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City reputation and the role of sustainability in cities

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Abstract

City reputation is a valuable intangible asset that boosts the attractiveness of a city in terms of resources, events, tourism, or as a place of residence. Since city sustainability is understood as the framework of a city's economic activities conducted within the carrying capacity of the local environment to the benefit of the local population, it may help to satisfy city stakeholders' expectations over time; in other words, to enhance city reputation. Our results from Tobit analyses, based on an international sample of 62 cities between 2015 and 2018, confirm that city sustainability is a determinant of city reputation. Specifically, this study shows that the level of environmental, social, and economic sustainability affects positively city reputation. Our results are of interest to local authorities, as they indicate the relevance of efforts to consolidate city sustainability in order to build a good city reputation.

KEYWORDS

city reputation, city sustainability, stakeholder theory, sustainable cities, sustainable development

1 | INTRODUCTION

Like organizations, cities also compete with one another (Begg, 1999; Lever, 1999; Porter, 1998) at regional, national, and even international scale (Anholt, 2007), in an attempt to attract and win over inhabitants, tourists, firms' locations and events. In this type of competition, city reputation, defined as the different stakeholders' perception of the ability of the city to meet their interests and expectations (Delgado-García et al., 2018), is a valuable asset to gain competitive advantage (e.g., Aula & Harmaakorpi, 2008; Rainisto, 2012; Wæraas, 2015). In fact, previous research has found that city reputation plays a role in making a city an attractive location for firms' investments (Delgado-García et al., 2018) and helps to stakeholder to associate attributes to the city (Villafañe, 2008). Those previous empirical findings have sparked an increasing interest in the factors that boost a city's reputation. Thus, a valuable avenue of research is to delve into the variables that may significantly affect the development of a city's positive or negative reputation (Delgado-García & de Quevedo Puente, 2016).

Global resource scarcity, climate change and a growing population have increased citizens' concern on sustainability. As the population is specially congregated in urban settlements, which are attracting even more inhabitants (Mulligan & Crampton, 2005), local governments have a relevant role to achieve sustainability (Dave, 2011). Indeed, within the framework of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) adopted by the United Nations (UN) in 2015, the SDG11 is focused on the sustainability of cities, because they are the epicenter of a large part of human daily life activities. So, city sustainability can be an important determinant of city reputation. The most extensively analyzed determinant of corporate reputation is corporate sustainability (e.g., Eberl & Schwaiger, 2005; Gomez-Trujillo et al., 2020; Roberts & Dowling, 2002; Rose & Thomsen, 2004). Although the link between sustainability and reputation has been widely studied in the field of organizational research, this relationship remains unexplored within cities and public sector administrations (Canel, 2009). Thus, the purpose of this paper is to translate this relationship into municipality research and identify the link between sustainability and city

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reputation. Applying the triple-bottom-line perspective (da Silva Neiva et al., 2021; Diaz-Sarachaga et al., 2018; Flores-Hernández et al., 2020) to city sustainability (Allen, 2009; Rodrigues & Franco, 2020) we analyze the effect of cities' sustainability pillars, social, economic and environmental, in order to determine their relative importance for city reputation.

To test the hypotheses, we employ a worldwide sample of 62 cities from 2015 to 2018. Regarding the methodological approach, we use Tobit regression and Tobit random effects estimators. The results confirm the positive effects of the three pillars of sustainability, that is, social, environmental and economic on city reputation. Although prior research has already analyzed factors of city reputation, it has focused on the impact of the organizations of specific international events, the location of well-known international organizations or urban architecture (Aula & Harmaakorpi, 2008; Harmaakorpi et al., 2008; Turok, 2009). This research goes further to prior research evidencing that the sustainable management of urban issues makes a difference to city reputation. Then local authorities should be aware of the importance of the sustainability in their daily management as a tool to build a good reputation for the city instead of focusing on events that may have a sporadic but not lasting impacts on the reputation of cities.

The rest of the paper is organized as follows. In the next section, we define the concepts of city reputation and city sustainability. We also discuss the relationship between these two concepts, analyzing the effect of social, economic and environmental sustainability on city's reputation. Sections 3 and 4 present the research design and the results, respectively. The paper ends with a conclusion and discussion section that sets out the main contributions of the research, limitations, future lines of research, and practical implications.

