

## SUSTAINING PLACE IDENTITY IN CULTURAL AND CREATIVE CLUSTERS: A SYSTEMATIC REVIEW

### SUSTENTANDO A IDENTIDADE LOCAL EM NÚCLEOS CULTURAIS E CRIATIVOS: UMA REVISÃO SISTEMÁTICA

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#### Abstract

Cultural and Creative Clusters (CCCs) are increasingly recognized as arenas of urban innovation, cultural transmission, and social transformation. Yet, existing research has often underplayed the role of Place Identity (PI) in sustaining cultural continuity and supporting innovative ecosystems, thereby limiting the scope of scholarly perspectives. To address this gap, this study conducted a systematic review following the PRISMA 2020 checklist, screening 218 publications from 2021 to 2025 and selecting 23 representative articles that capture the latest advances in PI–CCC scholarship. Scientometric analysis examined publication years, geographic distribution, methodological approaches, regional types, and key concepts, while thematic analysis identified core research dimensions and thematic orientations. The findings reveal that PI is constituted through three interdependent dimensions, Material, Experiential, and

#### Resumo

*Os Clusters Culturais e Criativos (CCCs) são cada vez mais reconhecidos como arenas de inovação urbana, transmissão cultural e transformação social. No entanto, as pesquisas existentes muitas vezes subestimam o papel da Identidade de Lugar (IL) na manutenção da continuidade cultural e no apoio a ecossistemas inovadores, limitando, assim, o escopo das perspectivas acadêmicas. Para abordar essa lacuna, este estudo realizou uma revisão sistemática seguindo o checklist PRISMA 2020, analisando 218 publicações de 2021 a 2025 e selecionando 23 artigos representativos que capturam os avanços mais recentes nos estudos sobre IL e CCCs. A análise cientométrica examinou os anos de publicação, a distribuição geográfica, as abordagens metodológicas, os tipos regionais e os conceitos-chave, enquanto a análise temática identificou as principais dimensões de pesquisa e orientações temáticas.*



Constructive, that are dynamically articulated in an “Anchored, Felt, and Redefined” coupling process. Comparative analysis further highlights operational mechanisms that stabilize or undermine PI, including governance strategies, heritage preservation and authenticity, accessibility and everyday practices, aesthetic–authenticity relations, image-led renewal, and sensory environments. By consolidating these insights, the study offers a reusable theoretical and methodological toolbox spanning conceptual integration, analytical paradigms, and governance applications, thereby advancing a more systematic and nuanced understanding of PI in CCCs.

**Keywords:** Place Identity. Cultural and Creative Clusters. Urban Cultural Sustainability. Place Attachment. Place-Making. Sustainable Cities and Communities.

*Os resultados revelam que a IL é constituída por três dimensões interdependentes: Material, Experiencial e Construtiva, que são articuladas dinamicamente em um processo de acoplamento “Ancorado, Sentido e Redefinido”. A análise comparativa destaca ainda os mecanismos operacionais que estabilizam ou prejudicam a identidade cultural, incluindo estratégias de governança, preservação e autenticidade do patri-mônio, acessibilidade e práticas cotidianas, relações estética-autenticidade, renovação orientada pela imagem e ambientes sensoriais. Ao consolidar essas percepções, o estudo oferece um conjunto de ferramentas teóricas e metodológicas reutilizáveis que abrangem integração conceitual, paradigmas analíticos e aplicações de governança, promovendo assim uma compreensão mais sistemática e matizada da identidade cultural em aglomerados culturais e criativos.*

**Palavras-chave:** *Identidade do Lugar. Aglomerados Culturais e Criativos. Sustentabilidade Cultural Urbana. Apego ao Lugar. Construção do Lugar. Cidades e Comunidades Sustentáveis.*

## 1 INTRODUCTION

Cultural and Creative Clusters (CCCs) have emerged as a widely adopted local development strategy in diverse urban contexts worldwide (Granpayehvaghei, 2022). They are widely recognized as an important means of fostering urban innovation and cultural revitalization (Chapain, 2020). In addition to promoting the growth of emerging industries and employment opportunities through the creative economy (Sasaki, 2010), CCCs are increasingly serving as platforms for addressing complex urban challenges, with a core focus on preserving and adapting traditions (Yung, 2014). Research shows that the agglomeration effects of creative clusters are most pronounced in areas with the highest degree of functional diversity (Wood, 2015); moreover, cultural and creative industries are not randomly located within cities but are highly sensitive to local “place characteristics” (Wood, 2015). By integrating tangible material assets with intangible cultural heritage such as artifacts, creative hubs, and traditional festivals (Grabher, 2001), CCCs not only strengthen local distinctiveness, evoke place identity, and reinforce

collective memory (Yung, 2014), but also generate profound cultural, social, and environmental values that transcend conventional economic metrics. As such, CCCs have become important laboratories for urban transformation, cultural transmission, and the negotiation of contemporary social identities.

As CCCs adapt to rapidly changing urban contexts, the question of how to sustain and renew PI has become central to debates on social resilience and cultural sustainability. Unlike static models, PI is now widely understood as a flexible and dynamic process (Bernardo, 2023), continuously shaped by the interplay of cultural memory, economic imperatives, and community practice (Zetter & Butina Watson, 2006). Persistent tensions, however, remain between commodification and preservation, especially when strategies such as tourism or creative industries overshadow local history and collective memory (Boussaa, 2021). Achieving a balance between economic growth and cultural continuity is therefore not only a theoretical challenge but also a pressing governance issue (Chapain, 2020). Recent studies further stress that coherence in PI fosters strong emotional connections, which are crucial for cultivating a sense of ownership and responsibility, both of which drive sustainable urban transformation (Bartolo *et al.*, 2023; Bernardo *et al.*, 2023).

However, despite increased attention to the flexible and negotiated nature of PI, the majority of existing scholarship is still anchored in static spatial contexts, such as heritage districts, historic sites, or rural communities (Zhong *et al.*, 2024; Zhu & Chiou, 2022). Mainstream theoretical frameworks tend to emphasize the strength or “intensity” of PI, often neglecting its substantive content and the heterogeneity of places and populations involved (Bernardo *et al.*, 2023; Kozina *et al.*, 2024). As a result, these approaches frequently fall short in capturing the fluidity, multidimensionality, and innovation-driven dynamics that characterize PI formation in CCCs (Granpayehvaghei & Bonakdar, 2022; Fan *et al.*, 2023). Moreover, the academic understanding of how person–place relations are re-negotiated within rapidly changing, innovation-led urban clusters remains limited (Davis & Wagner 2024). This underscores a significant research gap and highlights the need for integrative, multidimensional frameworks capable of addressing the contested, negotiated, and adaptive character of PI within contemporary creative urban contexts.

In response to these theoretical and empirical gaps, this study presents the first systematic synthesis of PI in CCCs from a fully multidimensional perspective. By

integrating rigorous PRISMA-based literature screening with both quantitative and qualitative thematic analysis, this research (1) maps the current methodological and thematic landscape of international scholarship on PI in CCCs; (2) inductively developing a tripartite analytical framework that incorporates material, experiential, and constructive dimensions while tracing the interactions and migration of variables across them; and (3) Elucidates the complex mechanisms that sustain PI within CCCs. This multidimensional approach not only advances the field beyond fragmented or single-factor models but also yields actionable insights for urban governance and the inclusive management of creative city development. The study thus provides a robust conceptual foundation for future empirical research and comparative analysis, addressing the urgent need for more integrative frameworks in the study of PI transformation.

## **2 LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **2.1 Theoretical evolution and key research directions of place identity in CCCs**

Recent scholarship has reframed PI as a multidimensional construct that extends beyond static associations with heritage or territory, instead positioning it as relational, evolving, and embedded in wider social and cultural processes (Davis & Wagner, 2024; Noaime & Mashary Alnaim, 2023; Chen *et al.*, 2024). Studies show that identity is not sustained solely by material anchors but arises from the integration of physical attributes, emotional involvement, and community-based practices (Zou *et al.*, 2023; Kozina *et al.*, 2024). Research on creative and cultural districts further shows how cultural production, everyday practices, and heritage renewal interact to produce negotiated and multi-layered identities (Jiang, 2025). This recognition of the relational and processual character of identity has also provided the basis for incorporating affective and participatory dimensions, most notably Place attachment (PA) and Placemaking (PM), into analyses of PI. It underscores the need for more integrated frameworks in studies of CCCs (Xu, 2022).

