



# Place Branding Assessment through Factors Affecting Iconic Value in Erbil City of Iraq

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Uniqueness; Familiarity;

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value; Erbil city.

## Abstract

Iconic buildings are the key branding instrument for architecture. Even their relationship is still in the formative stage. This article attempts to establish a plausible relationship between iconic buildings and place branding. The primary purpose of the study is to develop a framework for analyzing the link between the two concepts in Erbil city in Iraq. And to provide a satisfying response to the question (What appropriate iconic factors should be considered for boosting branding value in Erbil city? ), a framework was developed by conducting a comprehensive literature search for factors, that affect iconic buildings for enhancing a place's branding value then, using a questionnaire and a case study. As a result, the study can determine three factors among six factors (Uniqueness, Prestige, Legibility, Memorability, Style, and Familiarity) that are most essential for evaluating Erbil's brand value. The conclusion of the article emphasizes the significance of such factors and their roles in each type of icon in Erbil city (historical and contemporary) for strengthening place branding.

**Discipline:** Architecture.

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## 1 Introduction

"In the setting of global competitiveness, branding architectural objects and presenting iconic building has grown from a "trend" to an increasing demand." [1]. This comment dates from the mid-twentieth century. [2], with the development of "iconic buildings," which are considered the most notable structures for branding a place [3].

Place branding serves as a foundation for establishing a better image of the city, economic growth, and attracting visitors, but it also "serves as a foundation for city inhabitants to identify

with their city" [4]. Erbil city saw significant changes as a result of the obvious massive economic expansion and development that occurred in the previous era [5]. This has an impact on an increasing number of key contemporary landmark buildings. Aside from that, Erbil has several traditional vernacular notable structures due to its rich history and heritage significance. [5]. This study investigates the most appropriate factors that are usable for enhancing Erbil city's image. It gives a framework for assessing effective factors that contribute to increasing iconic value. To find an acceptable answer to the question of (what appropriate factors should be considered for improving iconic-brand value in buildings based in Erbil city).

## 2 Literature Review

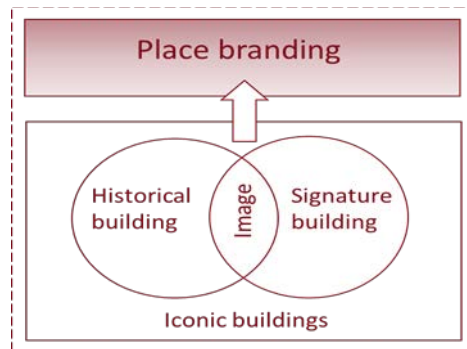
### 2.1 Iconic Buildings as an Assessment Tool for Place Branding

Architecture has been used as a symbol or image ever since the beginning of civilizations. [6]. Cultural buildings and places have a significant role in branding architecture [3] [7]. For instance: in Egypt, the pyramids were built to display the power of their kings. Athens' Parthenon and Rome's coliseums are two iconic architectural buildings that were famous for their monumentality and for introducing new urban structures to urban areas. However, as [12] investigated, innovation and modern technologies are other critical approaches to creating new iconic buildings for city branding strategies. It is important to emphasize; that architecture does not currently include social features. Instead focuses on the search for a global aesthetic [8]. According to past research, the most significant approach to architectural place branding, addressed in this article (modern and historical) approaches are visualized in Figure 1 [9, 10]. Cities all around the world are not the same; rather, they are different [11]. Each city has its personality, shaped by its inhabitants and other social and cultural influences [12]. In this regard, legendary Ignoring local culture in favor of "global images" will result in pictures of the city itself, which will not represent any local culture in the end. City governors should be familiar with their city's features and ideals. Otherwise, cities' images would lose their appeal to tourists [13].



Figure 1: Branding strategies (Rehan, 2013)

This study attempted to compare only two strategies for achieving branding evaluations, as shown in Figure 2.



**Figure 2:** relation between iconic buildings and place branding.

## 2.2 Branding and Place Branding Strategies

Branding is a social phenomenon based on target consumers' perceptions, which are impacted by the physical and communicative features of a particular place. [14]. There is no clear definition of place branding; nevertheless, it can be stated that: Place branding is "a collection of physical and socio-psychological qualities that are distinctive from competition and consist of a unique blend of functional features and symbolic values" [15]. According to [16], place branding is a way of increasing "the appeal of the city; the key thing is to build city recognition." According to [17], "city branding is more than just location promotion since it is used in some cities to rebuild and redefine their image." "(Place branding' is the process of "establishing a relationship between individuals and the image of their city. The goal of place branding is to connect the image of a space with its "real identity" [18].

