

The role of branding as a public policy tool in the context of post-war recovery

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Abstract

The integration of territorial branding into state policy can become one of the tools for responding to the complex challenges of post-war recovery. The article analyzes the possibilities of using territorial branding as a state policy tool in the processes of post-war recovery of Ukraine. Based on the generalization of scientific works by Ukrainian and foreign researchers, as well as analytical reports on the consequences of the Russian-Ukrainian war, the key challenges facing Ukrainian cities and territories in the infrastructure, economic, environmental, socio-humanitarian and management spheres are identified. It is substantiated that territorial branding, provided it is integrated into state policy, can perform not only a communication but also a coordination function, combining narratives of recovery with practices of strategic planning, resource mobilization, investment attraction and strengthening of public trust. It is shown that in the post-war context, branding can support the restoration of identity, increase the competitiveness of territories and consolidate internal and external stakeholders. At the same time, the risks of such an approach are outlined, in particular the danger of overly centralized decisions, limited inclusiveness and a lack of public trust. It is concluded that it is advisable to consider territorial branding as an auxiliary tool of the state policy of post-war recovery, the effectiveness of which depends on its coherence with real changes in the field of recovery, quality of governance and community participation.

Keywords: city branding; territory branding; state policy instrument; post-war recovery; Ukraine; war; challenges of post-war recovery

1. Introduction

Ukraine's post-conflict recovery is a multidimensional and complex process that requires strategic planning, effective coordination, and significant resources. The Recovery and Recovery Needs Assessment Report for Ukraine (RDNA3) identified critical challenges such as significant infrastructure damage, economic instability, environmental problems, and social upheaval. Addressing these challenges is vital to shaping Ukraine's long-term development trajectory. It is not just about restoring physical infrastructure, but also about building a sustainable system that can ensure future resilience and progress.

2. Review of basic research and publications in the chosen direction

Scientific publications of domestic scientists indicate that city branding in the post-war environment acquires the status of a public policy tool capable of combining communication narratives with recovery and management practices. In the array of sources used in the article, it is appropriate to distinguish three groups of studies. The first is the work of Ukrainian and foreign scholars on the role of branding in post-war regeneration: from the approaches of S.Anholt (integration of branding with politics, focus on investments and tourism) [1] and M.Kavaratzis (inclusive «bottom-up» models) [20] to the works of N.Evdokimova and D.Kotenok (branding as a tool for coordinating recovery) [42], G.Ashworth (G. J) [3], D.Diefendorf (JM) [11] and

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S. Khalaf (S.) (the relationship between physical recovery and identity) [20], Dinnie K. [13] (vision and alignment with strategies) and Kaneva N. (state narratives in post-conflict cities) [18]; a general overview is presented in Table 1. The second is analytical reports on the consequences of the Russian-Ukrainian war, which form an empirical framework of challenges and needs for branding policies: RDNA3, UNDP assessments, Barva Invest /ANTS, KSE, reviews by the Center for Economic Strategy, UWEC, WHO and OHCHR; the results of these materials are summarized in Table 2. The third is research that directly positions branding as a tool of public policy and governance: M. Potapovs justifies the need for a political classification of branding with requirements for planning, accountability and participation [20]; the works of Eshuis J., Braun E., Klijn E.-H. [15], Hereźniak M. & Anders – Morawska J. [17], Eshuis J. & Edwards A. [13], demonstrate the institutional integration of branding into municipal governance, the importance of clear indicators and democratic legitimacy. Taken together, these three bodies of literature make the case for a shift from image campaigns to managed, measurable branding policies integrated with post-war recovery goals and aligned with infrastructural, economic, environmental, and socio-humanitarian priorities.

3. Highlighting previously unresolved issues and formulating research hypotheses

Despite the volume of literature on place and city branding, several questions relevant to Ukraine's post-war recovery remain open. Branding is predominantly treated as a communication and identity-management activity, while its reclassification as a public policy instrument has not been operationalised for conditions of large-scale wartime destruction. The case studies most frequently cited - Beirut [21], Mostar [7], Belfast [8], Diyarbakir [6] - differ qualitatively from the Ukrainian situation, which combines ongoing hostilities, multi-domain damage, mass displacement, and parallel European integration. The institutional architecture through which branding policy could be coordinated within a national recovery framework remains undefined, and the risks of symbolic or façade branding documented in earlier work have not been translated into design criteria. On this basis, three research propositions are advanced. First, city branding can function as a recovery instrument only if it is reconstituted as a policy domain with defined subjects, competences, and links to the policy cycle, rather than treated as a communication activity. Second, the structural challenges of Ukrainian recovery require branding to perform an integrative function across infrastructure, economic, environmental, socio-humanitarian, and governance spheres. Third, the legitimacy and effectiveness of branding policy depend on institutional coordination, transparency, and stakeholder participation at all stages of the policy cycle.

