



# City, Identity, and Branding: Changes in Quito's Brand Amid the Government Transitions of 2021 and 2023.

**Ciudad, identidad y *branding*: el cambio en la marca de Quito frente a las transiciones de gobierno de los años 2021 y 2023**

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## Abstract

This study aims to analyze the transformations of Quito's institutional brands between 2021 and 2023 and to determine how changes in municipal administration influenced these changes, particularly as they intersect with the city brand's identity and positioning. The visual analysis focuses on a documentary review of the visual and strategic content of the brand manuals. Using a qualitative approach, semi-structured interviews were conducted with stakeholders involved in brand management. The interpretive comparative analysis determined that the 2021 brand was used to attract tourism and connect with citizens, featuring moderate visual strength. Its management was affected by abrupt changes in the municipal administration. The 2023 brand connected emotionally with the citizens of Quito more effectively than the previous one, seeking to foster a sense of belonging and pride in the city. Therefore, a significant change in the management of the visual brand is evident, as it visually integrates the city's communicational contexts, cultural memory, and social fabric.

**Keywords:** City brand, urban visual identity, brand management, municipal communication, cultural heritage, Quito

## Resumen

El estudio tiene como objetivo analizar las transformaciones de las marcas institucionales de Quito en los años 2021 y 2023, y determinar cómo los cambios de administración municipal influyeron en su alteración, en tanto se confunden con la identidad y el posicionamiento de la marca ciudad. El análisis visual se centra en la revisión documental del contenido visual y estratégico de los manuales de marca. Desde un enfoque cualitativo, se realizaron entrevistas semiestructuradas a actores vinculados con la gestión de marca. El análisis comparativo interpretativo determinó que la marca del año 2021 se usó para atraer turismo y conectar con la ciudadanía con una solidez visual moderada. Su gestión se vio afectada por los cambios abruptos en la administración de gobierno. La marca del año 2023 conectó emocionalmente con los ciudadanos quiteños con mayor efectividad que la anterior, buscando un sentido de pertenencia y orgullo por la ciudad. Por tanto, se visualiza un cambio significativo en la gestión de la marca visual, al integrar visualmente contextos comunicacionales, memoria cultural y social de la ciudad.

**Palabras clave:** Marca ciudad, identidad visual urbana, gestión de marca, comunicación municipal, patrimonio cultural, Quito

## ◆ Introduction

The city of Quito was founded in 1534 on the ruins of an ancient Inca settlement at the foot of the Pichincha volcano. In 1978, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) declared Quito a World Heritage Site, highlighting that its historic center is one of the best-preserved in Latin America. Its churches, colonial squares, and artistic and cultural richness create a space where the past and modernity coexist (Ministry of Culture and Heritage, 2025; UNESCO, 1978).

In relation to the management of territorial identity, the concepts of city branding and institutional branding (by the city government) refer to the communication and visual strategies through which a city or its government projects its values, history, culture, and economic potential to citizens and external audiences, both national and international. In this sense, city branding has established itself as an interdisciplinary field that integrates communication, territorial marketing, urban studies, and public management, enabling cities to position themselves in a competitive global context (Kasapi and Cela, 2017; Lucarelli and Berg, 2011). It is important to distinguish between city branding, which represents long-term territorial identity, and institutional branding, linked to a specific municipal administration. Confusion between the two has led to frequent changes in Quito's visual identity.

From this perspective, the city brand is not limited solely to tourism promotion but constitutes a strategic tool for strengthening collective identity, social cohesion, and territorial competitiveness (Kasapi and Cela, 2017; Kavartzis and Hatch, 2013; Lucarelli and Berg, 2011). As Simon Anholt (2006) points out, cities build their competitive identity based on cultural, symbolic, and economic elements that influence their international positioning. Similarly, Mihalis Kavartzis (2005) argues that city branding involves the strategic construction of urban identity through multiple channels of communication and symbolic representation. In this vein, urban marketing is understood as a strategic planning tool that allows the city to be projected to different audiences and global contexts (Ashworth and Voogd, 1990).

Since 2000, the mayors of Quito have developed various visual brands with the aim of positioning the city and strengthening its tourism and cultural profile. The first of these initiatives laid the groundwork for the city's promotion and tourism investment (Zurita and Llugsha, 2023). However, each change in administration has involved the incorporation of new visual and communication strategies, leading to a constant renewal of the city's graphic identity. According to the newspaper *La Hora* (2025), this frequent replacement of brands has hindered the consolidation of a stable and internationally recognizable identity.

In an interview published by *El Comercio* (2014), Rodrigo Jordán notes that during a municipal administration, approximately USD 15 million can be invested in the creation and management of a new city brand, including promotional activities and visual elements installed in public spaces. This demonstrates that, in many cases, branding strategies aim to strengthen the public's recall of the political authority initiating a new administration (*El Comercio*, 2014).

In this context, the municipal administrations of 2021 and 2023 developed new visual identities for Quito without fully considering how these changes affect the continuity and recognition of the city brand on the international stage. In particular, these redesigns were linked to changes in leadership and contexts of public distrust stemming from political crises and allegations of corruption in municipal governance.

