain how tangible urban reminders (such as architecture) communicate symbolic statements about the city.

Ooi (2011, p. 60) believes that aim of a city brand is "to shape people's perception, and that brand messages must be attractive and authentic". Thus, in communicating the desired image of the city, cities use urban icons as the key visual elements of the promotional message. For example, Dubrovnik and its Tourist Board use Walls of Dubrovnik (icon) in their marketing communication efforts in the frame of the national campaign Croatia Full of Life (see Picture 1) to attract visitors.

Picture 1. Advertisement for Dubrovnik featuring "Walls of Dubrovnik" icon



Source: TimeOut (2018). *Five reasons to visit Dubrovnik in autumn*. <https://www.timeout.com/croatia/things-to-do/five-reasons-to-visit-dubrovnik-in-autumn>

2.2 Urban icons as a part of a city brand

To be attractive to different stakeholders, primarily to local residents and tourists, cities like Barcelona, London, Hong Kong and Singapur are emphasising the quality of life and creation of the touristic infrastructure through urban development (Bouchon, 2014). As the result of the process of urban development, new urban icons have emerged. Some of the new urban icons are considered as positive examples that contribute to the quality of life of local residents and

tourist's well-being, like Frank O'Ghery Dancing House (in Prague), while some are considered as a negative example such as 30 St Mary Axe aka The Gherkin (previously known as Swiss Re Office) in London (Riza et al., 2012). According to Sklair (2017, p. 46), except for well known urban icons with worldwide recognition, there are also local urban icons, such as Erasmus Bridge in Rotterdam. These local urban icons “are iconic for their localities, for the people who see them and use them on a regular basis.”

Urban icons are "elements of the urban landscape (buildings, monuments or natural elements) that serve as visual symbols (single and repetitive) capable of transforming the complexity of urban experiences into knowledge and meaning through representational practices" (Ethington & Schwartz, 2006, as cited in Castillo-Villar, 2016, p. 255). They are important elements of the city branding development process.

Urban icons have mainly been studied in the area of architecture and urban studies (Ethington & Schwartz, 2006; Kaika, 2010; Rehan, 2014), and less in place management and marketing (Springer, 2020). A somewhat similar but different concept is cultural icons, that focuses on iconic cultural infrastructure in developing cities (Kong, 2007). In comparison, urban icons are broader concept because they also encompass natural elements (Warnaby & Medway, 2010).

Urban icons are encompassing different types of icons. As suggested by Castillo-Villar (2016) urban icons can be classified into three types; 1) natural icons (mountains, rivers, lakes), 2) pre-global icons (man-made and built before 1960) and 3) contemporary urban icons (man-made and built after 1960). Their significance and potential for the city brand development may differ, and this is why they should be thoroughly investigated and implemented in city brand building and management. In researching urban icons of Monterrey as the industrial and economic center of Mexico, the same author has found that pre-global icons were more important for the city brand than the contemporary ones.

Urban icons, both pre-global and contemporary that can generate positive experiences, such as easy access in terms of physical and economic access, are more readily accepted by residents. For example, contemporary urban icon Opera House in Oslo (Norway) has been recognised as a good example of urban design and attractive marketing symbol of Oslo because the attention has been given to the public access and a local orientation and not only on the aesthetics i.e., its "look at me effect" (Smith & von Krogh Strand, 2011).

The marketing literature on the topic of urban icons is very scarce. Besides the already mentioned research done by Castillo-Villar (2016), which has focused on the role of different types of urban icons in Monterrey's city brand (Mexico), as perceived by the residents, there are, to the best of the authors' knowledge, no other studies. In order to further investigate this actual topic and deepen the understanding of the importance of three types of urban icons for a city brand, we extend the research into a new context - of Zagreb as a capital city of Croatia (the EU member state), whose attraction for different stakeholders (residents, tourists, companies, investors, etc.) in the recent years is rising.

Based on the presented theory and identified research gap, we have defined two research questions:

RQ1: What are the most important urban icons for the city of Zagreb brand from the perspective of residents?

RQ2: What are the reasons for accepting or rejecting urban icons among residents?

The research questions are the common starting point for conducting qualitative research (Agee, 2009; Fischer & Otnes, 2006).