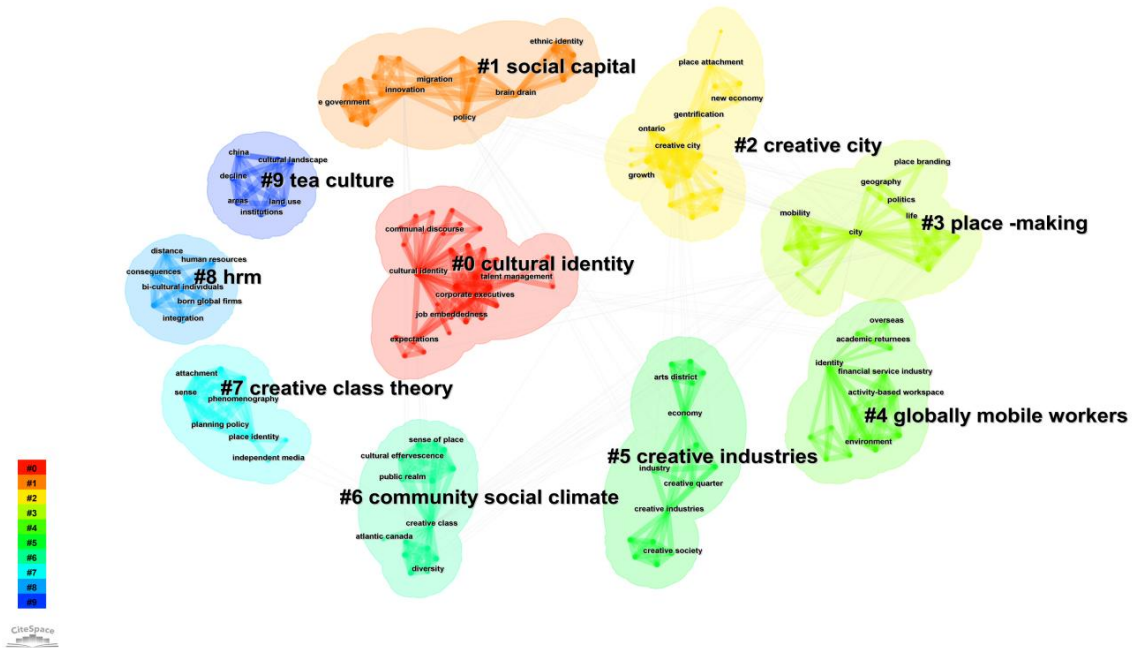
This conceptual broadening has also brought increased attention to the intricate relationships between PI, PA, and PM. PA emphasizes the affective and emotional bonds individuals develop with place through repeated experiences and active community participation (Rollero & De Piccoli, 2010; Gough *et al.*, 2024). In contrast, placemaking highlights the collective and creative processes that transform spaces via participatory,

community-driven initiatives (Hansasooksin & Tontisirin, 2021; Muñiz, 2023). Within CCCs, the interplay of PI, PA, and PM is particularly salient, as identity is continually shaped by the negotiation between personal emotional ties and creative reinterpretation of space (Gough *et al.*, 2024). Despite their close theoretical linkages, however, much of the literature continues to examine these elements in isolation, underscoring the need for a more integrated and systematic analytical paradigm to capture the full complexity of identity transformation in CCCs.

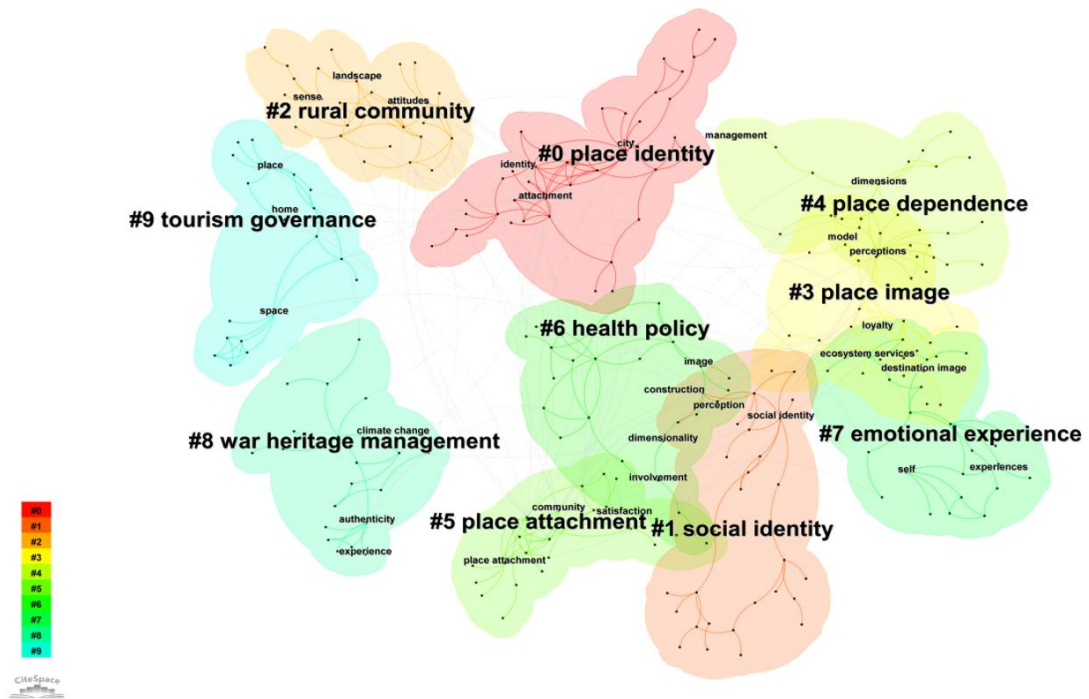
## **2.2 Mapping the knowledge structure: centrality and fragmentation of PI, PA, and PM in CCCs**

Recent knowledge mapping and bibliometric analyses (Figures 1 and 2) demonstrate that PI and PA occupy closely related conceptual spaces within the literature, while PM is increasingly recognized as a key mechanism driving dynamic identity formation in CCCs (Afsari Bajestani *et al.*, 2023; Bernardo *et al.*, 2023). However, despite these emerging connections, the boundaries between PI, PA, and PM remain conceptually blurred, with empirical research often failing to articulate how these elements intersect in practice. As a result, the field continues to exhibit significant thematic fragmentation. It lacks a holistic, multidimensional framework for systematically capturing the interplay of affective, spatial, and creative factors that underpin identity transformation in creative clusters. This ongoing fragmentation further underscores the urgent need for an integrative, analytically robust approach to advance both theoretical understanding and practical application.

**Figure 1**  
*CCCs Research (Citespace)*



**Figure 2**  
*Place Identity Research (Citespace)*



### 2.3 A Multidimensional framework for PI: PI, PM, and PA

Although previous studies have proposed various analytical frameworks for PI, such as individual, social, functional, and environmental dimensions (Bernardo *et al.*, 2023), material and perceptual attributes (Surchi, 2021), and cognitive, affective, and evaluative facets (Belanche, 2021), these approaches have rarely been integrated into a coherent structure within the context of CCCs. To address this gap, this review advances a unified tripartite framework comprising material, experiential, and constructive dimensions. Developed through inductive synthesis of dominant analytical categories across recent scholarship, the framework consolidates diverse theoretical perspectives into a single, systematic model. This integration enables a more nuanced understanding of the complex processes through which PI is formed, negotiated, and transformed in innovation-driven, creative urban environments, while also offering a robust basis for empirical testing and policy application.

The material dimension (M) refers to the tangible and spatial foundations of PI, encompassing architectural forms, urban landscapes, historic landmarks, and public art (Bernardo *et al.*, 2023; Surchi & Nafa, 2021; Zhu & Chiou, 2022). These physical elements operate simultaneously as the structural substrate of the built environment and as symbolic carriers of collective meaning. Their conservation, adaptive reuse, or transformation has a direct and often profound influence on the distinctiveness, authenticity, and temporal continuity of PI (Fan *et al.*, 2023; Sepe, 2018). In CCCs, material attributes are not merely static heritage assets but active components in the ongoing negotiation between preservation, innovation, and socio-spatial change.

The experiential dimension (E) centres on the perceptual, emotional, and mnemonic processes through which individuals and communities relate to place. It encompasses everyday sensory encounters, affective bonds, and the continuity of personal and collective biographies, which serve as core mechanisms in cultivating belonging and identity (Raymond *et al.*, 2010; Chen *et al.*, 2024). Emotional resonance, often rooted in routine practices and familiar spatial settings, anchors the lived experience of PI and extends its scope beyond the material environment to include subjective perceptions and shared social meanings. Within CCCs, these experiential processes are continuously shaped by the interaction between evolving cultural narratives and the rhythms of daily life.

The constructive dimension(C) captures the processes through which PI is actively negotiated, co-produced, and reinterpreted within dynamic, innovation-driven environments. In CCCs, identity formation is characterized by both high generativity and negotiability, rooted in the interplay between historical continuity and the collective agency of multiple stakeholders (Afsari Bajestani *et al.*, 2023; Oktay, 2019). Creative and cultural industries play a pivotal role in this dimension (Zeng, 2020), mobilizing participatory transformation, social capital, and cross-sectoral collaboration to maintain and reshape local identity (Malisiova, 2024), especially under conditions of rapid urban transformation (Oktay, 2019). By foregrounding agency and collaborative meaning-making, the constructive dimension underscores the political and cultural contestations inherent in sustaining PI (Sepe, 2018; Zeng *et al.*, 2020).

The foregoing review shows that research on PI in CCCs remains fragmented in its integration of dimensions and identification of mechanisms. To address this, we adopt a PRISMA-guided sampling strategy to assemble a replicable corpus, combined with a two-stage analytic design: bibliometric mapping to delineate the field and thematic coding to extract M/E/C mechanisms. This design is not intended to pursue procedural completeness, but rather to operationalize the central question of where and how M/E/C factors align or diverge. The following section details the search, screening, and coding procedures.

### 3 METHODOLOGY

This section may be divided by subheadings. It should provide a concise, precise description of the experimental results, their interpretation, and the conclusions that can be drawn.

#### 3.1 Data search process

To translate the identified research gaps into a replicable review design, this study followed the PRISMA 2020 checklist and flow diagram (Moher, 2009) to ensure methodological transparency and reproducibility. Building on the general structure of existing systematic reviews (Bo, 2025), the search and inclusion procedures were tailored to the PI's specific research context within CCCs. The screening criteria encompassed

research domain, thematic relevance, methodological orientation, language, publication status, database coverage, and publication date. The search was conducted between March 3 and May 4, 2025, thereby ensuring that the included studies reflect the most recent developments in the field.

Relevant publications were systematically retrieved from four major international academic databases: Scopus, Taylor & Francis Online, ScienceDirect, and Web of Science. The inclusion of these databases was designed to maximize both the breadth and quality of the literature, ensuring that diverse disciplinary perspectives and high-impact studies were captured. This review specifically targeted research on PI within CCCs, with the publication window set from 2021 to 2025. The search scope was intentionally broadened to encompass studies conducted in different national and regional contexts, thereby reflecting the global diversity and policy relevance of PI in CCCs.