4. Methodology and research methods

The study is conceptual and analytical; no primary empirical data were collected. The evidence base consists of peer-reviewed scholarship and analytical reports produced by international and Ukrainian organisations. The literature was assembled in three thematic strands: theoretical work on place, city, and territorial branding, including its critical and political readings; analytical reports on the consequences of the Russian-Ukrainian war and Ukraine's recovery needs; and research situating branding within governance and public-policy frameworks.

Four procedures were applied: conceptual analysis to separate communicative, marketing, and policy-oriented interpretations of branding; comparative analysis of approaches to identify points of convergence between Ukrainian and international scholarship (Table 1); policy analysis structured around the stages of the policy cycle, adapted from Potapovs [29] to the Ukrainian recovery context (Table 4); and framework construction to align the typology of post-war challenges with the functions branding policy could perform (Table 3). The choice of the policy cycle as the organising framework allows city branding to be examined as a sequence of governance decisions rather than a single communicative act.

5. Formulation of the purpose of the article

To study the role of territory branding as a public policy tool in overcoming the consequences of war and the challenges of post-war recovery, with an emphasis on its potential for socio-economic renewal, identity restoration, and sustainable development.

6. Presentation of the main material with a full justification of the results

The role of city branding in post-war recovery and public policy has been studied by both domestic and foreign scholars, who have emphasized its strategic importance for the recovery of cities after conflicts and overcoming their consequences. Simon Anholt emphasizes that city branding, integrated with public policy, reorients war-torn regions towards competitive development by creating narratives that attract investment and tourism, going beyond simple logos and encompassing governance and cultural identity. In turn, Mihalis Kavartzis [20] defines inclusive branding approaches, focused on a bottom-up model, that ensure that urban narratives are aligned with community aspirations and recovery efforts. Similarly, Nina Evdokimova and Daria Kotenok [42] emphasize the role of branding as a policy tool for coordinating recovery, engaging stakeholders in rebuilding cities as resilient centers. These approaches show that policy-integrated branding can support recovery by shaping urban identity, mobilizing resources, and aligning recovery with sustainable governance principles. Thus, branding can be seen as a tool for rebuilding cities and renewing approaches to managing their development. A more detailed overview of the works of scholars who have investigated this issue is provided in Table 1.

Table 1
The relationship between city branding and post-war recovery in the works of Ukrainian and foreign researchers

Author, organizational affiliation	Main works (Title, Year, Source)	The relationship between branding and recovery	
		Relationship type	Main points of the relationship
1	2	3	4
Gregory Ashworth (University of Groningen)	«Marketing Places» (1990) [3]; «Urban Identity and Branding» (2009) [4]	Indirect	The role of heritage in urban identity is highlighted, showing how cities rebuild symbolic objects (e.g. churches, monuments) after conflict to regain their identity. The concept of «dissonant heritage» explains how war-torn cities integrate complex histories (e.g. war memorials) into their brand to shape narratives of recovery
Jeffry M. Diefendorf (University of New Hampshire) – historian of urban renewal after World War II	«In the Whirlpool of War: The Recovery of German Cities after the Second World War» (1993, Oxford UP) [11]; «Rebuilding the Bombed Cities of Europe» (ed. 1990) [12]	Indirect	It is argued that the destruction of war prompted symbolic renewal (e.g., the restoration of cathedrals as markers of identity). It provides a basis for linking recovery to identity, influencing later branding research on the formation of a distinctive city image after the war
Samir Khalaf (American University of Beirut, Lebanon)	«Rebuilding Beirut» (2022, MIT Press) [22]; «The Heart of Beirut: The Return of the Borgias» (2006) [20]	Indirect/direct	Recovery as rebranding in Beirut is reflected, where the rebuilding of the city center has shaped a modern, safe image. It highlights the tension between a global, investor-oriented strategy and local inclusivity, showing how choices in recovery (e.g., preserving the «scars» of war versus modernization) influence the city's brand narratives
Peter van Ham (Independent Researcher) – Political Scientist	«The Rise of the Brand State2 (2001, Foreign Affairs) [36]	Direct	Branding is considered as a form of soft power and diplomacy in post-conflict contexts. It is determined that war-torn regions need to reorient their image to attract foreign aid and recognition, moving beyond propaganda to authentic image-making, which is essential for integrating recovery with international relations
Simon Anholt (Independent Nation Branding Consultant)	«Competitive Identity» (2007) [1]	Direct	City branding is key to post-crisis recovery, enabling cities to move from being seen as devastated areas to being seen as restored and resilient communities. The nation brand hexagon (governance, culture, people, tourism, investment, exports) serves as a guide for recovery to enhance global reputation and attract resources
Andriela Vitić-Četković & Greg Ringer (University of Montenegro, etc.) – tourism researchers	«Branding Post-conflict destinations: recreating Montenegro» (2008, Tourism) [37]	Direct	Analyzes branding of Montenegro after the Yugoslav wars (e.g., «Wild Beauty»). Shows how coordinated public and private efforts have overcome the stigma of conflict, emphasizing sustainable tourism and heritage to rethink urban identity, providing lessons for Ukrainian cities devastated by war
Eli Avraham & Eran Ketter (University of Haifa, etc.) – communication researchers	«Media Strategies for Promoting Places in Crises» (2008, Routledge) [4]	Direct	A set of tools for rebuilding the image after the crisis is proposed, emphasizing active media strategies (e.g., use of credible sources, targeted narratives) to combat war-related stereotypes. It also suggests branding cities as «open for business» to support recovery by attracting tourism and investment
Michael Kavaratzis (University of South Wales) – place branding theorist	«From City Marketing to City Branding» (2004) [20]	Direct	An inclusive, bottom-up approach to city branding as an urban policy tool is proposed, combining brand messaging with physical regeneration (e.g., flagship projects). It emphasizes the relevance of image to reality, which is critical for post-war cities to rebuild trust and ensure that branding supports regeneration goals such as social cohesion and economic recovery