According to Toni Puig (2008), an expert in city branding, before embarking on a redesign, it is essential to understand the city's existing image and its real positioning possibilities. This requires a comprehensive assessment of strengths and weaknesses to ensure a redesign that benefits citizens and increases the likelihood of national and international recognition. As Puig (2008, p. 115) notes: "The city must define its vision, mission, brand value, strategic pillars, and communication (...). From there, the team must identify the brand value that serves as the soul of the redesign: its 'what' and its 'why.'"

According to Puig (2008), trust is key to sustaining and enhancing the city brand: it facilitates collaboration among stakeholders and ensures that the branding remains competitive and appealing, making it possible to respond to citizens' feedback and mitigate risks that could affect the city's reputation.

In this context of changing administrations and scenarios of mistrust, the research problem focuses on analyzing the transformations the Quito city brand underwent during this period and how these influence Quito's positioning and identity. Therefore, the overall objective of this research is to analyze the transformation of Quito's city brand between 2021 and 2023, identifying the visual, symbolic, and strategic changes associated with municipal administrative transitions. To this end, the study proposes to identify the fundamental aspects represented in each

brand, analyze the branding strategies employed, and offer a comparative discussion of the transformation of the visual brands managed by the Quito mayor’s office during the periods analyzed.

A review of the institutional brands used by the Municipality of the Metropolitan District of Quito reveals changes in visual identity associated with different periods of municipal administration. These variations reflect how city branding strategies tend to respond to the political and communication agendas specific to each administration. In this regard, the research focuses on interpreting the graphic, communicational, and symbolic development of the main brands associated with the city of Quito in the years 2021 and 2023 (see Table 1).

**Table 1**  
*Institutional visual brands used by the Mayor’s Office of the Metropolitan District of Quito during the 2021 and 2023 periods.*

Year of use	Visual Brand	Mayotal term
2021		2019-2021
2021		2019-2021
2023		2023-2027

*Note:* Institutional branding used in communication and urban promotion campaigns by the Municipality of the Metropolitan District of Quito, Department of Communication (2020, 2023).

**Methodology** This study adopts a qualitative approach of a descriptive and comparative nature, aimed at analyzing both the visual elements present in Quito’s city brands and the strategic and managerial aspects employed in their creation, implementation, and positioning. This approach allows for the interpretation of the visual, cultural, and communicational discourses that shape the identity of urban brands.

The research design is based on a comparative case study, focusing on the visual identities developed by the Quito mayor’s office in 2021 and 2023. These periods were selected because they correspond to times of administrative transition and the reconfiguration of the city’s communication strategies.

**Data Collection Techniques** Two main techniques were used to collect information.

**Literature Review:** Official documents related to the city’s visual identity were analyzed, particularly institutional brand manuals published to identify key elements of each brand, such as typography, color schemes, composition, symbols, and strategic communication guidelines. The literature review provided insight into the context in which each visual identity was created and the communicational intentions that guided its development.

**Semi-structured interviews:** Semi-structured interviews were conducted with stakeholders involved in brand management to understand the strategic decisions behind each visual proposal, as well as the challenges and opportunities associated with its implementation. The interview guide was structured around five analytical categories (see Table 2).

**Table 2**  
*Interview guide on city branding, positioning, and brand management*

Category	Variable 1	Variable 2	Variable 3
<i>Brand identity.</i>	How would you describe Quito’s current brand identity?	What challenges were faced during brand management, and how were they overcome?	What attributes or values do you believe make Quito’s brand unique compared to other cities?
<i>Target Audience and Focus.</i>	What is the main focus of each brand (tourism, investment, quality of life, etc.)?	Which cities do you consider to be Quito’s direct competitors?	How is the success of the brand’s positioning currently measured?

<i>Positioning and competition.</i>	How effective has the brand been in attracting tourism, investment, and international events?	How has the brand adapted to new technologies and digital platforms?	
<i>Communication channels</i>	What communication channels do city governments use to promote themselves, and which is the most successful?	¿What international experiences have served as references for brand management?	
<i>Management, adaptation, and strategies.</i>	How does the political and administrative context influence the brand's stability and continuity?		
<i>Integration with entities and services.</i>	How does the brand integrate with public entities and services to enhance the city experience?		

*Note:* The table contains questions relevant to the analysis of brand identity and the effectiveness of the proposals.

**◆ Data Analysis** The analysis was conducted on two complementary levels:

Individual case analysis: First, a detailed analysis of each visual brand was performed using a matrix based on six categories: composition, typography, color, representation and symbolism, brand management, and positioning (see Table 3).