2 | THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND HYPOTHESES

2.1 | City reputation

City reputation has been defined as the aggregation of all stakeholder's perceptions of the city's ability to meet demands and expectations of many city stakeholders (Delgado-García et al., 2018). A city must address multiple stakeholders' diverse requirements (Merrilees et al., 2009, 2013; Waligo et al., 2013). For its inhabitants, the city is a place to live, work, and relax. It is also a supplier of a wide range of facilities such as education and health care. For firms, it is a place to locate, do business, and recruit employees. For tourists and other visitors, it offers a combination of culture, education, and entertainment (van den Berg & Braun, 1999). Single residents may demand sociocultural services, whereas families may require services that support the upbringing and education of their children. Investors will demand resources that bolster their economic activities. These demands and expectations may also vary with the stakeholder's specific attitudes or sociocultural level. Furthermore, each inhabitant may have more than one stake in the city; for instance, he/she may be both a business owner and a parent.

In order to build up a city's reputation, the city's stakeholders use different signals on which to base their expectations about the capacity of the city to satisfy their interests (Brammer & Millington, 2005; Merrilees et al., 2013). Prior research has analyzed a few different determinants of city reputation; they include the organization of certain events such as the European Cities of Culture, the Olympic Games or a World Championship (Harmaakorpi et al., 2008; Turok, 2009), the urban architecture (Aula & Harmaakorpi, 2008), or the presence of important organizations and institutions (Harmaakorpi et al., 2008; Turok, 2009). However, none of these factors are related to the daily life of the city. In this line, research has found that corporate sustainability is one of the main determinants of corporate reputation (e.g., Arikan et al., 2016; Brammer & Pavelin, 2006; Fombrun & Shanley, 1990; Lai et al., 2010; Pérez-Cornejo et al., 2020; Rothenhoefer, 2019) because it helps to ensure all company stakeholders' present and future demands are met. For this reason, in this research, we focus on the study of sustainability as a critical predictor that may affect city reputation.

2.2 | City sustainability

Cities are important entities because people's social and economic activities are increasingly organized around them (UN, 2015), making them key actors in governmental efforts (Attinger, 2011) to comply with international agreements on sustainability (Goodwin et al., 2021). In this context, a growing urban population makes it relevant to take into account their impacts on the environment, the economy, and society (Mori & Yamashita, 2015). Thus, stakeholders' growing pressure demands city sustainability because of its importance and impact. In this vein, stakeholders demand legislative and financial support in cities for sustainable initiatives (Wang et al., 2012), becoming a space that allows businesses and citizens to be sustainable. As such, there is public pressure on companies not only to provide economic value-added, but also to engage in socially and environmentally responsible behavior (García-Sánchez et al., 2013). Therefore, cities should create a framework that boosts business and helps citizens to be sustainable. In fact, as we previously mentioned, the UN has highlighted the vital role of cities in the search of sustainability (Diaz-Sarachaga et al., 2018) enunciating within its 17 SDGs, a specific goal called sustainable "cities" which aim is to promote inclusive, safe, resilient, and sustainable cities and human settlements (UN, 2015). As a result, there is a need to evaluate sustainability in cities in order to responsibly manage human activities taking place there (Mori & Christodoulou, 2012).

Although the concepts comprising sustainable development are quite broad and there is no consensus on specific definitions, all related studies consider it a desirable social good and accept the triple-bottom-line perspective (da Silva Neiva et al., 2021; Flores-Hernández et al., 2020). This approach has gained widespread acceptance in the business sphere (Milne & Gray, 2013) and has been applied in the field of city sustainability (Allen, 2009; Rodrigues & Franco, 2020). In this vein, sustainability is defined as the multidimensional capacity to operate successfully in simultaneously economic, social, and environmental dimensions (Shmelev & Shmeleva, 2018). Thus, sustainable cities are

those where economic activities remain within the carrying capacity of the local environment to the benefit of the entire local population (Devuyst et al., 2001). Therefore, we can distinguish three main pillars in city sustainability: economic, social, and environmental.

Allen (2009) defines economic sustainability as the capacity and ability to put resources to productive use for the community's long-term benefit without damaging or depleting the natural resource base. Social sustainability refers to fairness, inclusiveness, and the ability to promote equal rights over the natural, physical, and economic capital that supports the livelihoods and lives of local communities, with particular emphasis on poor and traditionally marginalized groups. Finally, environmental sustainability pertains to the impact of urban production and consumption on the integrity and health of the city, regional and global carrying capacity. This calls for a long-term consideration of the relationship between environmental resources and services and the demands made on them (Allen, 2009).

