



Urban Regeneration as a Platform for City Branding: An Analysis of the Existing Potentials of Dehdasht

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Abstract

Background and Objective: This study aims to analyze the urban regeneration capacities of Dehdasht city and to elucidate their connection with the urban branding process. Dehdasht, as a city lacking prominent urban recognition indicators, requires the utilization of regeneration potentials to enhance its identity and competitive position. Literature review indicates that previous studies predominantly focus on metropolitan areas and cities with established brands, highlighting a significant gap in examining the relationship between urban regeneration and branding in smaller, less-known cities. This research seeks to fill this gap by focusing on the case study of Dehdasht.

Methodology: The research adopts a descriptive–analytical approach based on documentary and library studies, as well as a review of national and international literature. Empirical data were collected through semi-structured interviews with urban planning experts and analyzed using content coding. The analysis framework encompasses four dimensions of urban regeneration: physical–environmental, economic, socio–cultural, and policy–managerial, which are examined in relation to the four fundamental components of urban branding: efficient institutional governance, sustainable financing, active stakeholder participation, and coherent policy orientation.

Results and Findings: The findings indicate that urban regeneration provides the necessary framework for achieving the four dimensions of urban branding. Specifically, the restoration of the historical Baladshapur district, enhancement of public spaces, and improvement of urban infrastructure, combined with the strengthening of socio-cultural capacities and participatory governance, enable Dehdasht to develop a competitive city image at regional and national levels. The study demonstrates that even cities with low urban recognition can, through targeted planning and integrated strategies, enhance their attractiveness to both internal and external stakeholders and improve their overall urban status.

Keywords: Urban regeneration, Urban branding, Dehdasht, Urban identity.

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Extended Abstract

Introduction

Urban regeneration has emerged as a critical strategy to address the deterioration of historic and central urban areas, driven by unplanned urbanization patterns and structural transformations. Beyond physical improvements, urban regeneration encompasses the revitalization of social, economic, and environmental dimensions of underperforming neighborhoods. In parallel, city branding has gained prominence as a strategic tool to enhance urban identity, competitiveness, and recognition. Despite global experiences emphasizing the integration of regeneration and branding, there remains limited empirical knowledge on their operational synergy in small and medium-sized cities. This study investigates the role of urban regeneration as a platform for city branding in Dehdasht, a historic and cultural center in southwest Iran, aiming to identify existing potentials, constraints, and strategic pathways to strengthen the city's identity and sustainable urban competitiveness.

Methodology

The research adopts an applied, descriptive–analytical approach. Data were collected through a combination of library and documentary review, semi-structured interviews with 50 purposively selected urban experts, local authorities, and informed residents, and systematic field observations. The interviews, each lasting 45–60 minutes, explored four dimensions of urban regeneration—physical–environmental, economic, socio-cultural, and policy–managerial—and their alignment with city branding components, including institutional governance, sustainable financing, stakeholder participation, and policy orientation. Data analysis employed thematic analysis and content coding using NVivo, supplemented by policy alignment assessment via Excel-based quantitative coding. Triangulation across documentary evidence, interviews, and field observations ensured methodological rigor and validity.

Results and Findings

Findings indicate that urban regeneration in Dehdasht requires a comprehensive, policy-driven approach rather than isolated physical interventions. Key challenges were identified across four dimensions:

Physical–Environmental: deteriorated historic fabrics, inadequate public spaces, uneven spatial distribution, and poorly designed city entrances limiting the city's visual identity.

Socio-Cultural: insufficient citizen participation, social vulnerabilities, and inappropriate location of housing projects negatively impacting social cohesion and local identity.

Economic: spatial concentration of investments, underutilization of cultural tourism and local crafts, and weak support for creative industries constraining economic diversification and brand development.

Policy–Managerial: fragmented governance, absence of long-term urban regeneration planning, temporary decision-making, and managerial instability hindering coordinated regeneration and brand-building efforts.

Conversely, significant potentials were identified, including the city's strategic location along the north–south corridor, unique radial urban network, cultural diversity, rich intangible heritage, proximity to neighboring towns facilitating regional integration, and the capacity to develop sustainable cultural and creative industries. These potentials provide a foundation for both physical and symbolic urban branding.

Strategies and Recommendations: A matrix of integrated regeneration–branding strategies was developed, highlighting the alignment of four regeneration dimensions with city branding pillars: institutional governance, policy orientation, sustainable financing, and stakeholder participation. Short-term (1–2 years), medium-term (3–5 years), and long-term (5–10 years)

interventions were proposed, including: documentation and restoration of historic structures, development of cultural routes and public spaces, enhancement of social participation and festivals, support for local crafts and creative industries, establishment of urban regeneration governance bodies, and adoption of participatory financing mechanisms. These strategies emphasize an iterative, multi-stakeholder, and multi-dimensional approach, ensuring that physical, socio-cultural, economic, and managerial initiatives reinforce each other to consolidate the city's identity and competitive positioning.

Conclusion

The study demonstrates that sustainable city branding in Dehdasht is contingent upon the integrated implementation of multi-dimensional urban regeneration. Physical–environmental improvements alone are insufficient; economic revitalization requires supportive policies and financial instruments, socio-cultural regeneration demands active citizen participation, and managerial regeneration necessitates coherent institutional governance. Effective synergy among these dimensions produces a city brand that is authentic, resilient, and reflective of local identity, culture, and heritage. The research offers a replicable framework for small and medium-sized cities with historic and cultural significance, emphasizing the importance of inter-disciplinary, participatory, and policy-aligned urban regeneration for sustainable city branding.

Declarations

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Authors' Contribution

Authors contributed equally to the conceptualization and writing of the article. All of the authors approved the content of the manuscript and agreed on all aspects of the work declaration of competing interest none.

Conflict of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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