3. Methodology

A qualitative research approach encompassing a three-phase study was applied following the same approach as Castillo-Villar (2016). The research was conducted on the case of Zagreb as the capital of Croatia in 2019. The aim was to cover multiple angles and discover the uniqueness of the selected case (Lune & Berg, 2017). The first phase consisted of a detailed overview of the Zagreb Tourist Board web pages, promotional materials (such as brochures, postcards, maps) and magazines about Zagreb and upcoming events to identify which urban icons are used in marketing communication. For example, Zagreb has been promoted as the city with many urban icons, as it can be observed in Picture 2 depicting some of the most popular Zagreb icons.

Picture 2. Zagreb marketing campaign "Close to the city, close to the heart" with famous urban icons



Info Zagreb (2020). Around Zagreb - Close to the city, close to the hearth (2020).

<https://www.infozagreb.hr/news/around-zagreb-close-to-the-city-close-to-hearth&lang=en&ref=150>

In the second phase, mental maps were used to investigate associations related to the term "Zagreb urban icons". Two researchers participated in the second phase, i.e. collecting mental maps. This method is useful when studying “the way people produce and experience space, forms of spatial intelligence, and dynamics of human–environment relations” (Giesecking, 2013, p. 712). The mental maps were collected on a convenience sample of 38 undergraduate students of the Faculty of Economics & Business, University of Zagreb. Students filled out the mental maps for approximately 10 minutes. The central term in mental maps was "Zagreb urban icons". The sample consisted of 22 female and 16 male respondents. On average, the respondents were 20 years old. The majority of the respondents were born in Zagreb (22 out of 38) and currently live in Zagreb (33 out of 38) or the Zagreb area (Velika Gorica, Gornja Bistra, Samobor, Dugo Selo and Zaprešić).

Finally, 16 in-depth interviews with Zagreb citizens were conducted to gain more insight into the most significant urban icons associated with the Zagreb city brand. The sample was convenience sample of 16 respondents, i.e., 9 females and 7 males who were born in Zagreb or are working there. The aim was to have respondents of different ages, so the youngest respondent was 23 years old, while the oldest was 80 years old. Respondents' demographic characteristics are shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Respondents' demographic characteristics

Respondent code	Age	Gender	Place of birth	How long they live or work in Zagreb
R01	64	F	Zagreb	64 years
R02	71	M	Kumrovec	50 years
R03	40	F	Zagreb	30 years
R04	50	F	Rijeka	23 years
R05	36	M	Zagreb	36 years
R06	47	M	Zagreb	29 years
R07	51	F	Zagreb	35 years
R08	34	M	Zagreb	34 years
R09	23	M	Zagreb	23 years
R10	49	M	Karlovac	12 years
R11	52	F	Zagreb	35 years
R12	55	F	Zagreb	55 years
R13	29	F	Zagreb	29 years
R14	29	M	Zagreb	25 years
R15	43	F	Velika Gorica	25 years (works in Zagreb)
R16	80	F	Košnički Hum	65

Note: Codes were used to assure respondents anonymity

Source: Research

One researcher conducted all the interviews using interview guideline. The interviews lasted up to 30 minutes, and respondents were interviewed face-to-face at their home. All interviews were recorded and transcribed by hand for further analysis.

4. Results

In the first phase of the research, relatively large number of urban icons were collected; precisely, eighty-two urban icons were identified. After that, in the second phase of the research, thirty-eight urban icons were identified using mental maps. All identified urban icons were also on the list of urban icons identified in the first stage of the research. Additionally, data showed that more urban icons were used in the marketing communication of the Zagreb city brand than respondents could actually perceive. This points to the need to focus on urban icons with greater significance for the city branding in the respective marketing communications campaigns.

Therefore, discovering the most important urban icons was crucial. The complete list of urban icons collected in the second phase of the research is presented in Table 2.

The frequently mentioned urban icons were St Mark's Church and Square, Croatian National Theatre, Zagreb Cathedral and Ban Jelačić Square. In this phase of the research, most associations were related to pre-global urban icons, although natural and contemporary urban icons were also mentioned by respondents.