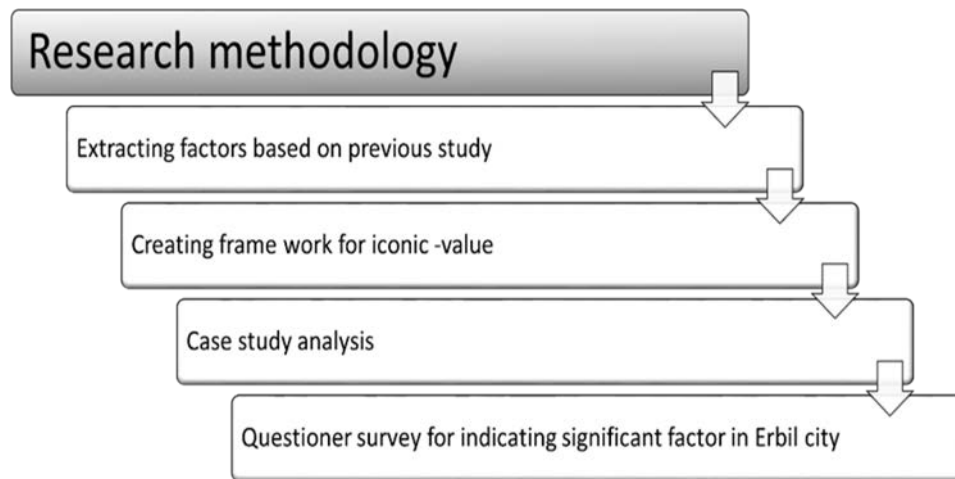
## 2.3 Theories Related to Architectural Branding and Iconic Buildings

To examine the presenting subject, the following concepts and theories are being used: A Theory of Place: This will cover the notion of critical regionalism [19]. This contributes to the environment's meaning. Semiotics and Symbolism are founded on the concept of linguistics. Semiotics will be used against Architecture in this text as a "sign system." This was referred to as "Semiotics" by Peirce and "Semiology" by Saussure [20]. Identity: This is significant since it deals with many forms of identity, such as national identity, cultural identity, and social identity. Individualism, glorification, and power are all aspects of identity. These investigate the reasons why individuals use architecture to increase their power and status to control and frighten others [21]. Psychological Perception: This is an essential subject because it seeks to understand how individuals see objects like buildings and how their backgrounds, cultural differences, experiences, and memories impact their senses and, as a result, how they experience buildings. This is crucial for icons because their symbolism conveys strong signals and, as a result, society perceives them in certain ways and anthropology [22].

## 3 Method

A methodology starts with a literature review on architectural branding. Its origins, techniques, and other factors impact its iconic value. Then, a model for analyzing the significance of factors was developed based on the previous literature review. This action is conducted, using

case studies and questionnaires. The flowchart in Figure 3 explains the steps of the research method.



**Figure 3:** methodology steps. (source author).

### 3.1 Factors that Affect Iconic Value

Based on previous related studies, the following factors are the most important in creating iconic value for improving place branding.

**Table 1:** Analyzed result

Factors	Definitions	Reference
Uniqueness	The characteristic of being distinct from other forms of its sort or of being unique or features the distinctiveness associated with local tradition is a possible source of fresh ideas and creativity that may be translated in a novel way, complementing the current look of the space and giving it an individualized nature.	[6] [7], [8]
Prestige	Happiness is associated with engaging with "branded" architecture, providing a sense of pride, importance, and respect.	[7], [9]
Legibility	Define legibility as the features of a building that aid in the creation of cognitive maps and guide residents.	[7], [10]
Memorability	System of symbolic and emotional values resulting from connection with the location's culture, tradition, history, and collective memory. Memorability is a crucial component of architectural stylistic autonomy.	[7] , [11]
Style	The desire to draw attention by being "in style" At first instinct, the need to separate oneself from one's surroundings is a motivation that creates fashion.	[7] [12]
Familiarity	Familiarity is important for the social acceptability of architecture since it evokes residents' deep attachments to homes, streets, areas, and cities.	[7] , [13]

### 3.2 Case Study

the study focuses on the role of iconic buildings in place branding. The research was limited to the form of iconic buildings. The following case studies are successful examples of iconic buildings in Erbil city, which were chosen after an interview with a group of specialists.