End of the of table 1

1	2	3	4
Keith Dinnie (Independent Branding Consultant)	«City Branding: Theory and Cases» (2011) [13]	Direct	Strong city brands require a clear vision, stakeholder collaboration, and policy alignment. Post-crisis branding recreates narratives around unique strengths, engaging communities to generate support, which is vital for the recovery of war-torn cities like Ukraine's
Victoria Prilenska (Independent Researcher) – Urbanist	«City Branding as a Tool for Urban Regeneration» (2012) [29]	Direct	Draws a causal link between branding and urban renewal, noting that post-war cities (e.g., Le Havre) use creative branding (e.g., culture, innovation) to signal regeneration. Proposes flagship projects (museums, parks) as dual assets for physical renewal and brand identity formation
Nadia Kaneva (University of Denver) – critical media researcher	«National Branding in Post-Communist Europe» (2011, Routledge) [18]; «Nation Branding and Commercial Nationalism» (2016) [19]	Direct	Analyzes post-conflict state branding strategies to shape new narratives (e.g., Croatian tourism, Kosovo youth). Critically assesses the gap between declared unity and actual division, but recognizes the role of branding in prioritizing recovery and signaling a break with the conflict past
Heather Skinner (University of South Wales) – Marketing Researcher	«Marketing Northern Ireland as a Post-Conflict Society» (2007) [31]	Direct	Branding in post-conflict regions (e.g. Northern Ireland, Kosovo) is being explored to change negative images and attract tourism/investment
Melissa Aronczyk (Rutgers University) – media researcher	«Nation Branding» (2013) [1]	Direct	Post-crisis national rebranding as a public policy tool is analyzed. Branding shapes recovery projects according to new identities, serving as a tool of «2soft power» to enhance global status and support recovery
Annika Björkdahl (Uppsala University) – peace and conflict researcher	«Peacebuilding and spatial transformation : Peace , space and place Routledge» (2017, Routledge) [7]	Direct	The restoration of symbolic sites (e.g., the Old Bridge in Mostar) is explored as branding for peace. Branding is shown as a mechanism of social cohesion that combines physical restoration with unified urban narratives
Andrea Lucarelli	«The Political Dimension of Place Branding» (2015) [26]	Direct	The role of branding in peacebuilding is questioned, warning of simplistic narratives that can alienate communities. The author suggests a participatory branding to promote trust and dialogue, ensuring that the branding of post-conflict cities is consistent with the principles of inclusive civic participation
Philip Boland (Queen's University , Belfast) – urban geographer	«All aboard the Belfast brand wagon: from «pariah» to «energy» city» (2021) [8]	Direct	Examines the branding of post-conflict Belfast, where regeneration (e.g. the waterfront) and reimagining campaigns have removed the stigma of the «Troubles». Emphasises the role of branding in attracting investment
Deniz Ay & Kaner Turker (University of Bern, etc.) – urban researchers	«Post-conflict urban recovery as a practice of ethnocratic regime: Diyarbakir» (2022) [5]	Indirect	Analyzes how the state is leading the «revival» in the Surichi district Diyarbakir has changed its image, erasing contested identities. The role of branding in transforming urban identity during recovery is highlighted, with a caution about political control that can stifle inclusivity
Nina Yevdokimova (Kyiv National Economic University) – economist/ urban marketer	«Modeling the city brand in the post-war development of Ukrainian territories» (2023, Technology Audit & Production Research) [42]	Direct	Analytical tools for branding cities in Ukraine's recovery are proposed, considering brands as resources for attracting investment and residents. The integration of branding into planning is demonstrated to align with citizens' needs, directly relevant to post-war urban regeneration

Analysis of Table 1 gives grounds to assert that most approaches to the interpretation of city branding have a direct or indirect connection with post-war recovery. In particular, the works of Ukrainian and foreign scholars identify various elements of city branding that can be used in post-war recovery. It is also important that since 2012, the works of scholars have mentioned post-conflict and post-crisis cities, demonstrating the importance of using city branding as a tool for post-crisis and post-conflict recovery.