**Table 3**  
*Criteria for analysis*

Category	Elements of Analysis
<b>Typography</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ Typeface and weight</li> <li>◆ Legibility and adaptability</li> <li>◆ Design reference</li> <li>◆ Optimization for digital environments</li> </ul>

<p><b>Color</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❖ Relationship to the symbols of the city's founding</li> <li>❖ Visibility</li> <li>❖ Solid or gradient</li> <li>❖ Emotional connection</li> </ul>
<p><b>Composition</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❖ Naturalness</li> <li>❖ Proportion between horizontal and vertical dimensions</li> <li>❖ Visual hierarchy</li> <li>❖ Intrinsic value</li> </ul>
<p><b>Representation and symbolism</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❖ Heraldry</li> <li>❖ Symbolic Icons</li> <li>❖ Ancient or Modern Representation</li> <li>❖ Emotional Connection</li> </ul>
<p><b>Brand management</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❖ Strategic plan</li> <li>❖ Citizen engagement</li> <li>❖ Adaptations to political changes</li> </ul>
<p><b>Positioning</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❖ Desired positioning</li> <li>❖ Perception</li> <li>❖ Recognition</li> </ul>



*Note: Prepared by the authors.*

These categories made it possible to evaluate both the formal components of the design and the strategic aspects associated with each brand's identity.

**Comparative Analysis**

Subsequently, a comparative analysis was conducted between the brands from 2021 and 2023, using the same categorical structure. This procedure allowed us to observe similarities and differences in the visual elements, symbolic narrative, and positioning strategies used in each case. The comparative analysis helped us understand how administrative changes and political contexts influenced the transformation of the city’s visual identity and the communication strategies employed by the municipal administration (see Table 4).

Table 4  
Comparative analysis of cases

	 Main Brand 2021	 Main Brand 2023
<b>Typography</b>	Roboto, legible, integration with Mitad del Mundo	Gotham, Montserrat, and Amithen; hierarchy, modernity, and emotional connection
<b>Color</b>	Blue and red gradients, issues at small scales	Flat colors of the flag, greater visibility and consistency
<b>Composition</b>	Typography and integrated icon, simple and recognizable	Coat of arms and iconic elements: fauna, flora, culture, and religion
<b>Representation and symbolism</b>	Mitad del Mundo as the central icon	Simplified coat of arms + cultural, historical, and natural symbols
<b>Brand management</b>	Post-pandemic, tourism focus, administrative transition	Comprehensive strategy, cultural and natural identity, connection with citizens
<b>Positioning</b>	Colonial architecture, tourism	Colonial architecture + fauna, flora, and culture; comprehensive narrative

Note: Prepared by the authors.

## ◆ Results and Discussion

The results section presents how brands visually implement the strategies employed and the ways in which they communicate their identity. Consequently, it examines the visual components of branding—such as composition, typography, and the use of color—as well as their representation and symbolism, which are key dimensions of brand creation, management, and positioning.

The following partial conclusions focus on identifying distinctive characteristics that shape the projection of Quito's image in the analyzed brands. This systematization shows how the brands seek to adapt and connect with citizens and tourists


### ***Quito's 2021 Visual Brand: Quito Great Again***

The findings suggest that the visual brand used by the city of Quito in 2021 is significant due to the challenges that arose in the wake of the pandemic. In this case, this was reflected in adaptations aimed at strengthening local tourism. As part of the analysis, the key components are broken down to understand its construction and management using the following parameters: logo composition and symbolism, typography used across various media, and color scheme. The challenges and citizens' recognition of the brand are also examined.

Furthermore, the study delves into the connection this brand seeks to project from a perspective of cultural and symbolic integration to foster a sense of identification among citizens. This is evaluated through the lens of brand management and the post-pandemic strategic plan, highlighting the importance of the historic center and the Middle of the World. Finally, the positioning aimed at promoting and strengthening trust and security among citizens is considered.

For further details, see Table 5.

**Table 5**  
*Analysis of the main visual brand of the city of Quito in 2021*

	Partial conclusions		
Brand 2021	Composition	Tipography	Color
	<p>The core of the brand is an illustrated logo that semantically and symbolically references the iconic Landmark of the Middle of the World; the letter “i” is transformed to represent this iconic tourist attraction. Additionally, the logo’s asymmetrical yet balanced composition stands out, lending it dynamism and visual interest.</p> <p>The lower right corner of the visual brand features a slogan.</p>	<p>The Quito city brand (2021) used a sans-serif typeface called Roboto, which was created by Google under the leadership of Christian Robertson (Rosado D’Arcy, 2021). This typeface was designed primarily for digital media, as it is a clear and legible font; however, it is also used in print media. Its design makes it easy to read, even at small sizes, and it includes variations that allow designers to create visual elements thanks to its modern look, which easily adapts to social media.</p> <p>Since its readability is optimized for screens, it facilitates communication in digital environments such as social media, apps, signage, and websites. On the other hand, it also adapts seamlessly to print media.</p>	<p>Quito uses the traditional colors of the flag (blue and red), which have been in use since 1944 and foster a sense of belonging among its citizens; however, the use of gradients in its logo makes recognition and clarity difficult in certain situations, since color is fundamental to a brand’s identity and is how the world perceives it—that is, the brand uses a color or combination of colors so that the public can remember it (Morón, 2023). In turn, according to the perspective of Dabner et al. (2022), color management serves as a central element of design, making it a key factor in establishing visual hierarchies and effectively guiding the eye.</p>