### 3.2.1 Case No. One: ERBIL -Grand Bazar

Grand Bazar is located in the heart of town, south of the citadel, which was founded in the early 13th century AD. The various alleyways that encircle Kayseri led to it. Customers enter through a network of small pathways that connect the stores.

A detailed building survey and damage analysis were performed, and a preservation-compliant restoration plan was developed as part of a collaborative project led by the Kurdistan Department of Antiquities in collaboration with the TU Berlin and the German Department of Archaeology Institute, as shown in Figure 4.

#### ERBIL -Grand Bazar visual characteristics

ERBIL -Grand Bazar is considered a historical landmark as well as a symbolic building in Erbil City, and the entire location includes several shops. Vaulted alley networks, semicircular and Islamic arches, and various vernacular strategies can be seen. The Bazaar Building stands out from the surrounding structures due to its identical shop units and barrel-vaulted walkways [14].



Figure 4: Erbil grand bazaar(source author).

### 3.2.2 Case No. Two: ERBIL – Choli Minaret

The Mudhafaria Minaret is located in the western part of Erbil, Kurdistan, Iraq. The minaret's height is 36 meters (118 feet). designed and built between 1190 and 1232 A.D. (586 and 630 AH) by the Turcoman prince of Erbil during the reign of Saladin. The upper part of the minaret deviates from the vertical axis by 65 cm, posing a significant risk of collapse [15].

#### ERBIL – Choli Minaret visual characteristic

The minaret consists of an octagonal base and a cylindrical shaft with a pointed top. Between the foundation and the shaft, there is a balcony. In each of its eight corners, there is a niche with pointed arches made of baked bricks. On the eastern side of the octagonal base, a door leads to the minaret steps and the balcony from the balcony parapet's twenty-four small niches. Stairs can be seen leading down into the cylindrical shaft, which had previously led to the second balcony, which has now been demolished [33] as depicted in Figure 5.

### 3.2.3 Jalil Khayat masjid

The Jalil Khayat Mosque is Erbil's largest Sunni Islamic masjid. The construction goes back to 2005, by Jalil Khayat. After his death, his sons finished it in 2007. The mosque is 15,000 square meters and is located in the heart of Erbil. It has a large hall that is 1,200 m<sup>2</sup> and 45 m high, with a capacity of 1,500 to 2,000 people.

#### Jalil Khayat masjid's visual characteristic

The Masjid was decorated both on the outside and inside. The walls are made of bricks, while the upper roof is made up of multiple domes with a larger dome on top. The minarets are 65-meter-stand near the mosque and can be seen from everywhere in Erbil. The designs are reminding of the Muhammad Ali Mosque in Cairo and the Blue Mosque in Istanbul. It has been recognized as one of the world's most spectacular mosque layouts. "The masjid composition relies on Islamic architecture and al-Abbasid design excluding the domes, the main dome is 48 meters (157 feet) tall, 20 meters (66 feet) in circumference, and is encircled by four half domes and twelve quarter domes. as shown in (Figure 6).



**Figure 5:** Erbil grand bazaar(Jalil Kahayan masjid).



**Figure 6:** Erbil minaret.

### 3.2.4 ERBIL –Family mall

Family Mall, ideally located on Erbil's 100 Meter Street near the Family Fun amusement park, is one of the city's newest and largest shopping complexes. The Mall is a modern construction with a floor area of roughly 120,000 square meters (1,291,670 sq. ft.). There are 130 various sorts of shops in the mall,

#### Family Mall visual characteristic

The creation of a family mall utilizing glass and steel enclosure technology. Architects design and construct weather-protected structures in family shopping malls that permit visual transparency and daylight access to outdoor spaces. Modern design for the entire project the steel structure is analogous to the Erbil Minaret and is placed above the malls to distinguish it from the other malls., as shown in (Figure 7).



**Figure 7:** Erbil family mall (source: trip advisor).

### 3.2.5 ERBIL –Golan tower

The Golan project aspires to be Erbil, Iraq's famous economic center. Two office towers on a commercial platform with retail and restaurants compose the project. Because of its prominent location in Erbil's business area, the project strives to stand out.