Table 2. The list of urban icons identified in the second phase of the research

	Urban icon (natural, preglobal or contemporary)	Number of associations
1.	St Mark's Church and Square (Crkva Svetog Marka i trg Svetog Marka)	18
2.	Croatian National Theatre (Hrvatsko narodno kazalište)	18
3.	Ban Jelačić Square (Trg bana Josipa Jelačića)	18
4.	Zagreb Cathedral (Zagrebačka katedrala)	18
5.	Stone Gate (Kamenita vrata)	11
6.	The Grič cannon (Grički top)	11
7.	Maksimir Park (Park Maksimir)	8
8.	Sljeme mountain peak (Sljeme)	8
9.	The Bundek lake (Bundek)	8
10.	Museum of Contemporary Art Zagreb (Muzej suvremene umjetnosti)	7
11.	Funicular (Uspinjača)	7
12.	Vatroslav Lisinski Concert Hall (Koncertna dvorana Vatroslav Lisinski)	6
13.	Zagreb fountains (Zagrebačke fontane)	6
14.	Maksimir Stadium/Stadion Maksimir (5x)	5
15.	Medvednica (5X)	5
16.	ZOO (5X)	5
17.	Mimara museum/Muzej Mimara (4x)	4
18.	Jarun lake (4x)	4
19.	Dolac market/Dolac (4x)	4

20.	Nikola Tesla Technical Museum/Tehnički muzej Nikola Tesla (3X)	3
21.	Mirogoj Cemetery/Mirogoj (3X)	3
22.	The Lotrščak Tower/Kula Lotrščak (3x)	3
23.	Sava river/rijeka Sava (3x)	3
24.	Zagreb tunnels/Zagrebački tuneli (3x)	3
25.	Zagreb Fair/Zagrebački Velesajam (2X)	2
26.	Tram ZET/Tramvaj ZET (2x)	2
27.	Strossmayer promenade/Strossmayerovo šetalište (2x)	2
28.	Museum of Broken Relationship (2x)	2
29.	Botanical Garden/Botanički vrt (2x)	2
30.	Ribnjak park/Park Ribnjak	1
31.	Kaptol	1
32.	Ilica street	1
33.	Sunčev sustav	1
34.	Matoš	1
35.	The Lenuci Horseshoe/ Lenuncijska potkova	1
36.	Zagreb Academy of Music	1
37.	Hendrix	1
38.	HAZU Glyptothèque/HAZU Glipoteka	1
39.	Manduševac Fountain/Manduševac	1

Note: The Croatian name of the urban icon is written in brackets

Source: Research

When comparing the list of obtained urban icons in the second stage (Table 2) with the content of the Zagreb promotional campaign “Close to the city, close to the heart” (Picture 2), it can be observed that the most mentioned urban icons were used in the campaign, i.e., St Mark's Church and Square, Croatian National Theatre and Ban Jelačić Square among others. This finding indicates the appropriate usage of urban icons for the Zagreb city brand promotion.

The most mentioned urban icons from the second phase were selected for the third phase of the research, i.e., interviews. The selected urban icons were those mentioned at least three times in the second phase of the study, which resulted in a list of twenty-four urban icons.

In the third phase of the research, respondents had to pick the five most important urban icons among twenty-four urban icons. All respondents considered this task very challenging because it was hard to choose only five urban icons, as most of them stated.

After choosing the top five urban icons, respondents had to classify chosen urban icons according to the importance for the city of Zagreb, where the first spot was reserved for the most significant urban icon and the fifth for the least potent urban icon. The complete list is available in Table 3.

Table 3. Results of the classification of the urban icons

Type of urban icon	Urban icon	First choice	Second choice	Third choice	Fourth choice	Fifth choice	Total	
Natural icons	Sljeme	1	0	0	0	0	1	
	Maksimir park	0	1	0	0	0	1	
	Zrinjevac park	1	0	2	1	4	8	
	ZOO	0	1	0	0	0	1	
	„Tomislavac“	0	1	0	1	0	2	
	Jarun lake	0	1	0	0	0	1	
	Bundek lake	0	0	0	0	1	1	
	Pre-global icons	The Grič cannon	0	1	0	0	1	2
Lotrščak Tower		1	0	0	0	0	1	
Zagreb tunnels		0	0	0	0	0	0	
Medvednica		1	0	0	0	0	1	
Mimara Museum		0	0	0	0	1	1	
Mirogoj cemetery		0	1	0	1	2	4	
Klovičevi dvori		0	0	0	0	0	0	
Dolac Market		0	0	2	2	0	4	
Funicular		0	0	1	3	4	8	
Zagreb Cathedral		2	2	4	1	0	9	
Stone Gate		0	3	0	2	0	5	
Croatian National Theatre		3	2	4	2	0	11	
St Mark's Church		6	3	1	2	1	13	
Ban Jelačić Square		1	0	2	1	1	5	
Contemporary urban icons		Vatroslav Lisinski Concert Hall	0	0	0	0	1	1
		Zagreb Fountains	0	0	0	0	0	0
	Museum of Contemporary Art	0	0	0	0	0	0	
	Total	16	16	16	16	16	80	