The assessment of the damage and consequences of the war in Ukraine is carried out by various organizations. In particular, the World Bank annually prepares the Rapid Damage and Needs Assessment (RDNA) report, which is prepared jointly with the Government of Ukraine, the European Commission and the United Nations with the support of other partners and summarizes the results of the year, assessing damage, losses, as well as recovery and recovery needs for 10 years. In addition to the physical and financial consequences that can be quantified, the RDNA provides a qualitative description of how people's lives have changed dramatically since the Russian invasion [39]. In contrast, the United Nations Development Program's Human Impact Assessment study assesses the overall impact of the war in Ukraine on people, their living conditions, health, access to education, livelihoods, food security, social status, gender equality and women's empowerment, as well as the evolution of multidimensional poverty and human development [34].

In turn, in the Barva Invest study «Study: Impact of the Russian War in Ukraine on Global Food Security» for the International Center for Ukrainian Victory and ANTS - National Interests Protection Network - analyzed the losses of the Ukrainian agricultural sector from the war, the use of fertile lands, the consequences of the Kakhovka Dam explosion, as well as the negative impact on global food security of the militarization of the Black Sea and the blockade of Ukrainian ports [23,33].

Given the availability of analytical studies of the consequences of the Russian-Ukrainian war, which are the result of the activities of international and domestic organizations and researchers, respectively, it is necessary to systematize such documents in order to analyze them and identify the main challenges, needs and consequences of Russia's war against Ukraine, which is presented in Table 2.

Table 2

A review of analytical studies on the consequences and challenges of the Russian-Ukrainian war

Study title, source	Year	Organization that conducted the study	Main highlights
1	2	3	4
Rapid Damage and Needs Assessment (RDNA3) [38]	2024	World Bank, Government of Ukraine, European Commission, United Nations and other partners	Estimates Ukraine's recovery needs at \$486 billion over a decade, with a \$15 billion need in 2024 and a \$9.5 billion funding gap. Qualitatively describes the changes in living conditions caused by the war, with a focus on economic and social recovery
Human impact assessment [34]	2024	United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)	Assesses the impact of war on humanitarian conditions: health, education, livelihoods, food security, social status, gender equality, women's empowerment, multidimensional poverty, and human development, which are critical for social cohesion in city branding
Study: Impact of Russia's War Against Ukraine on Global Food Security [23]	2024	Color Invest for the International Victory Center of Ukraine and ANTS – National Advocacy Network	Analyzes losses in the agricultural sector, the use of fertile lands, the destruction of the Kakhovka hydroelectric power station, and the impact on global food security through the militarization of the Black Sea and the blockade of ports, which is relevant to economic recovery strategies
Report on infrastructure damage resulting from Russia's military aggression against Ukraine (as of January 2024) [24]	2024	Kyiv School of Economics (KSE), Ministry of Communities and Territories, Ministry of Economy, Ministry of Health, Ministry for Reintegration of Temporarily Occupied Territories, National Bank of Ukraine	Analyzes infrastructure damage from February 2022 to January 2024, including direct losses in the financial sector of \$44 million (particularly banking infrastructure), highlighting the need for resilient economic structures for city branding
European Commission, World Bank and Kyiv School of Economics (joint research) [16]	2024	European Commission, World Bank, Kyiv School of Economics	Links city branding with economic recovery, emphasizing investment attraction and increasing global competitiveness, which is critical for Ukraine's post-war urban identity
Tracker of Ukrainian Economy [9]	2023–2024	Center for Economic Strategy, with the support of PrivatBank	Tracks real economic performance: GDP growth of 5-5.5 % in 2023 after a 28.8 % decline in 2022, with international aid of \$42.5 billion covering 71 % of budget needs. Separately highlights defense spending (30 % of GDP), unemployment, and labor shortages due to emigration and mobilization