	<b>Representation and symbolism</b>	<b>Brand management</b>	<b>Positioning</b>
	<p>In any society, whether ancient or modern, there are fundamental and widely accepted norms that govern behavior; this is what is referred to as culture (Capriotti, 2009). In this regard, Quito highlights various aspects, such as its traditions, culture, and iconic buildings, which not only enrich and emotionally connect with citizens but also foster a sense of identity among Quito residents, making them feel recognized by the world. However, civic values and the essence they evoke must be grounded in principles that promote culture.</p>	<p>The analysis is complex, as there was a transitional period that significantly impacted its strategic plan. In 2021, Quito was focused on post-pandemic tourism recovery, which clearly influenced how the brand was managed; its strategic plan reaffirmed the importance of the historic center and the Equator Monument, aiming to position the city as vibrant, dynamic, and culturally rich. This aligns with Sterman's (2012) perspective, who asserts that a brand identity can adapt to social, cultural, and technological changes over the course of a century, remaining relevant to its audience and to new generations.</p>	<p>Quito's positioning strategy aimed to highlight its impressive colonial architecture to attract tourists to explore the culture and history of its rich heritage; however, following the severe pandemic, Quito sought to focus on domestic tourism to build confidence and safety, with the goal of eventually attracting international visitors once again. This strategy aligns with an essential part of brand identity, which defines the central and overarching concept from which messages and communication to consumers stem (Solórzano and Parrales, 2021).</p>

*Note:* Created by the authors.


In summary, the Quito brand features a design that symbolizes the Middle of the World and uses the Roboto typeface, which is legible in both digital and print media. Furthermore, its traditional colors, such as red and blue, foster a strong sense of belonging among citizens, although the use of gradients in this logo may compromise clarity at smaller sizes. Its representation and symbolism aim to highlight the city's culture and tradition, forging a connection with the people of Quito. Despite the global impact of the 2020 pandemic, Quito's brand management adapted and reaffirmed its vision to once again become a vibrant city rich in culture. Finally, its positioning took a new direction: what was initially a strategy centered on colonial architecture to attract domestic and international tourists evolved into an approach to promote post-pandemic domestic tourism and strengthen citizens' confidence and sense of security.

**Quito’s 2023 Visual Brand: Quito Reborn**

An analysis of Quito’s 2023 visual brand revealed that it was transformed as a result of a new communication strategy. Unlike others, this visual brand focuses on an identity that not only promotes tourism but also seeks an emotional connection with citizens, thereby attempting to reflect a process of rebirth.

As part of this analysis, the characteristics of this visual brand were examined in depth to understand the impact and effectiveness of the composition of its illustrated logo. Its iconographic and typographic elements, which carry symbolic value, were identified, and its heraldry—which represents the strength and loyalty of citizens—was explored (Romero et al., 2013). It is clear that the aim is to project an image of modernity and transparency to strengthen its local identity, which is defined as a culturally rich brand—because it includes colonial architecture, flora, and fauna—and that, with this value proposition, the goal is to reach local, national, and international audiences (see Table 6).

Table 6  
Visual brand analysis of the city of Quito in 2023

	Partial conclusions		
Brand 2021	Composition	Typography	Color
	The logo combines illustration and typography to reflect the identity and spirit of Quito. It incorporates the city’s coat of arms and a series of icons designed to foster a sense of pride and belonging among citizens: the spectacled bear, which connects with nature and the majesty of ancient kings; the sun, a symbol of rebirth and new opportunities; the Virgin of Panecillo, which adds a celestial and mystical touch; the geranium,	Typography is fundamental to design, as it can alter the context and feel of a message (Quimí, 2020). The Quito city brand (2023) uses three hierarchically organized typefaces, each serving a specific communicative role and contributing to the visual identity. The word “Quito” is presented in Gotham, a geometric sans-serif typeface with rounded edges and an ultra weight, which conveys stability, institutional approachability,	Color, as a visual perception, allows the mind to recognize and distinguish elements (Spina, 2022). The brand uses the traditional colors of the Quito flag, which have been in use since 1944. Blue predominates in the logo and the elements of the coat of arms, evoking the Andean sky and the city’s identity. Red, present in the coat of arms and details of the logo, conveys passion and energy, balancing the composition of blues with warmth.