To be included in this systematic review, relevant studies were required to mention “place identity,” “place attachment,” or “placemaking” in the title, keywords, or abstract. In addition, the studies needed to incorporate terms related to CCCs. Given that some articles may use commonly adopted concepts in CCC research, the search string was carefully designed to capture the multidimensional characteristics of place identity within creative and cultural environments. Accordingly, the following query was applied across all selected databases: (“place identity” OR “place attachment” OR “placemaking”) AND (“cultural” OR “creative”) AND (“quarter” OR “district” OR “cluster”). This search strategy ensured the inclusion of publications discussing the conceptualization, classification, and sustaining mechanisms of PI, PA, or PM within various types of creative and cultural districts, quarters, or clusters. The search was conducted in the titles, abstracts, and keywords fields to maximize the retrieval of relevant studies. The initial search using this query yielded the following results: 41 articles from Scopus, 76 from Web of Science, 48 from ScienceDirect, and 53 from Taylor & Francis Online. All retrieved records were subsequently screened and assessed for eligibility based on the study’s inclusion and exclusion criteria.

### **3.2 Data selection criteria**

To ensure the quality of this study, the authors screened a total of 218 articles, applying the following exclusion criteria:

- English is the global language in academia. To better understand the articles' content, only those published in English were included.
- Only journal articles were considered. Publications in other formats, such as books or conference papers, were excluded to maintain the focus on peer-reviewed journal research.
- The search covered articles published between 2021 and 2025 to reflect the latest trends and developments in the field.
- Duplicate articles were removed to ensure accuracy. The retrieved articles that met the inclusion criteria were downloaded, and duplicates were removed in Zotero.
- After the preliminary screening, 59 articles were selected, as shown in Table 1.

**Table 1***Steps and results of this review*

Step	Stage	Research criteria	Result	
			Included	Excluded
1	Identification	Enter the set search terms in the title, abstract, and keywords	218	-
2	Screening	Records after exclusion: Language: English Article type: Article Publication time: 2021–2025	157	61
		Remove duplicates Exclude articles that are irrelevant or weakly relevant to the research question	-	2
3	Included	-	59	-

According to the PRISMA flowchart shown in Figure 3, the articles underwent final screening, and 59 were deemed eligible for evaluation. After careful review, 23 articles were approved. Given the aim of this study to conduct in-depth analysis and high-quality research, this number was appropriate.

### 3.3 Data analysis procedures

This study adopted a two-stage analytical approach combining bibliometric and thematic analyses to provide both a quantitative overview and qualitative insights.

First, bibliometric analysis was employed to map the overall landscape of the field, including: (1) temporal trends, summarizing recent developments and research surges; (2)

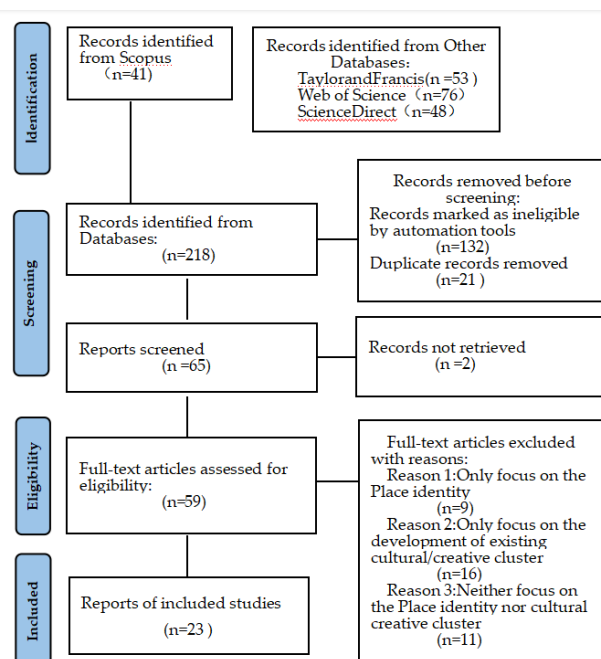
country-based distribution, identifying major research contributors globally; (3) methodological profiling, reviewing research designs and analytical strategies; and (4) mapping research directions and cluster types, clarifying the main thematic foci in PI studies within CCCs.

Second, thematic analysis (Bo & Abdul Rani, 2025; Malisiova & Kostopoulou, 2024) was conducted on the final 23 selected articles to systematically synthesize qualitative patterns. The process consisted of four steps: (1) data collection and familiarization; (2) initial coding, which documented key information such as publication year, author, country, cluster type, research concepts, and methodology; (3) inductive theme classification, organizing findings into material, experiential, and constructive dimensions; and (4) interpretation and synthesis, extracting the sustaining mechanisms of PI in CCCs.

Through this integrative approach, the study provides a comprehensive and multi-level account of the knowledge structure, thematic evolution, and sustaining mechanisms of PI research in cultural and creative clusters. Building on this, we adopt framework-guided thematic synthesis, using the material, experiential, and constructive triad as an a priori organizing scheme to demonstrate how material interventions, experiential attachments, and constructive practices interact to stabilize or undermine PI.

### Figure 3

*PRISMA flow diagram for reporting systematic reviews.*



## 4 RESULTS

### 4.1 Research overview

For the 23 articles ultimately included in the review, this study summarizes their bibliographic information, research country, title, cluster type, research concept, and methodology (Table 2). Building on this, it further demonstrates, at the case level, that the sustaining mechanisms of place identity within CCCs are not confined to theoretical abstraction but can be operationalized and tested through a “mechanism–variable–method” framework. This coding framework enables multi-perspective statistical and thematic analyses of the literature and ultimately reveals the mechanisms through which PI is sustained in CCCs.

**Table 2**

*Summary of literatures*

No.	Reference	Title	Country	Cluster Type	Research Concept	Methodology
1	Boussaa (2021)	The past as a catalyst for cultural sustainability in historic cities: The case of Doha, Qatar	Qatar	Heritage Creative District	Place identity; Sense of place; Memory; Urban identity; Local identity; Cultural identity	Qualitative
2	Rodrigues & Schmidt (2021)	How the creative class co-creates a city's brand identity: A qualitative study	Germany ; Scotland; Sweden	Urban Creative Cluster	Place brand identity; City brand identity; Sense of place; Sense of belonging; Experience	Qualitative
3	Surchi & Nafa (2021)	Appraisal of place identity through tangible elements of cultural features in Erbil City	Iraq	Heritage-Based Cluster	Place identity; Sense of place; Memory; Collective identity	Quantitative
4	Ye (2021)	Making post-colonial place identity: The	Macau, China	Heritage Creative District	Place identity; Sense of	Qualitative

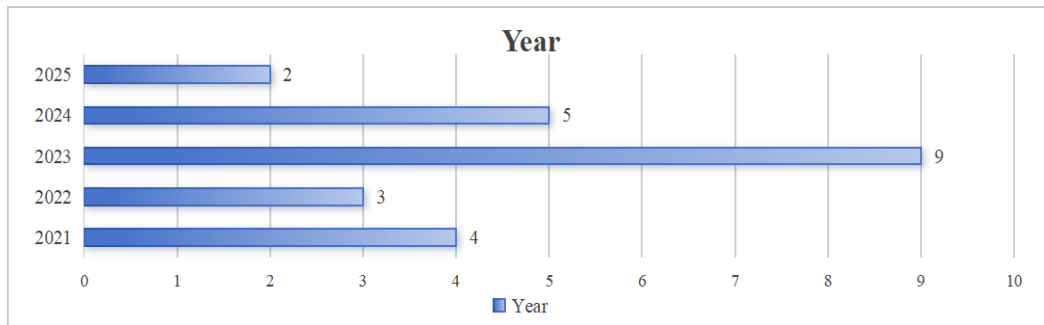
		regeneration of the St. Lazarus neighbourhood, Macau			place; Cultural identity; Sense of belonging; Urban identity	
5	Granpayehvagh ei & Bonakdar (2022)	What makes for a creative-friendly community? Untangling the location attributes of creative clusters	Canada	Mixed-Use Creative Cluster	Creative identity; Local identity; Cultural identity; City brand identity; Sense of identity	Qualitative
6	Xu <i>et al.</i> (2022)	The effects of residents' sense of place on their willingness to support urban renewal: A case study of the Century-Old East Street renewal project in Shaoguan, China	China	Historic Commercial District	Sense of place; Place identity; Place attachment; Place dependence	Quantitative
7	Zhu & Chiou (2022)	A study on the sustainable development of historic district landscapes based on place attachment among tourists: A case study of Taiping Old Street, Taiwan	China	Historic Commercial District	Place attachment; Place identity; Place dependence	Quantitative
8	Bernardo <i>et al.</i> (2023)	How to capture place identity contents? A tool for planning interventions	Portugal	Urban Centre Cluster	Place identity; Place attachment; Collective identity; Place meanings; Memory	Quantitative
9	Boffi <i>et al.</i> (2023)	Nurturing cultural heritage and place attachment through street	Italy	Arts District	Place attachment; Sense of belonging; Collective experience	Mixed Methods

		art: A longitudinal psychosocial analysis of a neighbourhood renewal process				
10	Fan <i>et al.</i> (2023)	Urban design strategies fostering creative workers' sense of identity in creative and cultural districts in East Asia: An integrated knowledge-driven approach	China	Urban Creative Cluster	Sense of identity; Place identity; Place attachment; Sense of place; Cultural identity; Memory	Quantitative
11	Fouad & Sharaf Eldin (2023)	Public perception influence on the reshaping of urban heritage: A case study of Port Said historic quarters	Egypt	Heritage-Based Cluster	Urban identity; Cultural identity; Sense of belonging; Experience	Qualitative
12	Gelbard (2023)	"Did You Hear? Mavericks Is Closing!" Punk refusal of gentrified endings	Canada	Arts District	Sense of place; Cultural community; Personal identity; Creative placemaking	Qualitative
13	Noaime & Mashary Alnaim (2023)	Examining the symbolic dimension of Aleppo's historical landmarks	Syria	Heritage-Based Cluster	Identity; Place identity; Urban identity; Cultural identity; Sense of place; Placemaking; Memory; Group identity	Qualitative
14	Thomas (2023)	Creative workers' perception of place in Edmonton, Canada	Canada	Urban Creative Cluster	Sense of place; Place identity; Placemaking; Place attachment; Creative	Qualitative