End of the of table 2

1	2	3	4
Environmental Consequences of the War in Ukraine: A Review for July 2024 [35]	2024	UWEC Working Group	Details environmental losses of \$4.2 billion, including \$1.8 billion from forest fires, \$1.6 billion from steppe fires, and \$752 million from oil flaring (excluding losses from the Kakhovka hydroelectric power plant of over UAH 55 billion). Emphasizes the principles of «green» recovery for sustainable recovery
Project «Russia Will Pay» [25]	2024	Kyiv School of Economics Institute (KSE Institute)	1.2 million tons of pollutants released into the atmosphere by May 2023 (430,000 tons of carbon monoxide and 700,000 tons of dust), with an estimated \$11 billion in debris cleanup, critical for ecological recovery in urban branding
International Platform for Action for a Green Recovery of Ukraine [27]	2024	Ministry of Environmental Protection and Natural Resources of Ukraine	Promotes green recovery in line with the European Green Deal, promoting climate-resilient technologies and environmental assessments for sustainable urban regeneration
WHO Urgent Appeal 2024: Ukraine [40]	2024	World Health Organization (WHO)	Reports that 9.6 million Ukrainians are at risk of mental disorders, with 3.9 million experiencing moderate to severe symptoms (54.1 % anxiety, 46.8 % depression), highlighting the need for psychosocial support in the process of social recovery
Ukraine: worsening impact on civilian population [28]	2024	Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR)	Confirms 11,743 civilian deaths and 24,614 injured as of August 2024, highlighting the scale of the humanitarian crisis, affecting social cohesion and urban recovery

The analysis of the cited sources shows that the post-war recovery of Ukraine requires a comprehensive approach, covering economic, environmental, social and humanitarian aspects, which are the basis for effective city branding. The research emphasizes the critical need for attracting investment, «green» recovery and psychosocial support to form a competitive urban identity. The estimated losses (\$486 billion for recovery, \$4.2 billion in environmental losses) indicate the need to coordinate branding policies with the restoration of infrastructure and social cohesion. Based on the analyzed sources, the following main groups of consequences of the war can be distinguished:

- impact on physical infrastructure: the war has caused extensive destruction to Ukraine's physical infrastructure: residential buildings, transport networks and critical utility systems such as power and water supply have been destroyed or damaged. This has disrupted the functioning of cities, disrupted access to basic services and undermined the fundamental elements of urban life. Restoring these assets is a top priority for creating a comfortable urban environment and creating a platform for city branding that demonstrates resilience and modernity, as well as for creating a convincing image of the city as safe, sustainable and development-oriented.

- consequences for economic recovery: the conflict has caused a catastrophic economic downturn: a significant decline in GDP, massive disruptions in trade chains and the destruction of industrial capacity. Financial constraints, exacerbated by labor shortages due to emigration and mobilization, are creating obstacles to recovery.

- environmental impacts: the war has caused an environmental crisis, with widespread air, water and soil pollution from infrastructure destruction, industrial emissions and deliberate actions such as dam collapses. These impacts have led to ecosystem degradation, reduced agricultural productivity and threats to public health.

- consequences for socio-humanitarian challenges: the humanitarian toll of the war is enormous: millions of people have been forced to flee their homes, access to education and healthcare has been severely disrupted, and the crisis has led to widespread mental health problems among civilians and veterans. Social fragmentation and loss of community cohesion further complicate the recovery process.

- governance implications and risks to trust: the war exposed vulnerabilities in the governance system, including institutional inefficiencies and corruption risks, which undermined public trust and complicated recovery processes.

The identified challenges and consequences in the infrastructure, economic, environmental, socio-humanitarian and management spheres are directly related to potential branding strategies for cities and territories.

Table 3 systematizes how city and territory branding can be a public policy tool, provided it is properly integrated into post-war recovery policies.