2.3 | Relationship between city sustainability and city reputation

It is important to understand the link between city sustainability and city reputation. In spatial terms, a city can be defined by its population and land use (Mori & Christodoulou, 2012). However, it is also the place where different stakeholders (Freeman, 1984; Hill & Jones, 1992) or resource holders with different demands on cities interact. In a world where cities aggressively compete to attract investment into their public and private sectors, reputation is a key success factor. A city's reputation is a lens through which information is observed and constitutes a decision-making criterion (Middleton, 2011).

Stakeholders use different informational cues or signals about the city, such as size, daily routines, or job offers, on which they base their expectations about the city's ability to satisfy their interests (Brammer & Millington, 2005; Brammer & Pavelin, 2006; Fombrun & Shanley, 1990); that is, city reputation. At the same time, local authorities also try to signal to potential stakeholders the city's capacity to satisfy these interests by organizing certain events (e.g., Olympic Games, World Expo) to bolster their city's reputation (Turok, 2009). However, the literature has found that such events do not always have a positive effect on city reputation (Randeree, 2014), or the effect is not lasting (Xue et al., 2012).

Issues related to daily life in cities can have a greater impact in terms of meeting stakeholders' expectations than large, exceptional events. Xue et al. (2012) show how Expo 2010 improved Shanghai's image in media reports, but this impact did not last. In this respect, economic, social, and environmental city sustainability may help cities to be able to fulfill stakeholders' needs in the future. Hence, city stakeholders can use city sustainability as an informational cue or signal (Fombrun & Shanley, 1990; Spence, 1974) on which to base their expectations about the city and to judge the city's commitment to all its stakeholders. In other words, city stakeholders translate their perceptions of city sustainability into expectations about the city's ability to meet their interests in the future, and these expectations constitute city reputation (Fombrun, 2002; Waddock, 2002; Wartick, 1992).

Corporate sustainability has been characterized by the increasingly popular triple-bottom-line approach, which implies economic, social and environmental sustainability (da Silva Neiva et al., 2021; Flores-Hernández et al., 2020; Rodrigues & Franco, 2020) and this approach can be extended to the city sustainability context. The social sustainability of a city can be understood as the city's continued capability to function as a viable long-term environment for social interaction, communication, and cultural development (Yiftachel & Hedgecock, 1993). Therefore, social city sustainability should involve social equity issues such as access to services, facilities, and opportunities (Bramley & Power, 2009) and the city's ability to maintain and reproduce the underlying social, cultural, and institutional conditions necessary for healthy democratic social relations (Baehler, 2007; de Tocqueville & Heffer, 1956). The way a city manages issues such as equity, consensus, and security builds up the city's social sustainability (Davidson, 2010), and may be a signal that generates expectations about the city's future prosperity and bolsters the city's reputation. Thus, we propose the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 1. *Social city sustainability positively affects city reputation.*

Cities are places where economic activities have been concentrated over time (Mori & Christodoulou, 2012). In order to attract economic activities, local institutions should be concerned about economic efficiency, understood as the avoidance of waste in the allocation of natural goods and services and their human-made substitutes and complements (Baumgärtner & Quaas, 2010). Economic city sustainability can be defined as the city's ability to put resources to productive use for the long-term, generating wealth for the community while taking care of the natural resource base on which it depends (Allen, 2009). Local institutions should thus consider the full impact of economic activities when they promote economic development. The ability of the city to develop a favorable economic environment may also generate positive expectations about the city's future, because it is a signal that the city may create enough wealth in the future to meet city stakeholders' needs. Thus, we propose the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 2. *Economic city sustainability positively affects city reputation.*

The development of cities contributes to economic and social aspects that usually entail environmental externalities (Mori & Christodoulou, 2012). As the human footprint increases, there is a rise in the environmental degradation or pollution resulting from human concentration and a decline in natural resources (Bithas & Christofakis, 2006). Environmental quality problems are likely to become worse as city size increases. Other factors such as land use, the transportation system, or the spatial layout of a city are also determinants of urban environmental carrying capacity (Munda, 2006). In fact, according to the triple-bottom-line concept of city sustainability, it is crucial to develop economic activities within the carrying capacity of the local ecosystem so that society as a whole can benefit (Devuyst et al., 2001). Therefore, city authorities