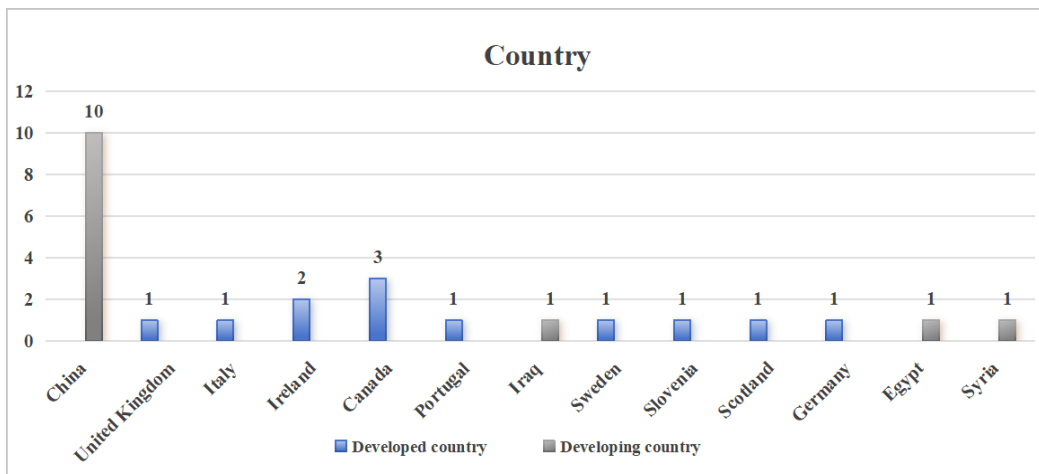
					milieu; Spirit of place; Perception; Experience	
15	Ye <i>et al.</i> (2023)	Effect of an artificial sound-based index on the perception of historical block environments	China	Historic Commercial District	Sense of place; Place attachment; Cultural identity; Environmental perception	Quantitative
16	Zou <i>et al.</i> (2023)	How do tourists' heritage spatial perceptions affect place identity? A case study of Quanzhou, China	China	Heritage Creative District	Place identity; Sense of place; Emotional attachment; Perception	Mixed Methods
17	Chen <i>et al.</i> (2024)	The effect of soundscape on sense of place in residential historical and cultural areas: A case study of Taiyuan, China	China	Heritage-Based Cluster	Sense of place; Place attachment; Place identity; Sense of belonging; Cultural identity	Mixed Methods
18	Davis & Wagner (2024)	Understanding the role of sense of place in the production and consumption of innovation districts	United Kingdom	Creative Industry Cluster	Sense of place; Place attachment; Place identity; Place dependence	Qualitative
19	Gough <i>et al.</i> (2024)	"This place becomes a place": Artists and placemaking on the margins	Ireland	Arts District and Suburban/Rural Clusters	Placemaking; Sense of place; Attachment to place; Feeling at home; Sense of belonging	Qualitative
20	Kozina <i>et al.</i> (2024)	People or place? Towards a system of holistic locational values for creative workers	Slovenia	Urban Creative Cluster	Attachment; Perception	Quantitative
21	Zhong <i>et al.</i> (2024)	Renewal strategies of	China	Industrial Heritage	Identity; Sense of	Mixed Methods

		industrial heritage based on placeness theory: The case of Guangzhou, China		Creative District	place; Local identity; Cultural identity; Belonging; Memory; Spirit; Placeness	
22	Jiang <i>et al.</i> (2025)	Configuring placemaking strategies shaping electronic word of mouth in Shanghai Shikumen heritage districts	China	Historic Commercial District	Placemaking; Cultural identity; Sense of place; Perception	Quantitative
23	Yang & Chang (2025)	Rural idyll in a global creative city: Gentrification, cultural governance, and creative placemaking	China	Suburban/Rural Clusters	Creative placemaking; Cultural identity	Qualitative

An analysis of the publication years of the 23 selected articles reveals a distinct temporal concentration. 2023 accounts for the highest proportion, contributing nearly 40% of the total. 2024 and 2021 follow with approximately 22% and 17%, respectively, while 2022 and 2025 account for the remaining 13% and 9%, respectively. As shown in Figure 4, the data reflect a sudden surge in research activity in 2023, indicating heightened academic attention to PI in cultural and creative settings. Rather than displaying steady growth, the trend is discontinuous, with 2023 forming a sharp peak amid otherwise moderate fluctuations. This suggests that while scholarly interest has intensified, particularly in recent years, the field's development remains sporadic and uneven, lacking sustained progression over time.

**Figure 4***Year of publication of the selected articles.*

As shown in Figure 5, the 23 articles span 14 countries (with one study covering samples from three countries), revealing significant disparities in national distribution. China accounts for the largest share (approximately 40%), underscoring its leading position in research on PI and the transformation of creative spaces. Canada follows with 12%, while the other countries each contribute a single study. According to the United Nations development classification, publications from developed countries represent 64%, compared with 36% from developing countries, indicating that the field remains dominated by developed contexts. Nonetheless, contributions from developing countries, particularly China, have become increasingly prominent. Overall, the findings suggest that scholarly attention to PI is marked by a broad international scope, reflecting diverse planning systems, urban conditions, and cultural priorities.

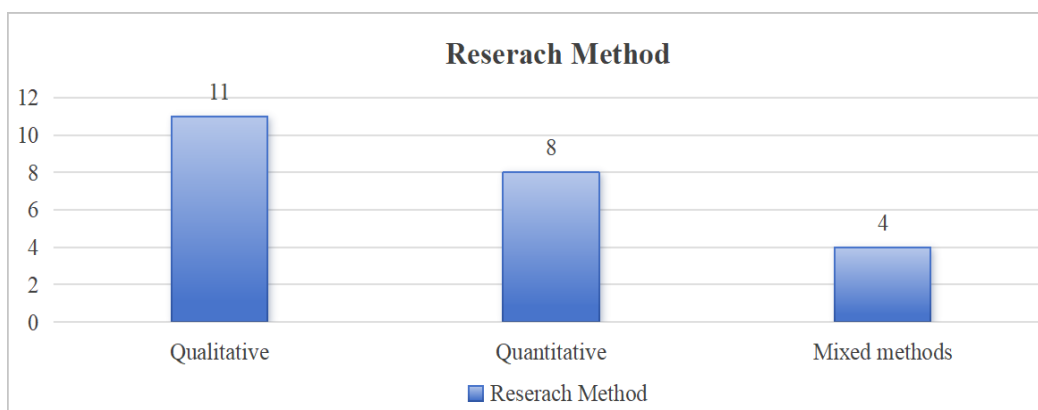
**Figure 5***Countries covered by the study.*

The reviewed studies adopt three main methodological orientations: qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods. Qualitative research emphasizes the interpretation of place-related experiences, cultural meanings, and processes of identity construction. It typically involves case studies, interviews, field observation, and textual analysis, allowing researchers to engage with spatial phenomena in their specific social and historical contexts. Quantitative approaches, by contrast, focus on measuring variables and testing theoretical relationships through structured surveys, modelling techniques, and statistical analysis. Mixed-methods designs integrate both, aiming to capture both interpretive depth and empirical generalizability.

As shown in Figure 6, among the 23 studies, 11 employ qualitative methods, 8 employ quantitative methods, and 4 employ mixed methods. The prevalence of qualitative research reflects the field's strong orientation toward contextual and exploratory inquiry. The presence of quantitative and mixed approaches, however, signals an increasing interest in methodological diversification, particularly in studies seeking to validate theoretical constructs or assess causal mechanisms. Overall, the field demonstrates a gradual move toward pluralistic designs that combine narrative interpretation with analytical rigor.

**Figure 6**

*Research method.*



As shown in Figure 7, the reviewed studies comprise 24 cases across 23 articles, grouped into four cluster types: heritage-led, mixed-use, arts-oriented, and industry-driven. Heritage-led clusters dominate with 12 cases, including heritage districts, historic commercial streets, industrial heritage sites, and heritage-based areas. These studies

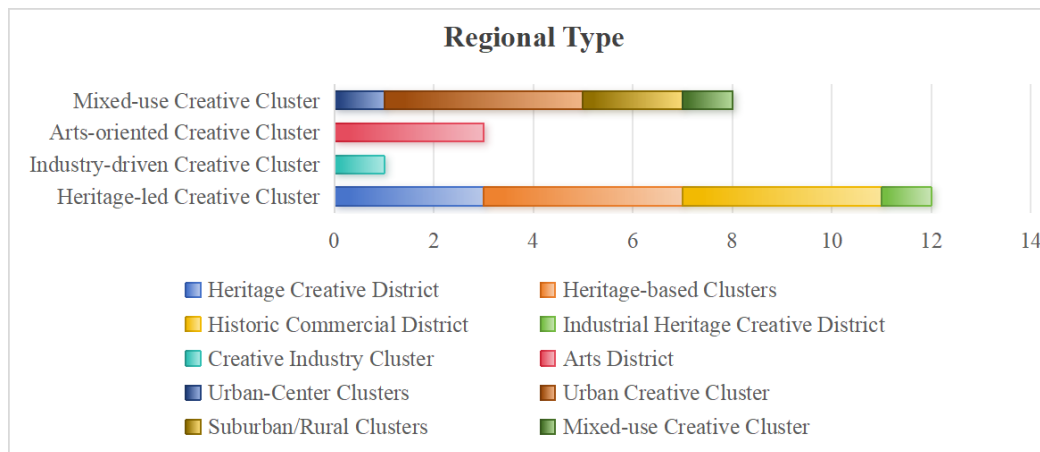
emphasize material continuity, symbolic reconstruction, and adaptive reuse in shaping place identity amid urban transformation.