Source: Research

The classification of urban icons and their ranking show that the essential urban icons are pre-global, i.e., St Mark's Church, Croatian National Theatre and Zagreb Cathedral. According to respondents, natural icons are more important (such as park Zrinjevac) for the city of Zagreb than contemporary icons.

While explaining their choices and rankings regarding St Mark's Church, respondents described its significance because of the factual characteristics, such as a) uniqueness (particular roof), b) historical relevance and c) location. Also, it is important to stress that respondents were expressing their personal experiences and positive emotions about this icon, some mentioning how it reminds them of "the old times", i.e., old Zagreb. *"Its unique roof appeals to everyone and associates me on the old Zagreb and the foundation of the city"*. (R07) *"I am strongly connected to that church, and for me, it has a solid personal value, for historical reasons too"*. (R06)

The second most important icon is the Croatian National Theatre because of its architecture, location, and important events. Many respondents stressed the beautiful architecture explaining, *"I have a feeling that Zagreb can really compete with other big cities having that kind of building"* (R06), and *"it is impressive"* (R07) and *"beautiful building"* (R11). It is *"the most beautiful theatre in the world"* (R14). Similarly, respondents explain how the reasons for choosing this particular icon are based on their personal feelings and experiences during a visit to the theatre. Some explain how *"Croatian National Theatre is a temple of culture"* (R01, R06). and when visiting the theatre, *"you always feel admiration..."* and *"when you see it, you have warm feelings around your heart..."* (R03). Also, one describes that *"she feels content and at ease"* there (R15).

The third urban icon is the Zagreb Cathedral. The respondents believed it is significant because of its religious meaning for all Christians, their religious orientation, but less because of its architecture. Some explain, *"it is a special feeling being closed in the Cathedral...It offers peace, relaxation and joy of contemplation"* (R04), and *"I feel happy and content"* (R05). Also, *"It is a unique part of the city for which Zagreb is known for"* (R08).

The fourth most essential icons were Zrinjevac park (natural icon) and Funicular (pre-global icon). Describing the significance of Zrinjevac, respondents explained that it is unique because of its appearance and many popular events. Almost all respondents pointed out that Zrinjevac

is special because people are enjoying there and sitting on the grass, which reminds them of European cities. Some explain, "*It is a green heart of the town, nearby city square*" (R04), and "*a beautiful masterpiece made by man and nature*" (R06). Few respondents point out the park enables them relaxation (R07, R12) and peace (R06, R11).

Regarding Funicular, respondents stress its distinctive characteristics. The original appearance reminds them of the "old Zagreb", one of the world's kind, explaining "*Funicular is the part of the old Zagreb, like its trademark*" (R01). "*Our Funicular is special because it is so retro, so it is cool. It was not modernised, and still is as it was before*" (R13).

The research results have shown that contemporary urban icons identified in the second phase of the research were not selected as the urban icons representing Zagreb the best. Some respondents explained how pre-global icons they chose had more historical significance for Zagreb city because they all have some story; they are more memorable and special than contemporary urban icons. One respondent explains, "*I cannot say they are not important. The new buildings such as Concert Hall, Music Academy, National and University Library are modern buildings, and they are ok. But they don't associate me on Zagreb, as the old buildings do*" (R07). "*It is more romantic and beautiful when you associate the city with the old buildings that have history and have a story...*" (R08).

Furthermore, when respondents were asked about the significance of the urban icons for a city image, they all agreed that it is of utmost importance because it is a way to attract tourists. They explained, "*without them, there is no city recognition. Without them, our city would be as any other place*" (R01). "*They are part of the city identity, that makes it different from other cities*" (R03). Also, "*they are so important because whenever we travel, we want to see its icons*" (R08). Two respondents pointed out that events organised around/on these icons are also crucial (R05, R13).