TABLE 1 Definition of variables

Name of variable	Description	Source
City reputation	City RepTrak score on a normalized scale from 0 for the poorest city reputation to 100 for the best.	RepTrak
City sustainability	Average of social, economic and environmental sustainability scores. Measured on a scale from 0 to 1.	Arcadis Sustainable City Index
Social sustainability	It is based on seven indicators: Education, Health, Demographics, Income Inequality, Affordability, Work-life balance, Crime. Measured on a scale from 0 to 1.	Arcadis Sustainable City Index
Environmental sustainability	It is based on seven indicators: Environmental risks, Green spaces, Energy, Air pollution, Greenhouse gas emissions, Waste management, Drinking water and sanitation. Measured on a scale from 0 to 1.	Arcadis Sustainable City Index
Economic sustainability	It is based on six indicators: Employment, Connectivity, Tourism, Ease of doing business, Economic development and Transport Infrastructure Development. Measured on a scale from 0 to 1.	Arcadis Sustainable City Index
Population	Logarithm of total inhabitants in the municipality	Internet search
Area	Logarithm of squared kilometers in the municipality	Internet search
Country capital	Dummy variable that takes the value 1 if the city is the capital of the country and 0 if it is not.	Internet search
Coast	Dummy variable that takes the value 1 if the city has a coast and 0 if it does not.	Internet search
Hosting international events	Dummy variable that takes the value 1 if the city has hosted an international event and 0 if it has not.	Internet search
Political budget cycle	Dummy variable that takes the value 1 if the city has held local election to renovate local government institutions and 0 if it has not.	Internet search
Country financial situation	Ratio of national Debt to GDP	OECD
Democratic context	It is based on 60 scores of five categories: electoral process and pluralism, civil liberties, the functioning of government, political participation, and political culture. Measured on a scale from 0 to 10.	The Economist
Continent	Dummy	
Year	Dummy	

should seek to prevent negative environmental impacts, fostering environmental city sustainability. This environmental concern can be perceived as a positive signal that reinforces the reputation of the city, highlighting the city's commitment not only to the present population but also to future generations. Thus, environmental city sustainability may generate positive expectations about the city's future; that is, it may enhance the city's reputation. Therefore, we propose the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 3. *Environmental city sustainability positively affects city reputation.*

3 | METHOD

3.1 | Sample and methodology

The sample is the result of merging the lists of cities included in the City RepTrak index published by RepTrak and in the Sustainable Cities Index (SCI) during the period 2015–2018. The final number of observations is 183, and these observations come from 62 different cities. Because the value of our dependent variable is an index which range

comes from 0 to 100, we used a Tobit analysis (McDonald & Moffitt, 1980). Furthermore, we also made a complementary analysis from a panel data approach analyzing the cities that had at least values for city reputation for three consecutive years. In this case, the sample was reduced to 46 cities and 166 observations, and the estimator employed was Tobit random effects.

Regarding the city profile, Table 1 describes the variables used in our model, and Table 2 presents the descriptive statistics for the main explanatory variables. While the cities are quite well balanced in terms of whether they are the capital and have a coastline, the same cannot be said of hosting international events (most of them have not hosted international events, 59%) and the presence of cities of different continents (40% are located in Europe and 21.9% in Asia).

3.2 | Variables

3.2.1 | Dependent variable: City reputation

To measure city reputation, we use the information published in “The World's Most Reputable Cities”, the City RepTrak index, which ranks the world's largest cities by gross domestic product (GDP) in order

TABLE 2 Descriptive analysis

	N	Min.	Max.	Mean	SD
City Reputation	183	47.1	82.3	70.156	8.812
City sustainability	183	28	74.60	59.02	9.70
Social sustainability	183	25.2	78	60.038	9.305
Economic sustainability	183	32	87.9	63.456	11.344
Environmental sustainability	183	11	87.9	55.543	14.597
Population (in thousand)	183	513	37.468	8055.1	7945.1
Area	183	32.6	16.808	1547.8	2721.9
Population density	183	367.4	667775.2	30056.4	95213.8
Political budget cycle	183	0	1	0.2	-
Country financial situation	183	5.8	326.6	79.4	43.4
Democracy context	183	1.9	9.4	7.5	1.7
			N		Frequency
Country capital					
No			92		50.3
Yes			91		49.7
Coast					
No			89		48.6
Yes			94		51.4
Hosting international events					
No			108		59.0
Yes			75		41.0
Continent					
Africa			5		2.7
Asia			40		21.9
Europe			74		40.4
Oceania			8		4.4
America			56		30.6

Source: own elaboration.