Mixed-use clusters account for eight cases, typically represented by urban creative zones and multifunctional districts that combine cultural production, residential life, and commercial activity. These contexts are frequently associated with regeneration processes and the restructuring of identity. Arts-oriented clusters are represented by three cases in which grassroots creativity, cultural resistance, and informal forms of PM are particularly prominent. Only one case focuses on an industry-driven cluster, highlighting innovation and creative production and illustrating the limited attention given to economic infrastructure in current PI research.

Additionally, 2 cases fall under suburban or rural clusters, extending the discussion beyond urban cores toward more localized identity-making processes. This distribution reveals a prevailing focus on heritage-led contexts, while the presence of hybrid and peripheral clusters indicates a broader shift toward diversified spatial typologies and identity practices.

## Figure 7

*Research direction.*

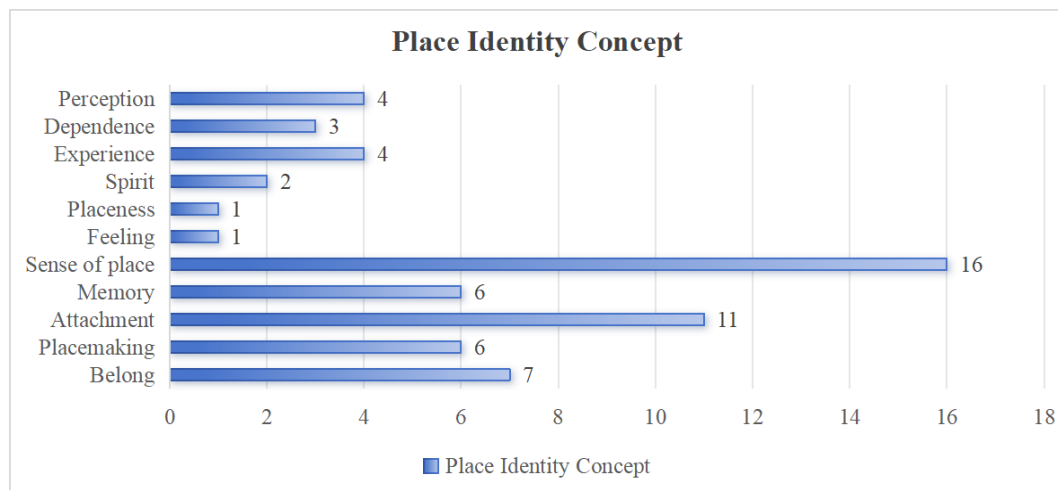


As illustrated in Figure 8, the reviewed studies reveal that place identity is not treated as a singular concept but rather as a constellation of interrelated terms that capture emotional, cognitive, and spatial dimensions. Among the 23 articles, sense of place is the most frequently referenced concept (16 mentions), followed by place attachment (11), indicating a shared emphasis on affective ties and identity anchoring. Memory (6), belonging (7), and placemaking (6) also feature prominently, pointing to the collective,

historical, and participatory aspects of place-based meaning. Terms such as perception, experience, and dependence reflect the cognitive and functional underpinnings of how individuals interact with space, while spirit, feeling, and placeness suggest more symbolic or intangible interpretations. The range and frequency of these concepts demonstrate an increasing analytical refinement in the study of place identity, with researchers drawing from overlapping theoretical strands to examine how people emotionally and cognitively relate to their built and cultural environments.

### Figure 8

*Place Identity concept.*



## 4.2 The research dimension

To accurately capture the complexity of PI, this study synthesizes the sub-themes identified across 23 articles and classifies them within the tripartite framework of material, experiential, and constructive dimensions. Rather than treating place as a static backdrop, the framework emphasizes the continuous interactions among spatial environments, human experiences, and cultural production.

It reflects how identity is formed through physical configurations, affective perceptions, and socially embedded practices. These sub-themes specify the concrete mechanisms of identity formation, ranging from architectural coherence and environmental comfort to symbolic expressions and participatory transformations. This classification thus provides a structured lens for interpreting how PI is rooted, perceived,

and redefined in everyday contexts. The detailed categorization is presented in Figure A1, which serves as the conceptual foundation for the subsequent analysis.

#### *4.2.1 Material dimension analysis*

The material dimension defines place identity through its tangible and physical attributes, highlighting how the built environment provides the structural foundation upon which identity is anchored and interpreted.

##### ***4.2.1.1 Built heritage and historic buildings***

Built heritage and historic buildings integrate local culture and historical narratives, forming a fundamental material basis of place identity (Boussaa, 2021; Afsari Bajestani *et al.*, 2023). Physical forms such as citadels, traditional houses, and historic urban fabric function as tangible anchors for identity, reinforcing continuity and collective memory (Surchi & Nafa, 2021; Zou *et al.*, 2023; Belanche *et al.*, 2021; Grabher, 2001). Conservation and adaptive reuse practices connect past and present, reinforcing uniqueness and a sense of belonging (Boussaa, 2021; Yang & Chang, 2025; Afsari Bajestani *et al.*, 2023). At the same time, processes such as heritage recoding and reinterpretation generate new symbolic meanings that strengthen city branding and cultural representation (Ye *et al.*, 2023; Rodrigues & Schmidt, 2021; Bartolo *et al.*, 2023; Gough *et al.*, 2024). Conversely, the loss, commodification, or aesthetic sanitisation of heritage erodes place identity by detaching historic buildings from lived social practices (Boussaa, 2021; Ye, 2021; Bernardo *et al.*, 2023). Empirical findings further show that both residents and visitors highly value historic buildings for authentic experiences and a sense of belonging (Fouad & Sharaf Eldin, 2023; Fan *et al.*, 2023; Yang & Chang, 2025).

##### ***4.2.1.2 Spatial structure and urban pattern***

Historic spatial structures reflect how communities have adapted to their environments over time and remain vital to sustaining place identity (Boussaa, 2021; Afsari Bajestani *et al.*, 2023). Physical landscapes and regional spatial patterns embody placeness and local characteristics, reinforcing emotional connections to place (Zhong *et*

*al.*, 2024; Kozina *et al.*, 2024). Spatial planning that prioritises the conservation of urban morphology and architectural layout enhances residents' emotional identification with place by maintaining continuity between historical narratives and contemporary use (Zhong *et al.*, 2024; Kozina *et al.*, 2024). Place identity emerges through the relational ordering of urban elements, including spatial layout, landscape form, architectural programmes, historical narratives, and inhabitants' lifestyles, and becomes destabilised when this order is disrupted (Ye, 2021; Bernardo *et al.*, 2023).

#### **4.2.1.3 Public landscape and social open space**

Public landscapes and social open spaces play a central role in strengthening social networks and promoting cultural vibrancy (Granpayehvaghei & Bonakdar, 2022; Fouad & Sharaf Eldin, 2023; Bo & Abdul Rani, 2025). Public gathering spaces such as plazas, courtyards, libraries, and community centres foster emotional attachment through shared use and collective interaction (Fan *et al.*, 2023). Traditional spaces, including *baraha* plazas and vibrant courtyards, reflect strong desires for outdoor activities and sustain local life, contributing to the reconstruction of place identity (Boussaa, 2021; Afsari Bajestani *et al.*, 2023). Open spaces embedded with symbolic meaning further support public interaction and the re-establishment of belonging (Noaime & Mashary Alnaim, 2023; Gelbard, 2023). However, when informality and inclusiveness are reduced, public spaces risk becoming sites of consumption, leading to diminished belonging and weakened identity (Ye, 2021; Thomas, 2023; Bernardo *et al.*, 2023; Gokce & Kickert, 2024).

#### **4.2.1.4 Infrastructure and accessibility**

Infrastructure and accessibility are foundational elements of place identity, supporting everyday functionality, social interaction, and inclusion. Walkable environments, compact layouts, transit accessibility, spatial accessibility, and quality amenities facilitate residents' daily needs while promoting social integration (Boussaa, 2021; Granpayehvaghei & Bonakdar, 2022; Thomas, 2023; Gokce & Kickert, 2024; Jiang *et al.*, 2025; Malisiova *et al.*, 2024). These infrastructural conditions attract creative workers and support creative-friendly communities by encouraging face-to-face interaction and social cohesion (Boussaa, 2021; Bernardo *et al.*, 2023; Chapain & Sagot-

Duvaurox, 2020; Bo & Abdul Rani, 2025). In urban regeneration contexts, the completeness, availability, and maintenance quality of infrastructure further enhance place belonging, self-confidence, and identity (Thomas, 2023; Gokce & Kickert, 2024). Across urban and rural contexts, infrastructure underpins emotional identification with place and sustains long-term cultural enrichment (Zhong *et al.*, 2024; Kozina *et al.*, 2024; Jiang *et al.*, 2025).