	<p>with its vitality and characteristic colors; the domes of historic buildings, which evoke the colonial legacy; and the mountains, which showcase the grandeur of the culture and the land surrounding the city. On the right, three hierarchically arranged typefaces highlight the name “Quito,” balancing the logo’s asymmetrical composition and reinforcing an institutional character, without neglecting the approachability and human focus sought by the city’s administration.</p>	<p>and trust. “Metropolitan City Hall” is displayed in Montserrat, a regular-weight sans-serif, creating contrast without detracting from the main focus and reinforcing the brand’s administrative character. The slogan “Quito Renace” uses Amithen, a calligraphic typeface that simulates hand-drawn brushstrokes, adding a human and approachable touch, and fostering social sensitivity alongside institutional formality. All typefaces are optimized for digital and print media, ensuring readability and consistency across all platforms.</p>	<p>Yellow and green, though barely visible, represent the wealth and nature surrounding Quito. Finally, white, used in the typography and small details, provides clarity, visual cleanliness, and legibility, creating balance in the overall design.</p>
	<p><b>Representation and symbolism</b></p>	<p><b>Brand management</b></p>	<p><b>Positioning</b></p>
	<p>The brand aims to convey the history, culture, and traditions of Quito through a logo that modernizes the coat of arms, integrating heraldic elements with a contemporary aesthetic that reinforces the visual identity. Each symbol has a purpose: the white tower on a red background represents strength and nobility; the green mountains evoke the snow-capped Andes; the stylized birds reinterpret the double-headed eagle, a symbol of authority; and the helmet turning to the right symbolizes honor, defense, and</p>	<p>As Gálvez (2023, p. 29) points out, “The goal of positioning a brand nationally and internationally is achieved, in many cases, through the implementation of branding, enabling companies and sectors to expand internationally through the use of an appropriate brand.”</p> <p>In the case of city branding, management focuses on a visual and communication strategy aimed at building a coherent identity that resonates with citizens. A strong visual identity allows for the unification</p>	<p>As Maza et al. (2020, p. 12) point out, “Positioning must be based on a long-term value or quality attributed to the brand that has no end, since that is why people will always remember it.”</p> <p>The city brand’s positioning seeks to convey a rebirth of Quito, highlighting the stages of revitalization, renewal, and improvement following the political changes and crises it has faced. Furthermore, it aims to reflect the identity of Quito’s residents through icons and elements representative of the city,</p>

	<p>the status of Royal City.</p> <p>The logo is framed by organic and floral contours, uses the colors of the flag and emblematic elements of the city, achieving a graphic identity that connects emotionally with citizens and fosters pride and a sense of belonging among the people of Quito.</p>	<p>of various institutional channels under a single image that conveys modernity and transparency and reflects the city's development and dynamism.</p>	<p>helping citizens identify with the brand while simultaneously attracting domestic and international tourists.</p>
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*Note:* Created by the authors.

In short, the 2023 Quito city brand is built around an illustrated logo that integrates iconic and typographic elements with high symbolic value, such as the coat of arms—a modernized version that retains its heraldic essence but features a contemporary graphic aesthetic that reinforces the city's visual identity. In the center of the heraldic shape stands a white tower on a red background, representing strength and nobility, while the two green mountains on either side symbolize the snow-capped Andean peaks surrounding the city; on the sides are stylized birds that reinterpret the double-headed eagle of the Holy Roman Empire, a symbol of imperial authority. At the top is a helmet turned to the right, symbolizing honor and defense, as well as showcasing its status as a Royal City, and the entire design is framed by organic and floral contours with a dynamic, colorful, and attractive visual language. Additionally, it is accompanied by icons such as the spectacled bear, the sun, the Virgin of Panecillo, the geranium, the dome, and the mountains, which evoke nature, spirituality, tradition, and a sense of belonging. The graphic identity uses three hierarchically organized typefaces: Gotham Ultra for the name "Quito," which conveys solidity and institutional approachability; Montserrat Regular for "Metropolitan Mayor's Office," which highlights its administrative nature; and the Amithen typeface for the slogan "Quito is reborn," with a handwritten stroke that conveys sensitivity and a personal touch. Regarding the color palette, the traditional blue and red of the Quito flag stand out, reinforcing the emotional and cultural connection to the city, while the use of yellow, green, and white brings vitality, balance, and visual clarity. This brand aims to project a modern image capable of connecting with citizens and adapting to various institutional formats, conveying a message of renewal following periods of crisis, and positioning Quito as a resilient, vibrant, and culturally alive city that strengthens its local identity while opening up to national and international tourism.

**Comparison of the City of Quito's Visual Brand from 2021 and 2023**

A comparative analysis of the City of Quito's branding from 2021 and 2023 reveals a significant transformation in its strategy, as shown in Tables 7, 8, and 9.

*Table 7  
Comparative analysis of the City of Quito's branding from 2021 and 2023*

Category	Brand 2021	Brand 2023
<b>Tipography</b>	It uses Roboto, a font designed for readability and to convey the main message clearly and effectively. This ensures that the content is easily understood by a wide audience. Furthermore, the integration of the typeface with the "Middle of the World" icon creates an immediate association with the city, making the brand memorable and scalable.	It uses three different typefaces to achieve greater expressiveness: Gotham, which conveys urban modernity, confidence, and presence; Montserrat, which combines formality with an authenticity that is accessible to citizens; and Amithen, with strokes that evoke artistic and personalized handwriting, adding a human and creative touch that strengthens the connection with residents.
<b>Color</b>	Blue and red gradients are incorporated to add a modern and dynamic touch, but they lose their impact at smaller sizes (favicons, cards).	It retains the colors of the Quito flag but eliminates gradients, thereby improving readability and visibility. Each color enhances the identity and fosters a sense of belonging through historical and traditional symbols.
<b>Composition</b>	It incorporates the "Middle of the World" icon into the typography, creating an immediate connection to the city. Its simplicity makes it easily recognizable, although the gradients affect its scalability.	It combines the coat of arms with representative icons (the spectacled bear, the sun, the Virgin of El Panecillo, the geranium, the dome, and the mountain), balancing history, nature, culture, and wildlife. The composition reflects both traditional Quito and its modernity, fostering local pride and a sense of belonging.