Also, respondents were asked about icons with a potentially harmful image for the city of Zagreb. Respondents were divided between those who believe there are some icons with a negative image and those who think there was none. Many of them mentioned the unfinished University hospital and Fountains, other abandoned buildings (with graffiti), or buildings with old and ruined facades. One respondent pointed out the lack of authentic places such as old cinemas and restaurants (R03).

At the end of the interview, respondents expressed their opinions on Zagreb's development as a touristic city. They concluded that Zagreb is not a city for mass tourism because it can lose its appeal and charm. One respondent explains, "*There are times when it is so crowded with thousands of tourists... the city is too small for mass tourism, and there is no regulation*" (R06). However, respondents believe that Zagreb has attracted more tourists in the last two decades because it has offered more events. They see it as a positive trend that enables higher quality of life for residents too.

5. Discussion and conclusion

The research discovered that many urban icons were used in the official marketing communication of the Zagreb city brand. However, the analysis of residents' perceptions shows that some of those urban icons were not associated with the Zagreb city brand. More precisely, none of the participants in the second stage of the research associated Zagreb with forty-two urban icons used, although more than eighty-two urban icons were used in marketing communication. So, it can be concluded (with caution) that identified urban icons should be used more as the visual element in marketing communication of the city brand of Zagreb to reflect the city brand's distinctive characteristics better.

Similar to the previous and only study on the topic of urban icons in creating city brand (Castillo-Villar, 2016), this research demonstrated that when choosing between pre-global and contemporary icons, residents decided that pre-global icons are more essential for city brand and its appeal. More precisely, this is the first research that reveals that five urban icons are the most important for the Zagreb city brand. They comprise four pre-global icons - St Mark's Church, Croatian National Theatre, Zagreb Cathedral, and Funicular and one natural icon - Zrinjevac park. Almost all these icons stimulate nostalgic feelings because they remind residents of "old Zagreb" when Zagreb was the less complicated, straightforward and authentic city with many local businesses. These findings build on Ooi (in Dinnie, 2011), who believes that city brand messages need be authentic. In using authentic urban icons in marketing communication of city brand, pre-global icons should communicate authentic places, buildings, monuments and attractions.

In residents' opinions, the essential urban icons provide easy access to both residents and tourists; they have special and unique characteristics (architecture, location), but also provide

places for experiencing cultural or religious uplift that trigger different feelings, such as feelings of ease, peace, and admiration. These findings corroborate some of the previous research findings, where it was discovered that accessibility represents a crucial aspect for accepting urban icons as places that represent a city (Castillo-Villar, 2016). So, urban icons should enable the inclusion of different people, residents and tourists.

When planning new contemporary icons, city leaders should think about how these new urban icons will provide experiences and be easily accessible to everyone. This finding goes along with the proposition made by Smith and von Krogh Strand (2011) that new urban icons should enable public access and be oriented to the local community. In the case of Zagreb, contemporary icons are less important for the city brand, because they lack historical value and have less story telling features in comparison to pre-global ones.

Besides results directly connected to urban icons, this research, similar to the one conducted by Bouchon (2014), reveals how residents believe that quality of life has increased in recent years, which is a goal of many urban touristic cities. It was partially because Zagreb has become a popular tourist destination and that there were new investments in touristic infrastructure and urban development.

It can be concluded that, although urban icons were up to the recent time mainly studied in other fields outside of marketing (such as architecture and urban planning), the topic is closely connected to marketing, i.e., city branding and city brand management. Therefore, further research in this area is very much needed.

6. Research limitations and future directions

This paper has several limitations that are related to the characteristics of samples used in the qualitative research (the second and the third research phases). For collecting associations in a frame of mental maps, a convenience sample of 38 undergraduate students (of similar age) was used. Furthermore, only 16 respondents of different age and gender participated in the interviews, and they all had a strong emotional attachment to Zagreb. The length (short time) of the interview represents an additional limitation, too.

Despite these limitations, the research results offer additional insight into the importance of different types of urban icons and their advantages for city brand management and put forth the

necessity for further academic studies in the area. The findings have great practical value for marketing managers involved in Zagreb Tourist Board and activities dedicated to the Zagreb city brand management.

Follow-up and future studies may be directed towards discovering tourists' and marketing and tourist professionals' perceptions of Zagreb's most critical urban icons.

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