#### ***4.2.1.5 Housing, living, and working conditions***

Housing, living, and working conditions encompassing affordability, quality, availability, living costs, private open space, and environmental quality are central to place identity formation (Kozina *et al.*, 2024; Jiang *et al.*, 2025). Desirable conditions, such as low rent, a rural atmosphere, architectural uniqueness, safety, and proximity to social networks, support tolerant, inclusive, and diverse communities (Yang & Chang, 2025; Moher *et al.*, 2009; Kozina *et al.*, 2024). However, displacement, socio-economic restructuring, and gentrification may disrupt established identities by forcing low-income families to the periphery or replacing original residents with groups with higher cultural and economic capital (Boussaa, 2021; Afsari Bajestani *et al.*, 2023; Yang & Chang, 2025). Neglecting housing conditions risks transforming places into empty containers or open-air museums detached from lived experience (Boussaa, 2021; Afsari Bajestani *et al.*, 2023).

#### ***4.2.1.6 Architectural articulation and materiality***

Architectural articulation and materiality express place identity through built form, scale, texture, and construction language. The structure of the built environment and its physical forms embody place identity and generate symbolic meaning (Belanche *et al.*, 2021). Architectural style, built form, and cultural ambiance foster a sense of belonging and attract creative actors (Granpayehvaghei & Bonakdar, 2022; Bo & Abdul Rani, 2025). Elements such as façades, roofs, reclaimed materials, textures, and proportions evoke historical continuity, cultural nostalgia, and differentiation among places (Ye, 2021; Yang & Chang, 2025; Fouad & Sharaf Eldin, 2023; Fan *et al.*, 2023; Chapain & Sagot-Duvaurox, 2020).

#### 4.1.2.7 *Authenticity*

Authenticity is defined by perceptions of genuineness, originality, and historical integrity and constitutes a core component of the material dimension (Zhu & Chiou, 2022; Boussaa, 2021). The protection and adaptive reuse of authentic heritage enhance cultural identity, collective memory, public participation, and place attachment (Fan *et al.*, 2023; Davis & Wagner, 2024). Authenticity is also a strong antecedent of place attachment in heritage tourism contexts (Zhu & Chiou, 2022). However, when authenticity becomes a sanitised and aestheticised representation detached from residents' everyday lives, it may obstruct belonging and weaken place identity (Ye, 2021; Bernardo *et al.*, 2023).

#### 4.2.2 *Experiential dimension analysis*

The experiential dimension captures the emotional, sensory, and affective relationships between individuals and place, emphasising how place identity is lived, felt, and perceived through everyday experience rather than merely observed through physical form.

##### 4.2.2.1 Perceived *safety and comfort*

Perceived safety and comfort constitute foundational experiential conditions of place identity. The continuity of everyday life provides residents with a sense of security and belonging, which positively predicts sense of place (Chen *et al.*, 2024; Granpayehvaghei & Bonakdar, 2022). Basic human needs, including personal safety, housing quality, and proximity to social networks, underpin value-based locational preferences and support place identity across different place types (Kozina *et al.*, 2024; Jiang *et al.*, 2025). Social environments perceived as approachable, friendly, open, and socially connected reflect tolerance and inclusivity, reinforcing emotional attachment and identity formation (Rodrigues & Schmidt, 2021; Bartolo *et al.*, 2025). Sensory perceptions further shape experiential identity, as evaluations of sense of place are negatively associated with artificial noise and positively associated with natural soundscapes, which activate feelings of comfort and familiarity with the environment (Ye *et al.*, 2023; Gough *et al.*, 2024).

#### 4.2.2.2 Sense of *belonging and identity*

A sense of belonging is a core experiential component of place identity, integrating self-perception, social identification, and emotional attachment (Bernardo *et al.*, 2023; Zhong *et al.*, 2024). Sense of place, encompassing both place attachment and place identity, reflects emotional and cognitive relationships between people and places and is reinforced through recognition, social adaptation, and collective memory (Xu *et al.*, 2022; Boffi *et al.*, 2023; Chapain & Sagot-Duvaurox, 2020; Kozina *et al.*, 2024). Place attachment, often triggered by visual preference, perceived authenticity, and destination image, functions as a foundational mechanism for place identity construction (Zhu & Chiou, 2022; Boussaa, 2021). A strong sense of belonging fosters stakeholder engagement, local participation, and co-creation, embodying social bonding and ownership, which are essential to identity formation (Rodrigues & Schmidt, 2021; Davis & Wagner, 2024; Bartolo *et al.*, 2025; Hansasooksin, 2021). Sensory perceptions within historical districts, particularly soundscapes that activate memory and emotion, further shape residents' identity and deepen their sense of place (Chen *et al.*, 2024; Granpayehvaghei & Bonakdar, 2022). However, the commodification of colonial heritage, characterised by visual consumption and the erosion of vernacular life, may obstruct belonging and weaken post-colonial place identity, as illustrated in contexts such as St. Lazarus (Ye, 2021; Bernardo *et al.*, 2023).

#### 4.2.2.3 *Social value and community prestige*

Social value emerges from residents' subjective cognition, emotional evaluation, and communicative practices, shaping collective perceptions of place (Xu *et al.*, 2022; Boffi *et al.*, 2023). Expressions such as “this place supports its own” reflect locally embedded solidarity and reinforce community-based identity (Thomas, 2023; Gokce & Kickert, 2024). Heritage tourism is closely associated with social value, contributing to collective pride and external recognition (Zhu & Chiou, 2022; Boussaa, 2021). Grassroots practices, including do-it-yourself attitudes, foster local pride and a distinct social identity rooted in everyday agency (Thomas, 2023; Gokce & Kickert, 2024). Community recognition further shapes the social image of place, positioning neighbourhoods as trendy, prestigious, or culturally valuable (Chapain & Sagot-Duvaurox, 2020).

However, such representations require careful balancing between cultural preservation, local community needs, and urban development to avoid symbolic exclusion or identity distortion (Xu *et al.*, 2022; Boffi *et al.*, 2023; Bernardo *et al.*, 2023).

#### ***4.2.2.4 Place familiarity and biographical continuity***

Place familiarity and biographical continuity anchor place identity through affectivity, personal experience, memory, and temporal continuity (Bernardo *et al.*, 2023; Chapain & Sagot-Duvauroux, 2020). Familiarity with physical features and everyday environments supports self-continuity and emotional stability, reinforcing long-term attachment (Surchi & Nafa, 2021; Belanche *et al.*, 2021). Heritage and traditions shape socio-cultural place identities by establishing narratives that connect past and present, with genealogy and attachment reflecting origins, personal history, and an inability to imagine living elsewhere (Bernardo *et al.*, 2023; Chapain & Sagot-Duvauroux, 2020). An authentic sense of place is thus embedded in residents' ordinary lives, reflecting lived historical continuity rather than curated or exceptional experiences (Ye, 2021; Bernardo *et al.*, 2023).

#### ***4.2.2.5 Aesthetic appreciation***

Aesthetic appreciation constitutes a significant experiential driver of place identity. Aesthetic value has been identified as the most influential dimension of cultural heritage tourism value in historic districts (Zhu & Chiou, 2022; Boussaa, 2021). Visual appeal, architectural harmony, and artistic expression contribute to symbolic meaning and evoke emotional connections between people and their environment (Muñiz *et al.*, 2023; Gelbard *et al.*, 2023). Public art and contemporary artistic interventions enhance visitor satisfaction and generate positive electronic word of mouth, reinforcing external place representations (Jiang *et al.*, 2025; Malisiova *et al.*, 2024). Preserving historical landmarks further strengthens place identity by maintaining visual continuity and symbolic recognition (Noaime & Mashary Alnaim, 2023; Gelbard *et al.*, 2023). However, restored buildings that primarily serve the tourist gaze may reorganise meaning through aestheticised representation, potentially marginalising everyday lived experience (Ye, 2021; Bernardo *et al.*, 2023).

#### **4.2.2.6 Social relations and affective bonding**

Social relations and affective bonding consolidate experiential place identity through interpersonal networks and shared experiences. Place attachment serves as a strong anchor for relationships with significant places and is closely associated with social belonging (Bernardo *et al.*, 2023; Chapain & Sagot-Duvauroux, 2020). Place identity is shaped by affective feelings towards the place of residence, grounded in both social and physical features and positively correlated with social networks and attachment (Bernardo *et al.*, 2023; Chapain & Sagot-Duvauroux, 2020). Creative communities, particularly among artists, often form close-knit and supportive networks that highlight the importance of intergenerational and intragenerational learning in sustaining place-based meaning (Gough *et al.*, 2024; Jacobs, 1961). These affective bonds foster social cohesion, connectedness, and deepened community networks, reinforcing place identity as a relational and socially embedded phenomenon (Davis & Wagner, 2024; Hansasooksin, 2021).

#### **4.2.3 Constructive dimension analysis**

The constructive dimension conceptualises place identity as a socially produced and negotiated outcome, shaped through collective memory, symbolic representation, everyday practices, and participatory agency.

##### **4.2.3.1 Historical memory and local narrative**

Place identity involves the continuous construction and modification of meaning through the protection and reinterpretation of cultural attributes related to history, memory, and tradition (Boussaa, 2021; Afsari Bajestani *et al.*, 2023). Historical memory and local narratives carry collective emotions and experiences, functioning as spaces of shared memory and cultural transmission across generations (Zhong *et al.*, 2024; Kozina *et al.*, 2024; Noaime & Mashary Alnaim, 2023; Gelbard *et al.*, 2023). Cognition and memory encompass understandings of industrial heritage, including technological histories and residents' recollections of socio-economic development (Zhong *et al.*, 2024; Kozina *et al.*, 2024). Ontological spatial perceptions emerge through interactions with

heritage sites, enhancing cognitive engagement with cultural and religious history and translating historical development into symbolic narratives (Zou *et al.*, 2023; Grabher, 2001). Reworking history through symbolic expression enables places to project richness and continuity, allowing communities to move forward while remaining anchored in pride for their past (Ye, 2021; Bernardo *et al.*, 2023; Boussaa, 2021).