measure their reputation (RepTrak, 2018). This city ranking uses the same methods as RepTrak Pulse, a measure of corporate reputation widely used in academic research (Dell'Atti et al., 2017; Gangi et al., 2020; Pérez-Cornejo et al., 2020; Vidaver-Cohen & Brønn, 2015). The Reputation Institute developed the RepTrak system for corporate reputation evaluation, later they adapted the system to assess the reputation of countries and cities. This system is based on the dependence of reputation on the emotional bond that various stakeholder groups feel with the territory. The RepTrak "heartbeat" measures stakeholders' degree of admiration, trust, and positive attitude towards a given area. The annual City RepTrak index is produced from a global survey of 23,000 respondents living in G8 countries. The construction of the City RepTrak index involves the following different stages: First, the survey asks for the general public in G8 countries to rate cities, especially people who are "somewhat" or "very" familiar with the cities (RepTrak, 2017). Second, a benchmarking of the cities is performed with information on people's perceptions about 13 attributes (Business environment; financially stable and future growth; well-respected products and services; headquarters of

leading companies; technology; beautiful city; appealing experiences; well-known personalities; well-developed political and legal institutions; social, economic and environmental policies; adequate transport, communications and infrastructure; well-respected leaders and safety), grouped in three dimensions (advanced economy; appealing environment and effective government). The City RepTrak score is measured on a normalized scale from 0 for the poorest city reputation to 100 for the best.

3.2.2 | Independent variables: City sustainability

To measure city sustainability, we use the information provided by the Sustainable Cities Index (SCI) of 100 cities from around the world that are selected for SCI evaluation Arcadis (2016). This ranking evaluates the cities in three sub-criteria, People, Planet, and Profit. Then, the three sub-criteria are averaged to provide an overall sustainability score. The main advantage of this index is the focus on citizens' daily challenges in their neighborhoods. SCI data collection relies on

TABLE 3 Correlation matrix

	City reputation	City sustainability	Social sustainability	Environmental sustainability	Economic sustainability	City population	City area	Country capital	Coast	Hosting international event	Political budget cycle	Country financial situation	Democracy context
City reputation	-												
City sustainability	0.741***	-											
Social sustainability	0.687***	0.795***	-										
Environmental sustainability	0.531***	0.785***	0.429***	-									
Economic sustainability	0.547***	0.875***	0.579***	0.579***	-								
City population	-0.536***	-0.505***	-0.417***	-0.455***	-0.367***	-							
City area	-0.238***	-0.249***	-0.152***	-0.301**	-0.118	0.245***	-						
Country capital	-0.153**	0.023	0.052	-0.011	-0.064	0.403***	0.176**	-					
Coast	0.136*	-0.007	-0.056	-0.101	0.111	-0.021	-0.103**	-0.322***					
Hosting international event	0.165**	0.082	0.217***	0.061	-0.045	0.137*	0.259***	0.127*	-0.056	-			
Political budget cycle	0.113**	0.085	0.053**	0.065	0.069	-0.062	-0.076	-0.037	0.026	-0.027*			
Country financial situation	0.337***	0.086	0.095	0.033**	0.040	0.138*	-0.261***	0.015	0.064	0.132*	0.014	-	
Democracy context	0.701***	0.567***	0.401***	0.593***	0.377***	-0.446***	-0.466***	-0.132*	-0.033	0.185**	0.152**	0.274***	-

* $p < .1$; ** $p < .05$; *** $p < .01$.

TABLE 4 Results of Tobit analysis

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
	City Reputation	City Reputation	City Reputation	City Reputation
City sustainability				40.612*** (3.817)
Social sustainability	33.715*** (3.848)			
Environmental sustainability		23.670*** (4.346)		
Economic sustainability			20.458*** (2.394)	
City population	-3.368*** (0.953)	-4.113*** (1.045)	-3.125*** (0.966)	-2.719*** (0.901)
City area	0.553* (0.291)	0.353 (0.329)	0.200 (0.299)	0.116 (0.278)
Country capital	-1.154* (0.648)	-1.060 (0.717)	-1.303** (0.652)	-1.205** (0.606)
Coast	1.861*** (0.626)	1.658*** (0.690)	1.227* (0.630)	1.578*** (0.585)
Hosting international events	-1.432** (0.671)	-0.642 (0.740)	-0.189 (0.679)	-0.482 (0.627)
Political budget cycle	-0.095 (0.667)	-0.398 (0.741)	-0.344 (0.673)	-0.418 (0.626)
Country financial situation	0.050*** (0.007)	0.061*** (0.008)	0.054*** (0.007)	0.055*** (0.007)
Democratic context	1.923*** (0.268)	1.306 (0.348)	1.599 (0.289)	1.120*** (0.272)
Continent	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Year	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Constant	39.344*** (5.568)	53.221*** (5.707)	51.826*** (5.163)	42.2700*** (5.006)
No. of observations	183	183	183	183
No. of cities	62	62	62	62
LR Chi	335.62***	299.06***	332.97***	359.54***