#### **Golan tower's visual characteristic**

To create a distinct aesthetic appeal, the towers are equipped with a remarkable three-dimensional curtain wall coated with motifs that are strongly related to Kurdistan's culture. The patterns on the 3D curtain wall not only make a magnificent appearance from the outside but also provide a unique experience on the inside while providing shade from the sun's heat and brightness, as shown in Figure 8.



**Figure 8:** Gulen Tower.

### 3.2.6 ERBIL –Alton masjid

The Alton Mosque in Erbil is A superb contemporary mosque on Bnaslawa Old Rd in Kurdistan that employs clean, pure line composition, notably in its minaret. The obstructed present theme is used in the minaret in several techniques.

#### **Alton masjid visual characteristics**

In contrast to other mosques, its design is visually distinct. Considering the distinctive design. The minarets were fashioned in their purest form. The Masjid was designed in a modern

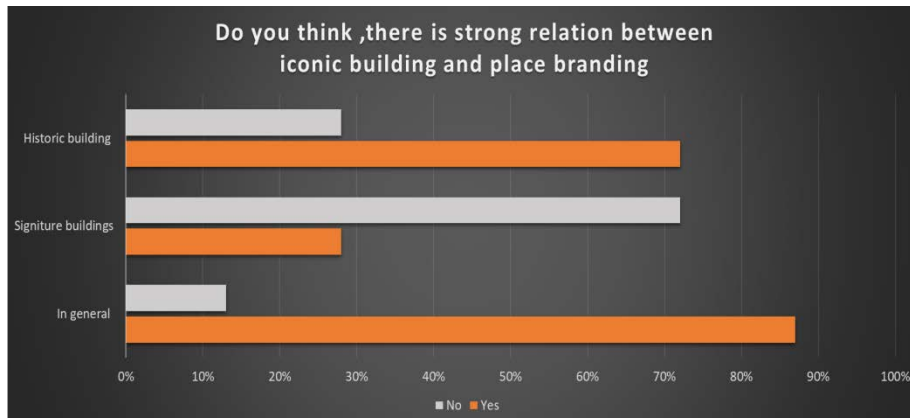
style. The walls are made of white marble with small detailing. as shown in Figure 9.



**Figure 9:** Alton Masjid exterior view (source [34]).

## 4 Result and Discussion

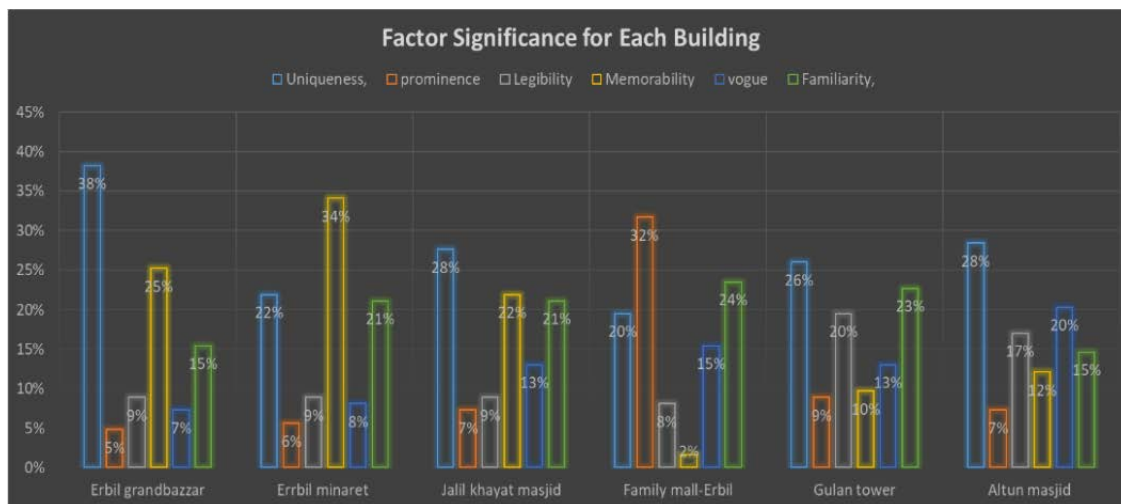
The questionnaire survey was distributed to 123 participants (architectural domain specialists, instructors, and designers). First, to explore the influence each case study has on Erbil's place branding, based on their (Contemporary and Historic) categorization, as shown in Figure 10. Then, to determine the most influential factors for Erbil's iconic building value among the six factors (uniqueness, prestige, legibility, memorability, style, and familiarity), which are indicated based on previous research as shown in Figure 11.