#### ***4.2.3.2 Symbolic meaning and iconicity***

Place identity is constructed through symbols, icons, and values that translate cultural meaning into recognisable forms (Surchi & Nafa, 2021; Belanche *et al.*, 2021). Names, landmarks, and symbolic objects transform identity into branding mechanisms while embodying historical and cultural significance (Boussaa, 2021; Afsari Bajestani *et al.*, 2023; Noaime & Mashary Alnaim, 2023). Such symbolic elements foster belonging by functioning as landmarks, cultural signifiers, and communicative devices that convey shared values and narratives (Gelbard *et al.*, 2023). Iconicity enhances memorability and recognition, allowing places to convey complex emotions and meanings through clear, contextually relevant symbolic representation (Ye, 2021; Bernardo *et al.*, 2023).

#### ***4.2.3.3 Everyday spatial practice and socio-economic life***

Everyday spatial practices play a critical role in constructing place identity through routine interaction with the built environment and socio-economic life. State-led rural gentrification may transform villages into culturally productive landscapes, attracting artists and offering alternative experiences beyond urban environments (Yang & Chang, 2025; Moher *et al.*, 2009). Sustaining traditional ways of living, such as everyday gathering practices in cafés, plazas, and communal spaces, reinforces cultural values and collective identity (Boussaa, 2021; Afsari Bajestani *et al.*, 2023). Daily interactions between people and urban form shape identity through mutual adaptation, while heritage structures such as citadels continue to influence morphology and activity patterns (Surchi & Nafa, 2021; Belanche *et al.*, 2021). The ability of places to satisfy basic functional needs, including work, residence, education, services, leisure, and transport, further anchors identity in everyday life (Kozina *et al.*, 2024; Jiang *et al.*, 2025).

#### **4.2.3.4 Cultural and creative participation**

Cultural and creative participation actively constructs place identity through shared experiences and symbolic ownership. Art festivals, exhibitions, workshops, and open studios foster emotional attachment and collective meaning-making (Ye, 2021; Bernardo *et al.*, 2023). Temporary art events, pop-up exhibitions, and creative installations co-produce cultural experiences and enhance symbolic representation of place (Jiang *et al.*, 2025; Malisiova *et al.*, 2024). Community art events, performances, and collaborative storytelling promote collective memory and cultural identity by engaging both residents and outsiders in co-producing place meanings (Fan *et al.*, 2023; Zhong *et al.*, 2024; Kozina *et al.*, 2024; Yang & Chang, 2025).

#### **4.2.3.5 Community engagement and participatory governance**

Community engagement supports place identity through participatory approaches that encourage residents to reconnect with their past and collectively reconstruct place meaning (Boussaa, 2021; Afsari Bajestani *et al.*, 2023). Active participation enables public recognition and emotional identification with place, as demonstrated in participatory planning and negotiated space-making practices (Zhong *et al.*, 2024; Kozina *et al.*, 2024; Yang & Chang, 2025). Interactive platforms further enhance perceived involvement, co-creation experiences, and attachment by positioning residents as co-producers of space (Jiang *et al.*, 2025; Malisiova *et al.*, 2024). Without such participatory coherence, place-based attachment and identity risk erosion (Chapain & Sagot-Duvaurox, 2020).

#### **4.2.3.6 Place-making and transformation agency**

Residents' sense of place significantly influences their willingness to support transformation and regeneration initiatives (Xu *et al.*, 2022; Boffi *et al.*, 2023). Strong place attachment enhances environmental and social adaptability, leading to greater support for change (Xu *et al.*, 2022; Boffi *et al.*, 2023). Artists and cultural actors often function as place-making agents whose everyday practices of renovation, storytelling, and spatial curation redefine place identity (Yang & Chang, 2025; Moher *et al.*, 2009).

Placemaking strategies supported by digital engagement further transform urban image and meaning, reinforcing identity through dynamic interaction (Jiang *et al.*, 2025; Malisiova *et al.*, 2024). Countercultural practices, including refusal and alternative venues, also operate as forms of transformation agency by creating counter-environments and alternative temporalities of meaning (Gelbard *et al.*, 2023; Fouad & Sharaf Eldin, 2023).

#### ***4.2.3.7 Digital participation and translocal engagement***

Digital participation extends place identity beyond physical boundaries by enabling translocal engagement and symbolic reconstruction. Digital platforms facilitate the transformation of urban image and meaning through online interaction, contributing to dynamic place-making and identity reinforcement (Jiang *et al.*, 2025; Malisiova *et al.*, 2024). Online content generated and circulated by diverse actors transmits collective imagination and supports identity reconstruction and place branding (Yang & Chang, 2025; Moher *et al.*, 2009). Digital storytelling, curated media, and online promotion recreate and transmit historical narratives, assembling digital and material elements into hybrid place identities that integrate on-site experience with translocal representation (Granpayehvaghei & Bonakdar, 2022; Bo & Abdul Rani, 2025; Ye, 2021; Bernardo *et al.*, 2023).

## **5 DISCUSSION**

### **5.1 Research overview analysis**

#### ***5.1.1 Publication timeline***

The publication pattern reveals short-term spikes rather than steady longitudinal growth. This uneven temporal distribution indicates that existing knowledge is concentrated within a limited time window, thereby constraining year-to-year comparisons and making long-term trend identification difficult. As a result, observed developments may reflect episodic research interest rather than sustained scholarly engagement. To enhance temporal robustness, future studies should aim to establish a

more continuous publication record across years, enabling changes in place identity (PI) research to be interpreted as enduring trends rather than isolated peaks.

### *5.1.2 Research countries*

The dominance of a small number of countries, coupled with single-case representation in other regions, suggests that specific planning systems, urban conditions, and cultural priorities may strongly shape interpretations of PI. This geographical concentration limits the generalisability of findings and raises questions about contextual dependency. Comparative research across diverse national and institutional contexts would help distinguish transferable conclusions from those embedded in local socio-cultural and governance arrangements.

### *5.1.3 Research methods*

Qualitative studies provide in-depth, context-sensitive insights into how place identity is constructed, experienced, and negotiated, while quantitative approaches contribute systematic measurement and theory testing. Mixed-methods designs seek to integrate these complementary strengths. Given this methodological profile, a balanced research strategy is warranted: qualitative approaches are particularly suited to capturing meaning-making processes, whereas quantitative tools are valuable for construct validation and examining relational patterns. Pluralistic methodological designs can therefore preserve interpretive richness while enhancing analytical rigor and empirical robustness.

### *5.1.4 Research types and concepts*

The distribution of research types is weighted toward heritage-led contexts, with additional attention to mixed-use environments and arts-oriented settings, while industry-driven contexts remain comparatively underexplored. A small number of studies also extend into suburban and rural areas. This concentration foregrounds themes of material continuity, symbolic reconstruction, and adaptive reuse but leaves economic infrastructures and productive landscapes relatively underexamined. Conceptually, the

frequent emphasis on sense of place and place attachment, alongside references to memory, belonging, and place-making, reflects a predominantly affective and collective understanding of PI. Expanding the range of cluster types and spatial contexts, while retaining conceptual coherence, would allow for more rigorous examination of whether existing explanations of PI remain valid beyond heritage-focused environments and established urban cores.

## 5.2 Research dimension analysis

Place identity (PI) in creative cultural clusters (CCCs) is co-produced across material, experiential, and constructive dimensions. However, the existing evidence remains disproportionately weighted toward visible and tangible elements, while intangible and political processes receive comparatively limited and unsystematic attention. This imbalance obscures how governance decisions and everyday practices condition both the visible outcomes of renewal and their lived meanings.

Heritage fabric, spatial form, landscape, infrastructure, housing, and architectural materiality can consolidate distinctiveness, yet their effects are contingent rather than linear. Economy- or brand-led upgrading often prioritises curated landmarks while neglecting ordinary settings, resulting in a loss of authenticity, social exclusion, and displacement. Beyond iconic interventions, access and ground-level functions are decisive. Restricted or elevated sites with weak everyday programming are consistently associated with low participation and reduced self-efficacy. Sensory conditions also matter; artificial or commercial noise degrades soundscape quality and weakens the sense of place. In fragile contexts, the destruction of symbolic landmarks disrupts mnemonic anchors and undermines shared identity. Where heritage quality and destination image are poorly aligned, reputational decline often follows. Overall, the material basis of PI is contested and continuously negotiated between preservation and transformation, inclusion and loss.

Experiential mechanisms such as safety, comfort, belonging, memory, aesthetic appreciation, and social bonding play a stabilising role in PI but are marked by internal tensions. When visual preference and branding substitute for authenticity and cultural cues, destination image becomes superficial, and attachment remains shallow. Image-led renewal without dialogue is frequently associated with commercial upscaling,

displacement, and the erosion of everyday continuity. In contrast, functional satisfaction and emotional involvement operate jointly to strengthen tourist PI, indicating that sensory and functional qualities must be coupled with affective meaning.

Identity is further shaped through memory, symbols, practices, and participation, with the political dimension playing a decisive role. Top-down branding and standardised policy approaches often overlook *genius loci*, producing placelessness and misalignment with lived meanings. In innovation- and industry-oriented districts, core sense-of-place components such as identity, attachment, and dependence are often underspecified, leading to misalignment between design intentions and everyday practice. Selective remembrance and tokenistic governance can further silence alternative voices and sanitise subcultural life, generating exclusionary outcomes for PI.