<b>Representation and symbolism</b>	“The Middle of the World” serves as a central icon, representing a globally recognizable landmark that symbolizes Quito and its identity.	The symbolism is expanded: the simplified coat of arms represents strength, nobility, and loyalty; the additional icons highlight history, heritage, nature, and culture, reinforcing the emotional connection with citizens.
<b>Brand management</b>	The strategic plan was developed in the wake of the pandemic, focusing on tourism and the promotion of the historic center and the Equator Monument, though the transition has presented certain challenges.	It is a more comprehensive strategy that encompasses colonial architecture, nature, wildlife, and the city’s symbolic landmarks. It aims to strengthen local identity, bring the brand closer to residents, and position Quito as a culturally rich and vibrant city.
<b>Positioning</b>	It highlighted the city’s iconic landmarks to attract tourists and showcase its history.	It maintains the prominence of colonial buildings but broadens the scope to include wildlife, flora, and historical elements, conveying a more comprehensive message about Quito’s identity, tradition, and cultural richness.

*Note:* Prepared by the authors.

**Table 8**  
*Results of interviews on Quito’s city brand (2021 and 2023)*

Categoría	Variable	Brand 2021	Brand 2023
<b>Brand identity</b>	Description	Minimalist; retains traditional elements such as the coat of arms; Montserrat typeface; easy to remember and apply; slogan used.	Expands the visual identity: incorporates a simplified coat of arms and symbols of fauna, flora, architecture, and culture; hierarchical typefaces (Gotham, Montserrat, Amithen); reinforced slogan; greater emotional connection.
	Management Challenges	Management Challenges Establish coherence and consistency; simplify visual elements for application across different formats.	Integrate multiple symbolic elements without losing clarity; balance modernity and tradition; strengthen strategic and emotional coherence.

	Unique features	Unique attributes Represents Quito’s historical and cultural heritage; minimalism facilitates identification.	Represents cultural, natural, and symbolic diversity and richness; reinforces civic pride; connects local identity with international reach.
<b>Target Audience and Approach</b>	Main Approach	Tourism and promotion of iconic buildings; communication focused on colonial history; limited citizen participation.	Multi-faceted: tourism, investment, quality of life; incorporates citizen services; strengthens cultural and natural narrative.
	Competition	Compared primarily with other major cities in the country (Guayaquil, Cuenca); Quito is unique in essence and population.	Recognition compared to national and international cities; emphasizes uniqueness and global reach; strengthens appeal as a cultural and diverse city.
	Measuring success	Initial awareness; attracting tourists and events; limited by digital resources and media reach	Awareness, preference, and loyalty; improved indicators in tourism, investment, and cultural positioning; adaptation to digital platforms.
<b>Positioning and Competition</b>	Effectiveness	Moderate increase in tourists (≈39% during holidays); estimated revenue of \$8 million; revitalization of the historic district through transportation and events.	Greater communication effectiveness; integration of urban and cultural services; increased national and international appeal; more comprehensive positioning.
	Technological adaptation	Present in digital environments; limited visibility on small screens.	Optimization for digital environments, social media, and mobile apps; consistent across different sizes and platforms.
<b>Communication and Channels</b>	Channels used	Television, radio, social media, billboards, print media; effectiveness varies depending on frequency and consistency of the message.	Multi-channel approach, including traditional and digital media; reinforcement of cultural and symbolic messages; greater interaction with residents and tourists.

	International references	Limited; learning based on general branding best practices.	Inspired by successful global brands (Apple, Coca-Cola); LoveMark strategy for brand recall and loyalty.
<b>Management and Strategies</b>	Political context	Administrative changes affect continuity; stalling of certain projects; limited adaptation to the post-pandemic context.	More comprehensive strategy; considers political and administrative stability; alignment with goals for a cultural, inclusive, and resilient city.
<b>Integration with Organizations and Services</b>	Collaboration with public services	Basic coordination with municipal services; limited integration with transportation and events.	Strong integration with municipal departments and public services; brand applied to transportation, culture, and events; enhances the citizen and visitor experience.

Note: Prepared by the authors.