Table 3
Branding as a tool of public policy in the context of post-war recovery

Areas of post-war recovery	Challenges of post-war recovery	The role of branding as a public policy tool in overcoming the challenges of post-war recovery
Infrastructure recovery	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - large-scale physical destruction; - loss of industrial and transport potential; - lack of social infrastructure; - financial dependence and investment needs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - developing a city brand that emphasizes transparency, strategic planning, and effective public governance can convince investors and donors to support recovery projects; - integrating infrastructure renewal into the city's image emphasizes recovery as a symbol of resilience and progress, strengthening the trust of the population and international partners; - by positioning the brand as sustainable and promising, politicians encourage the private sector to participate in the recovery, aligning recovery goals with a long-term development vision
Economic consequences	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - significant costs for the restoration of the economy and infrastructure; - dependence on international financial assistance; - high defense spending; - unemployment and labor shortage; - inflation and monetary policy; - long-term stability risks 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - using branding strategies to communicate a long-term economic vision that promotes domestic and foreign investment. Public policies that stimulate entrepreneurship, ensure efficient use of resources, and support new sectors can be integrated into the brand narrative, signaling a stable environment rich in opportunities; - creating an image of the city as a center of opportunity and an increased quality of life helps retain skilled workers and attract a new workforce, strengthening confidence in long-term stability
Environmental consequences	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - large-scale environmental pollution; - destruction of forests and natural ecosystems; - risks of radiation contamination; - financial pressure and the need for international support; - destruction of nature reserves 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - branding can highlight environmental cleanup and sustainable practices as central elements of a city's new identity. Government policies aimed at creating green infrastructure, pollution control, and the use of renewable energy become an integral part of the city's brand, shaping a global image of responsible governance and compliance with international environmental standards; - by demonstrating compliance with international agreements and best practices, the brand strengthens the trust of donors, environmental NGOs, and «green» investors; - integrating environmental improvement and nature conservation into the city's brand identity builds a sense of public pride and demonstrates the priority of sustainable development
Humanitarian and social consequences	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - human losses due to hostilities among the military and civilian population; - mass migration (internal and external); - trauma, need for reintegration and mental health support; - lack of access to food, water and medical care for millions; - problems of reintegration of displaced persons 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - emphasizing state measures in the social sphere, programs of psychosocial support and reintegration of affected groups demonstrate concern for all segments of the population; - a strong city brand highlights community initiatives, improvements in healthcare and education, strengthening trust and social cohesion; - through transparent communication of needs and recovery strategies, the city brand promotes support from NGOs, philanthropists, and international organizations, optimizing the provision of assistance
Governance and cohesion implications	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - social fragmentation and loss of trust in communities; - geopolitical instability; - corruption risks 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - public communication of anti-corruption measures, accountability mechanisms, and inclusive decision-making processes creates an image of reliable and stable governance; - a carefully crafted brand unites diverse groups, emphasizing cultural heritage, shared values, and comprehensive public policies that restore social connections and trust in institutions; - a stable narrative about effective governance and institutional integrity of the city convinces foreign partners, investors, and neighboring states, reducing geopolitical tensions and increasing the city's global status

The table presents the challenges and consequences of the post-war recovery of Ukrainian cities, as well as the role of branding as a tool of state policy in the following areas: infrastructure, economy, environment, humanitarian and social consequences, and governance. The results of the analysis show that branding, if effectively implemented, performs the function of an integrator between different areas of recovery: infrastructure, economy, environment, socio-humanitarian and governance. It allows transforming large-scale destruction and crisis phenomena into strategic opportunities, forming a single narrative of trust, resilience and modernization. In this context, branding acts not only as a means of communication, but also as a policy tool that can reconcile the interests of the state, communities, investors and international partners, ensuring the consistency and effectiveness of the recovery processes.

Branding strategies can be seen as tools that combine recovery goals with long-term development objectives. For example, by highlighting sustainable practices and modern infrastructure, cities can restore trust among residents and attract international

support. Similarly, the use of a strong brand identity can increase public trust, foster civic engagement, and position cities as centers of opportunity and innovation.

It is worth noting that scholars in the field of public administration consider place branding as a public policy area. The work «Place marketing as governance strategy: An assessment of obstacles in place marketing and their effects on attracting target groups» (Eshuis, Braun, and Klijn (2013)) shows how municipalities integrate place marketing initiatives into broader governance processes to attract investors, residents, and visitors, effectively introducing branding into the political agenda [15]. Hereźniak and Anders - Morawska (2015), in their work «City brand strategy evaluation: In search of effectiveness indicators», argue that developing clear, measurable indicators for a city brand strategy is not just a marketing measure, but a basic component of public governance, ensuring that branding efforts are aligned with municipal goals and that their effectiveness can be assessed [17]. Eshuis and Edwards (2013), in their study «Place marketing as governance strategy: An assessment of obstacles in place marketing and their effects on attracting target groups» [15], emphasize that place branding functions as a new governance tool, linking branding activities with democratic legitimacy, thereby positioning branding as a legitimate and necessary element of the urban political and governance process.

Place branding is seen as a governance strategy in which public authorities build relationships with residents to develop civic participation and social capital. This is generally consistent with the value model of citizen-government relations proposed by Smith and Huntsman (1997), which is characterized by high levels of engagement, decentralization, democracy, participation, and co-creation of public value, which involves partnership, co-investment, shared interests, collaboration, and exchange among citizens [32]. By analogy with participatory branding, citizens should be at the center of public administration.

The study «Strengthening the city's reputation in the age of cities: An insight in the city branding theory» [10] emphasizes that city branding is not just an advertising activity; it is a strategic tool of public governance that combines urban identity, economic policy and participatory democracy to stimulate development and sustainability.

In the processes of post-war urban recovery in Ukraine, the integration of branding into state policy can contribute to increasing the competitiveness of cities if it is aligned with the recovery policy, investment strategy, and real changes in the urban environment.