Recurring causal chains link governance choices (C) to material selectivity or neglect (M), which in turn shape experiential erosion (E). For example, economic and branding logics may drive curated or demolition-led interventions, resulting in displacement and the weakening of authenticity and belonging. Although existing studies identify credible mechanisms within each dimension, they often treat these mechanisms in isolation, thereby overlooking the power relations that determine whose identities are recognised. An integrated perspective demonstrates that outcomes depend on the alignment of C, M, and E: similar material interventions may either consolidate or dilute PI depending on access, participation, and continuity of everyday life. This cross-dimensional logic underpins the causal analysis developed in the following section.

### 5.3 Toward empirical testing of mechanisms sustaining PI in CCCs

A central aim of this review was to elucidate the mechanisms through which PI is sustained in CCCs. The synthesis presented in Section 4 identified a series of recurring pathways illustrating how material interventions, experiential attachments, and constructive practices interact to stabilise or undermine PI. While these patterns provide valuable interpretive insights, they remain conceptual and hypothesis-generating rather than empirically validated. To move beyond partial fulfilment of this objective, it is necessary to articulate these mechanisms more explicitly and indicate how future research may operationalise and test them.

### 5.3.1 Governance strategies and branding practices

The literature demonstrates that top-down branding and generic “creative-class” strategies often weaken PI by neglecting local histories and everyday practices, producing placelessness and contested meanings. Ye (2021) documented this dynamic in Macau’s St. Lazarus district, where centralised branding displaced vernacular life. Similar tensions were identified in European creative cities (Rodrigues & Schmidt, 2021), while Yang and Chang (2025) showed that rural idyll branding in Shanghai generated fragile symbolic meanings disconnected from community narratives.

Future research could operationalise governance strategies along a continuum from centralised to participatory models, as evidenced in planning documents and institutional arrangements. Dependent variables may include residents’ reported sense of belonging, measured using validated place attachment scales (e.g., Raymond *et al.*, 2010; Rollero & De Piccoli, 2010). Comparative case studies across governance contexts, combined with structural equation modelling (SEM), would allow researchers to test whether participatory governance systematically predicts stronger PI.

### 5.3.2 Conservation strategies and authenticity

Another recurring mechanism concerns the role of conservation in sustaining or eroding authenticity. Landmark-oriented conservation and selective demolition frequently result in loss of authenticity and weakened belonging. Fouad and Sharaf Eldin (2023) reported such outcomes in Port Said, while Ye *et al.* (2023) demonstrated that perceived authenticity in Quanzhou outweighed aesthetic appreciation in sustaining attachment. Kozina *et al.* (2024) further showed that industrial heritage conservation fostered identity only when integrated into everyday practices.

Future research should measure conservation strategies along a spectrum from landmark-focused to fabric-inclusive approaches and examine their effects on perceived authenticity and belonging. Longitudinal surveys conducted before and after regeneration interventions would provide evidence of causal change. Visitor surveys and authenticity scales (Ye *et al.*, 2023), combined with multi-group SEM, could test whether conservation strategies differentially affect PI outcomes.

### 5.3.3 Accessibility and everyday programming

Accessibility and everyday cultural programming emerged as critical factors in sustaining PI. Restricted access and weak ground-level programming diminish PI by discouraging social interaction and participation. Granpayehvaghei and Bonakdar (2022) highlighted the importance of accessibility for creative-friendly communities, while Fan *et al.* (2023) showed that creative workers' identity formation in East Asia was closely tied to everyday amenities and walkability.

This mechanism can be operationalised using GIS-based walkability indices, transport connectivity measures, and indicators of cultural programming frequency. These variables may then be linked to participation rates and attachment levels. Mixed-methods approaches that integrate spatial modelling with ethnographic fieldwork would capture both structural accessibility and the lived experience of everyday practice.

### 5.3.4 Aesthetics without authenticity

The findings also suggest that aesthetic upgrading, when detached from authenticity, produces shallow forms of attachment. Zou *et al.* (2023) showed that tourists in Quanzhou valued authenticity more highly than aesthetic enhancement, while Noaime and Mashary Alnaim (2023) demonstrated that Aleppo's symbolic landmarks derived meaning from historical continuity rather than visual appeal alone.

This mechanism can be empirically tested by distinguishing between design quality indicators (e.g., visual coherence, architectural appeal) and authenticity cues (e.g., historical continuity, cultural symbolism). Surveys measuring visitor attachment and intention to return, analysed through SEM, would allow researchers to assess whether authenticity mediates the relationship between aesthetics and PI.

### 5.3.5 Image-led renewal without dialogue

Image-driven renewal strategies that lack community dialogue often result in displacement and cultural fragmentation. Boussaa (2021) documented this process in Doha; Yang and Chang (2025) identified similar dynamics in rural Shanghai; and Muñiz (2023) observed how ethnic branding in Los Angeles fragmented community identity

despite its external visibility. Governance inclusivity may be measured through the presence of participatory planning forums, consultation frequency, and perceived transparency. Outcome variables could include residential stability, cultural participation, and place attachment. Longitudinal ethnographic research combined with demographic data would allow scholars to trace how exclusionary renewal reshapes PI over time.

### 5.3.6 *Soundscapes and sensory environments*

Sensory environments, particularly soundscapes, represent an underexplored mechanism in PI research. Artificial noise and degraded acoustic conditions weaken PI, whereas authentic auditory cues reinforce a sense of belonging. Chen *et al.* (2024) and Ye *et al.* (2023) demonstrated how noise intrusion undermined the sense of place in historic districts. This mechanism can be operationalised by mapping decibel levels and sound sources and linking them to survey measures of perceived comfort and attachment. Mixed-methods designs integrating acoustic analysis with ethnographic accounts are especially well suited to capturing the interplay between sensory environments and identity.

### 5.3.7 *Toward causal understanding*

At present, these mechanisms remain interpretive hypotheses derived from systematic synthesis. To fully achieve the third research objective, future studies must transform them into testable propositions. This requires (1) operationalising key variables such as governance inclusivity, conservation strategies, accessibility indices, authenticity perceptions, and sensory quality; (2) employing comparative and longitudinal designs that examine different cluster types over time, particularly before and after major interventions (Boffi *et al.*, 2023); and (3) adopting plural methodological approaches that integrate qualitative depth with quantitative rigour, including SEM, regression analysis, GIS modelling, and social network analysis (Fan *et al.*, 2023; Gough *et al.*, 2024).

Embedding these mechanisms within broader theoretical frameworks such as urban resilience, the just city, and cultural sustainability would further strengthen their explanatory power. In sum, this review identifies a coherent set of mechanisms through which PI in CCCs is sustained or eroded, including governance strategies, conservation

approaches, accessibility, authenticity–aesthetics alignment, participatory dialogue, and sensory environments. However, fulfilling the third objective requires moving beyond conceptual synthesis toward empirical validation. By operationalising these mechanisms, testing them across diverse contexts, and employing plural methodologies, future research can establish a causally grounded understanding of how PI remains resilient amid cultural, economic, and political change.

## 6 CONCLUSIONS

This review maps recent developments in PI research within CCCs. Across the 23 studies (2021–2025), research activity peaks in 2023, yet the field’s growth remains intermittent. The evidence spans 13 countries, with China most represented; qualitative designs prevail, alongside a gradual shift toward quantitative and mixed-methods approaches. Empirically, cases concentrate in heritage-led clusters, and concepts cluster around Sense of place and PA while increasingly engaging memory, belonging, and PM. Taken together, the literature shows a clear shift toward multidimensional, theoretically refined accounts of PI and underscores the context-dependent and complex nature of identity formation in CCCs.

The synthesis demonstrates that PI in CCCs is co-produced through material, experiential, and constructive dimensions. Material anchors such as historic fabrics, public landscapes, and spatial arrangements reinforce distinctiveness but risk commodification and exclusion when reduced to iconic landmarks. Experiential ties of belonging, memory, and aesthetic value provide stability yet remain fragile in the face of gentrification, tourism pressure, or superficial image-led renewal. Constructive practices, including governance arrangements, participatory PM, and digital engagement, enable identity to be reproduced and renegotiated, though their impact is often shaped by power relations and market dynamics. Across contexts, recurrent mechanisms ranging from conservation strategies and accessibility to authenticity, sensory environments, and everyday practices emerge as decisive in sustaining or eroding PI.

By consolidating fragmented scholarship, this review advances a tripartite framework that conceptualizes PI as anchored in material settings, felt through lived experiences, and redefined through collective practices. This perspective demonstrates that identity is most resilient when physical forms, emotional attachments, and

participatory practices are aligned, whereas imbalance across these dimensions often yields fragile or contested meanings. The study further identifies causal chains linking governance decisions, material interventions, and experiential outcomes, offering both a conceptual lens and methodological guidance for future empirical testing.

The findings highlight the need for integrated and context-sensitive policy approaches. Safeguarding PI requires more than preserving landmarks; it also depends on affordable housing, accessible public spaces, and the continuity of everyday life. Participatory planning and cultural programming should be prioritized to ensure that symbolic narratives remain embedded in routine practice. Attention to authenticity, sensory quality, and social equity is essential if renewal strategies are to reinforce, rather than undermine, the distinctiveness and inclusiveness of CCCs.

These conclusions should be read alongside the limitations of the current evidence base, including the temporal concentration of studies, uneven geographical distribution, and a prevailing focus on heritage-led clusters. Broader comparative work across diverse cluster types and contexts is necessary to test the robustness of the proposed framework. Moving beyond descriptive synthesis to operationalize key mechanisms, refine measurement strategies, and adopt longitudinal and cross-context designs will be critical. Such advances will clarify how material, experiential, and constructive processes interact to sustain adaptive and resilient place identities in rapidly transforming cultural and creative environments.

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### Authors' Contribution

All authors contributed equally to the development of this article.

### Data availability

All datasets relevant to this study's findings are fully available within the article.

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