**Figure 10:** A bar graph illustrating the relationship between iconic value and place branding (source author).

According to the survey results, 89 percent of respondents believed that there was a strong correlation between branding and iconic projects. For highlighting this connection in comparisons between historic and contemporary icons. Only 28% of respondents believed that contemporary iconic buildings played a role in architectural branding, while 72% believed that historic icons played a significant role in place branding. Figure10 depicts this.





**Figure 11:** A bar chart depicting the significant factors that influence the value of an iconic brand.

Regarding the effective factors, responses indicated that: Uniqueness, familiarity, and memorability have a significant effect on the iconic value of branding in Erbil City, whereas legibility, prestige, and style are less important as shown in Table 2. This result is clearly expressed only in historic buildings rather than in contemporary case studies. which indicates that: in general, building design does not reach a level that expresses all factors; in historic cases, all buildings follow the same factor, whereas in contemporary cases, each building focuses on a different factor, and it demonstrates their random design strategies.

The study discovered two opposite types of iconic buildings within the body of Erbil city (Heritage and Contemporary Icons). Based on the research findings, heritage icons play an important role in the branding of Erbil city. However, modern structures that make use of cutting-edge concepts and technology can still contribute to Erbil's image as a modern metropolis. In addition, the aforementioned findings enabled us to identify important factors that boost Erbil's branding based on heritage icons (Uniqueness, familiarity, and memorability), as shown in Table 2.

**Table 2:** the factor significance percentage

Feature that improve iconic value of an architectural brand	Erbil - Grand bazaar		Erbil minaret		Jalil khayat masjid		Gulan tower -Erbil		Family mall -Erbil		Altun masjid	
	Number of indications	Feature significance	Number of indications	Feature significance	Number of indications	Feature significance	Number of indications	Feature significance	Number of indications	Feature significance	Number of indications	Feature significance
Uniqueness,	47	38%	27	22%	34	28%	24	20%	32	26%	35	28%
Prestige	6	5%	7	6%	9	7%	39	32%	11	9%	9	7%
Legibility,	11	9%	11	9%	11	9%	10	8%	24	20%	21	17%
Memorability	31	25%	42	34%	27	22%	2	2%	12	10%	15	12%
style	9	7%	10	8%	16	13%	19	15%	16	13%	25	20%
Familiarity,	19	15%	26	21%	26	21%	29	24%	28	23%	18	15%

## 5 Conclusion

Place branding was done by utilizing various methods. The proper option should be based on the local features and resources. The most important aspect of this concept is to develop suitable strategies for branding A city. The association between iconic architecture and city branding is still in the formative stages. It is known as an effective strategy for improving city branding, especially

in places that have a strong historical background and potential for creating contemporary creative buildings, such as Erbil city. Iconic structures act as a city's logo and serve to attract tourists. Consequently, visually appealing icons play an essential role in marketing the city.

Based on a case study analysis and a questionnaire survey, this article demonstrates that there is a significant connection between place branding and iconic buildings. The fact is that; historic iconic buildings play a significant role rather than contemporary iconic buildings in Erbil city. By analyzing historical cases such as (Grand Bazaar Erbil, Jalil Khayat masjid, and Choli Minaret), it can be concluded that (memorability, uniqueness, and familiarity) are the most important factors in Erbil city, for enhancing branding value. However, this indication cannot be demonstrated by analyzing contemporary cases (Golan Tower, family mall, Alton masjid). In contemporary case studies, each building focuses on a different factor. For instance, in Golan Tower, in addition to its uniqueness and familiarity, Prestige is a significant factor, whereas the most effective factor in a family mall relates to building legibility. Therefore, this study highlighted that ((Uniqueness, Familiarity, and Memorability)) are the most essential aspects of icon construction that contribute to enhancing a place's branding value in Erbil city, and those factors can be seen in historic icons. The adaptability of branding strategies could transform local disadvantages into advantages. The leaders of a city should know what makes their city special and what it stands for, and they should choose branding strategies that work for them.

## 6 Availability of Data and Material

Data can be made available by contacting the corresponding author.

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