**Table 9**  
Conceptual framework: Key elements of city branding

Concepto	Definición	Aplicación en Quito (2021–2023)	Observations
<b>Brand Identity</b>	The internal and distinctive perception that a city wants to convey, built upon its unique characteristics (culture, heritage, natural resources)	2021: Minimalist, focused on the Middle of the World monument and colonial architecture.  2023: Integration of fauna, flora, a simplified coat of arms, architecture, culture, and religious imagery	This evolution reflects a shift from simple identification to a richer and more symbolic identity.
<b>Brand Image</b>	How the city is perceived from the perspective of visitors and residents, influenced by tangible and intangible elements	2021: Perception of a historic, tourist, and post-pandemic city.  2023: A renewed, diverse, culturally rich city, emotionally connected to its citizens.	The 2023 brand aims to forge a deeper emotional bond with internal and external audiences.

<p><b>Brand Positioning</b></p>	<p>The way in which the city seeks to distinguish itself in the public’s mind from other cities.</p>	<p>2021: Emphasized tourism and colonial architecture.</p> <p>2023: A comprehensive positioning strategy that combines history, culture, nature, and modernity. The 2023 positioning strategy.</p>	<p>The 2023 designation allows Quito to compete on the international stage and showcase itself as a culturally rich and diverse city.</p>
<p><b>Assets and Attributes</b></p>	<p>Tangible elements (places, monuments, infrastructure) and intangible elements (culture, history, feelings) that make up the city's identity.</p>	<p>2021: Middle of the World, colors of the flag, Roboto typeface.</p> <p>2023: Simplified coat of arms, spectacled bear, geranium, domes, hierarchical typefaces, flat colors of the flag.</p>	<p>The integration of intangible and tangible attributes strengthens the connection with residents and tourists.</p>
<p><b>Brand Personality</b></p>	<p>The perception of the city as if it were a person, with characteristics that make it unique and attractive.</p>	<p>2021: A historic, reliable, and tourist-friendly city.</p> <p>2023: A vibrant, resilient, welcoming, modern, and culturally diverse city</p>	<p>The 2023 personality projects a more human and emotional character, facilitating customer loyalty.</p>
<p><b>Visitor Loyalty and Perception</b></p>	<p>The emotional connection and perception of tourists and residents regarding the city influences their decision to visit or live there. 2021: Moderate tourist attraction; limited trust in the brand.</p>	<p>2021: Moderate tourist appeal; limited brand trust.</p> <p>2023: Increase in domestic and international visitors; strengthening of civic pride and preference for the city.</p>	

*Note:* Prepared by the author. The table contains definitions taken from the article by Irisi Kasapi and Ariana Cela (2017): “Destination branding: A review of the city branding literature”.

The evolution of Quito’s city brand between 2021 and 2023 reveals a significant shift in both its visual approach and its communication strategy. **The 2021 brand**, “Quito grande otra vez,” was characterized by its typographic simplicity using the Roboto font, prioritizing readability and effectiveness in digital media. It symbolically integrated the Middle of the World monument into the typography, creating a direct link to

the city. However, the blue and red color gradients, while adding modernity and dynamism, proved problematic in small-scale formats, affecting clarity. Strategically, this version emerged in the wake of the pandemic, with the goal of revitalizing tourism, highlighting primarily the historic center and its iconic buildings. Its visual identity was functional, clear, and centered on the history and trust that the city projects to residents and visitors.

In contrast, **the 2023 brand**, “Quito Reborn,” underwent a profound overhaul, incorporating a logo rich in iconic elements such as the simplified coat of arms, complemented by symbols representing Quito’s fauna, flora, architecture, culture, and religious heritage—such as the spectacled bear, the geranium, the Virgin of Panecillo, and the mountains—thereby reinforcing a sense of belonging and diversity. It abandoned gradients and returned to the flat colors of the Quito flag, improving visibility and visual coherence. The hierarchical typography (Gotham, Montserrat, and Amithen) balanced modernity, institutionalality, and emotional connection. This brand expanded the strategic vision, moving from a limited tourism-focused approach to a comprehensive narrative that highlights the urban, natural, and cultural aspects, consolidating a visual identity that emotionally connects with citizens and projects Quito as a diverse, resilient, and culturally rich city.

A comparative analysis of both brands demonstrates that brand management has deepened its ability to position itself in the minds of citizens, linking social and cultural contexts with communication needs, consistent with the understanding of city branding as an interdisciplinary field that articulates communication, identity, and the city’s strategic projection (Lucarelli and Berg, 2011). However, the constant change of brands with each administration hinders national positioning and poses a challenge for redesign investment. Furthermore, there are no visible and clear elements that directly link the visual brands to a specific administration. This highlights the need to clearly differentiate the concepts associated with a city’s brand (see Table 10).

**Table 10**  
*Concepts associated with a city’s brand*

<b>Concept</b>	<b>Definition</b>
<b>City Branding</b>	Projects the city's identity and values, fostering social cohesion, civic pride, and international positioning.
<b>Institutional or Government Brand of a City</b>	Refers to the image and perception that the government and official institutions project of the city, with the aim of generating trust, identity, and competitiveness.