Given that public policy tends to focus on long-term planning, the use of branding will allow for a strategic approach. Place branding as a tool of public policy for post-war recovery allows for:

- effectively allocate resources, ensuring targeted funding and efforts;
- increase accountability and transparency of both the public administration system as a whole and the management of budgetary resources;
- strengthen public trust and openness;
- to enhance citizen participation, promoting inclusivity and a shared sense of ownership among residents.

Mikhails analyzes the use of branding as a public policy tool Potapovs M. (2024) in his work «Place branding: Is it public policy, or isn't it?» [29]. The author explores the question of whether place branding, in particular nation branding, should be classified as public policy. The researcher argues that most place branding efforts are initiated and implemented by governments with specific goals, such as improving reputation or attracting investment. The study reveals problems in the policy cycle of national branding, in particular, the limited role of prior research and the lack of systematic evaluation. In particular, one of the important problems is the possibility of bureaucratic obstacles and delays inherent in public policy processes. The dynamic nature of place branding as a rapidly evolving field can make it difficult to adapt to structured and formalized procedures typical of public policy.

The rigid structures and rules that characterize public policy can also hinder the flexibility needed for innovative and adaptive approaches to place branding. Furthermore, the broad involvement of different stakeholders in public policy processes can lead to conflicting priorities and lengthy decision-making, which reduces the flexibility needed to respond effectively to changing circumstances. The institutional nature of public policy can hinder the creativity and agility that are often critical to successful place branding.

Given the bureaucratic and institutional barriers identified in Mikhails's Potapovs study, as well as the specifics of the post-war recovery of Ukrainian cities, it is advisable to separately consider the difficulties that arise at different stages of the formation and implementation of branding policy.

In his work, Mikhails Potapovs argues that place branding should be considered as a public policy, providing a structured approach to its development, implementation and evaluation, ensuring coherence with broader public policy goals, long-term planning, resource allocation, transparency, accountability and citizen participation. For Ukraine, considering branding as a public policy tool is not only theoretical, but also practical, as post-war recovery requires long-term planning, coordination of actions and agreement on decisions between different actors. City branding, as an «integrator between different spheres of recovery», must purposefully address the identified gaps in policy development in order to realize its potential.

Table 4 systematizes the key barriers that may complicate the formation and implementation of branding policies in the context of post-war recovery of Ukrainian cities. This analysis reflects both general institutional barriers (e.g., rigid regulatory frameworks and insufficient role of scientific research) and specifics of interaction with local communities, budget planning, and performance monitoring that are critical for successful city branding in today's environment. (Table 4).

Table 4
Challenges of integrating branding into the state policy of post-war urban recovery in Ukraine

Policy development stage	Challenges identified in Mikhaïls' Potapovs work	Ukraine's need	Overcoming challenges
Agenda setting	Limited prior research, prioritization of branding options (e.g. tourism vs. investment) without assessing the real need for branding, ignoring the possibility of maintaining the «status quo» and lack of holistic understanding	Ukraine faces unprecedented and multidimensional challenges in the areas of physical infrastructure, economy, environment, and socio-humanitarian dimensions. For war-torn cities, the status quo is not an option	Introducing mandatory interdisciplinary preliminary studies for city branding initiatives that go beyond a simple campaign justification. The studies should deeply assess the specific needs and unique challenges of each Ukrainian city or region, based on detailed damage assessments. Developing a city branding agenda based on a holistic understanding of the cultural, socio-economic, geopolitical and environmental factors of the post-conflict context. This will ensure that branding strategies are focused on addressing fundamental issues (e.g. mental health, environmental degradation, economic recovery) rather than just superficial image building. Focusing research on how branding can best facilitate recovery, for example by identifying priority sectors for attracting investment or shaping narratives of social cohesion and psychological recovery
Formulation and design	«Empty» (universal in a general way), unambitious policies due to compromises, lack of predictive impact assessments, and unclear cause-and-effect relationships with unfounded indicators that undermine policy effectiveness	Recovery requires large-scale and coordinated investment and rebuilding trust. Policies must be effective and measurable to attract and sustain international support	Mandatory robust impact assessments for all proposed city branding policies. Such assessments should clearly demonstrate how specific branding actions will lead to measurable outcomes directly linked to Ukraine's recovery goals. Development of specific, ambitious and clearly defined city branding policies, avoiding dilution through trade-offs, with a focus on the transformative potential of branding in rebuilding resilient cities. Justification of all quantitative indicators, clearly explaining their cause-and-effect relationship with the branding policy
Acceptance – prioritizing evidence, transparency, and alternative options	Decision-making based on political priorities, lack of alternative approaches to branding, which limits opportunities for inclusive, citizen-oriented policies, and lack of transparency due to overly broad and vague goals	Recovery requires sustained, consolidated and credible governance. Decisions must be transparent to counter corruption risks and maintain the trust of society and international partners	Basing the adoption of city branding policies on evidence and expert analysis, not just on short-term political priorities. This will ensure long-term strategic alignment with recovery goals. Presenting clear policy alternatives at the adoption stage, allowing for comparative analysis of their potential advantages and disadvantages in a post-conflict context. Ensuring full transparency of policy documents, detailing specific actions, responsible parties, timeframes and indicators, going beyond general objectives
Implementation	Low level of coordination between numerous stakeholders, lack of systematic control and interim monitoring mechanisms, lack of transparency and accountability	The recovery process involves a large number of stakeholders. Trust and accountability are key to the effective use of significant resources	Establish transparent mechanisms for multi-level coordination (vertical and horizontal) in the field of city branding among all stakeholders to prevent fragmentation of efforts and conflicting strategies. Introduce systematic monitoring mechanisms and regular, mandatory interim assessments to track progress, identify new challenges and timely adjust strategies, ensuring alignment with recovery goals. Establish a strict framework for transparency and accountability during the implementation phase
Evaluation	The complexity of assessing the impact of branding, which requires subtle, city-specific assessment methods, limited/unsystematic summary assessments, and a lack of independent audits	Given the scale of the challenges and investments, continuous learning and demonstration of effectiveness are key to sustainable development and maintaining international support	Develop and implement holistic evaluation practices adapted to the unique, multidimensional nature of post-war city branding, taking into account its interrelationship with infrastructure, economic, environmental and social policies. Implement systematic, comprehensive summative evaluations of all city branding policies to comprehensively analyze outcomes and impacts. Establish regular independent financial audits and evaluations of the results of city branding initiatives