<b>Tourism Brand</b>	Aimed at attracting visitors, highlighting cultural, natural, and architectural attractions, as reflected in 2021.
<b>Country Brand</b>	Projects the city as part of the national identity, a strategic resource for attracting investment and global recognition.
<b>Product and Service Brand</b>	Focused on promoting local activities and services associated with tourism and urban development.
<b>Brand Identity</b>	The internal and differentiating perception that a city wants to convey, built upon its unique characteristics, such as culture, heritage, and natural resources.
<b>Brand Image</b>	How the city is perceived from the perspective of visitors and residents, influenced by tangible and intangible elements, such as culture, activities, and the environment.
<b>Brand Positioning</b>	The way a city seeks to differentiate itself in the public's mind compared to other cities, highlighting its superior or distinctive qualities.
<b>Assets and Attributes</b>	Both tangible elements (places, monuments, infrastructure) and intangible elements (culture, history, associated feelings) that make up the city's identity.
<b>Personalidad de marca</b>	Brand Personality: The perception of the city as if it were a person, with specific characteristics that make it unique and attractive to its target audiences.
<b>Visitor Loyalty and Perception</b>	The emotional connection and perception that tourists and residents have with the city, and how this influences their decision to visit or live there.

*Note:* Created by the authors. The table contains definitions taken from the article by Irisi Kasapi and Ariana Cela (2017): “Destination branding: A review of the city branding literature”.

As previously mentioned, **the 2021 brand** reflected a minimalist approach, centered on the Equator and colonial architecture, featuring the Roboto typeface and color gradients that conveyed modernity but had

limitations in terms of visibility and scalability. Its identity was geared toward post-pandemic tourism recovery, creating a perception of a historic and trustworthy city. For its part, **the 2023 brand** demonstrates a strategic evolution toward a comprehensive and emotional identity. The logo incorporates a simplified coat of arms, symbols of fauna, flora, architecture, and culture, along with hierarchical typography, reinforcing the connection with citizens, projecting local pride, and consolidating Quito's international profile.

In terms of **positioning**, in 2021 it was limited to tourism promotion and colonial architecture, achieving a moderate increase in visitors. By 2023, it expanded into a comprehensive narrative that combined historical heritage, culture, nature, and modernity, differentiating Quito from other cities nationally and internationally and strengthening its uniqueness and authenticity.

**Tangible** assets include monuments, colonial buildings, and natural elements, while **intangible attributes** encompass culture, history, spirituality, and feelings associated with the city. The 2023 brand projects a **more human and emotional personality**: Quito is perceived as vibrant, resilient, culturally rich, and approachable, which helps generate loyalty, recall, and preference among both residents and tourists.

In summary, the evolution of Quito's city brand reflects a shift from a functional and minimalist identity toward a comprehensive, symbolic, and emotional identity that connects with residents, strengthens the perception of the city, and positions Quito as a cultural, tourist, and urban benchmark at the national and international levels. Differentiating between brand types (city, tourism, country, products, and services) is crucial for optimizing resources, achieving strategic coherence, and consolidating a lasting and globally recognized identity.

## ◆ Conclusions

The comparative analysis shows that changes in administration and contexts of mistrust significantly influence the continuity and consolidation of the city brand, affecting its positioning at the national and international levels. However, the 2023 brand study demonstrates that strategically directed creative efforts allow for the coherent integration of cultural, historical, and natural elements, consolidating a robust, symbolic, and emotional identity recognized by citizens and visitors alike. This finding contributes to the debate on territorial branding by showing that creativity applied with a strategic focus strengthens the perception of a city, even in contexts of political transition.

The research highlights that prioritizing the city brand over brands associated with a specific administration is key to ensuring continuity, institutional neutrality, and coherence in territorial identity. The coexistence of proposals linked to specific terms of office—often managed

belatedly and in a vague manner—can scatter creative efforts and economic resources. In contrast, focusing creativity and strategic planning on the **city brand** allows for the optimization of resources, generates tangible impacts on local pride, tourism, and international competitiveness, and consolidates a lasting and globally recognizable identity.

In terms of assets and attributes, the 2023 brand combines tangible elements—monuments, colonial buildings, nature—with intangible elements—culture, history, spirituality, and emotions—projecting Quito as a vibrant, resilient, and approachable city. The creative efforts reflected in the brand’s visual, narrative, and symbolic conceptualization strengthen loyalty, recall, and preference among residents and tourists, demonstrating how strategic city brand management generates tangible returns for the community and for international visibility.

In summary, the study suggests prioritizing the city brand over any brand linked to a specific administration. This is justified because the city brand ensures institutional continuity, strategic coherence, resource optimization, and the strengthening of territorial identity, whereas brands associated with specific terms of office tend to be fleeting and fragmented. Furthermore, creative efforts should focus on the city brand, as its strategic management allows for the integration of cultural, historical, and emotional elements, generating tangible returns in terms of local pride, tourism, and international competitiveness.

This study contributes to the field of city branding and territorial communication, demonstrating how the visual and symbolic strategies of a city brand are shaped by political and administrative contexts, which highlights the need for sustainable territorial identity policies over time.●

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