Source: adapted by the author [29]

The table aligns the challenges of branding policy formulation, identified by Potapovs, with the needs of post-war recovery in Ukraine. It emphasizes that for effective and sustainable recovery, it is crucial to consider city branding as a powerful public policy tool capable of addressing the identified gaps. In particular, at the stage of shaping the agenda for Ukraine, the «need» for city branding focused on recovery is undeniable, given the unprecedented destruction and multidimensional challenges. Therefore, the emphasis should be shifted from the question of «whether to brand» to the question of «how to brand effectively». At the stage of formulation, city branding policy should be specific, ambitious and evidence-based, with a clearly defined link between measures and expected recovery outcomes. Decision-making on city branding should be transparent, evidence-based and consider alternatives, going beyond short-term political priorities. Effective implementation of branding policies requires robust coordination, systematic monitoring, and unwavering transparency and accountability to manage diverse stakeholders and large resources. The assessment of city branding should be holistic, systematic, and independently verified to facilitate ongoing policy adaptation and ensure responsible and efficient use of resources for recovery. The systemic integration of these approaches allows us to view city branding not as a collection of individual promotional activities, but as an accountable public policy tool related to the planning, coordination, monitoring, and evaluation of post-conflict recovery processes. Such an approach will directly contribute to the country's post-conflict recovery, strengthen domestic and international trust, and ultimately build a sustainable and competitive future for its cities and territories.

7. Conclusions and prospects for further research

The article analyzes the relationship between city branding and post-war recovery through a review of the works of scholars. It is determined that both Ukrainian and foreign scholars identify and research various elements of city branding that can also be applied in the context of post-war recovery. Since 2012, academic works have been paying increasing attention to post-conflict and post-crisis cities, which emphasizes the importance of branding as a tool for such recovery.

The analysis of annual reports and studies of the consequences of the war in Ukraine confirmed that the post-war recovery of Ukraine requires a comprehensive approach that covers economic, environmental, social and humanitarian aspects, which is the foundation for effective branding of cities. The consequences of the war have negatively affected all spheres of public life, in particular, physical infrastructure, economic recovery, the state of the environment, the socio-humanitarian sphere, governance and cohesion. Table 3 examines in detail how the city and territory branding system can act as a tool for overcoming the challenges of post-war recovery, provided that it is effectively integrated into the state policy of post-war recovery of cities and territories of Ukraine. This allowed us to determine that, provided that it is effectively integrated, branding plays the role of an integrator between different spheres of recovery - infrastructural, economic, environmental, socio-humanitarian and governance. The bureaucratic and institutional barriers and challenges outlined by Mikhaïls Potapovs were also considered, in the political cycle of territorial branding, and identifies how they can complicate the formation and implementation of branding policy in the context of post-war recovery of Ukraine at each stage of policy development. In particular, a list of measures to overcome these challenges and barriers is identified.

Therefore, the systemic integration of these approaches allows us to shift efforts in the field of branding cities in Ukraine from separate promotional activities to the level of a strategic, accountable and effective instrument of state policy. Such an approach will directly contribute to the post-war recovery of the country, strengthening domestic and international trust and shaping a sustainable and competitive future for Ukrainian cities and territories.

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