* $p < .1$; ** $p < .05$; *** $p < .01$.

reputable data sources such as the World Bank, the World Health Organization (WHO), Energy Information Administration (EIA), and United Nations Statistics Division. Specifically, the social sustainability variable is captured by the pillar People, which measures social sustainability through seven indicators: Education, Health, Demographics, Income Inequality, Affordability, Work-life balance, and Crime. It aims to quantify the overall quality of life and the opportunities the city provides to its citizens. Environmental sustainability is measured through the Planet pillar, which also uses seven indicators: Environmental risks, Green spaces, Energy, Air pollution, Greenhouse gas emissions, Waste management, and Drinking water and sanitation. This pillar is aimed at measuring the city's awareness of its influence on the environment and what it is doing to reduce its impact on the

ecosystem. The pillar Profit measures economic sustainability using six indicators: Employment, Connectivity, Tourism, Ease of doing business, Economic development, and Transport Infrastructure Development. This last pillar is related to cities' wealth, global importance, the ease of doing business, transportation network, and tourist attractiveness. We range all the measures from 0 to 1.

3.2.3 | Control variables

We include 10 control variables: municipality size, measured as population and area size, hosting international events, political budget cycle, country capital, maritime coast, country financial situation,

TABLE 5 Panel data results of Tobit random effects analysis

	Model 5	Model 6	Model 7	Model 8
	City Reputation	City Reputation	City Reputation	City Reputation
City sustainability				9.421*** (3.560)
Social sustainability	6.056** (2.640)			
Environmental sustainability		4.864* (2.734)		
Economic sustainability			3.735* (2.217)	
City population	-2.158 (2.041)	-2.390 (2.078)	-2.424 (2.044)	-2.062 (1.963)
City area	0.478* (0.571)	0.363 (0.583)	0.342 (0.574)	0.357 (0.548)
Country capital	-1.318 (1.267)	-1.253 (1.294)	-1.360 (1.270)	-1.324 (1.124)
Coast	2.056* (1.234)	1.993 (1.259)	1.860 (1.236)	1.977* (1.182)
Hosting international events	-1.261 (0.308)	-1.121 (1.334)	-0.954 (1.313)	-1.071 (1.252)
Political budget cycle	-0.248 (0.285)	-0.302 (0.286)	-0.274 (0.287)	-2.977 (0.287)
Country financial situation	0.042*** (0.011)	0.046*** (0.011)	0.047*** (0.011)	0.044*** (0.010)
Democratic context	2.892*** (0.560)	2.665*** (1.558)	2.697*** (0.570)	2.640*** (0.547)
Continent	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Year	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Constant	44.892*** (11.550)	48.102*** (11.558)	49.118*** (11.365)	44.771*** (11.067)
No. of observations	166	166	166	166
No. of groups	46	46	46	46
Wald Chi	336.23***	327.11***	329.58***	349.94***

* $p < .1$; ** $p < .05$; *** $p < .01$.

democracy level, continent, and year. Below we provide the descriptions and measurement of these variables.

Municipality size plays an essential role in city reputation strategy (Lockert et al., 2019). We reason that the bigger the city is, the more robust and competent image it can project. Size is measured as the logarithm of total inhabitants in the municipality (López-López et al., 2018). Previous research has also employed this variable (e.g., García-Sánchez et al., 2013). We have also included another measure that captures city size; namely, city area that is measured by the logarithm of squared kilometers of the city.

As prior research has highlighted the effect on city reputation of certain events (Harmaakorpi et al., 2008; Turok, 2009), we also include a variable called Hosting international events. Hosting sports and/or cultural events such as the Olympic

Games (Broudehoux, 2007; Randeree, 2014) or World Expo (Xue et al., 2012) may influence a city's reputation. Hosting international events is a dichotomous variable (1 the city has hosted an event, 0 it has not hosted an event).

We also include two variables that control the country-of-origin effect (Kang & Yang, 2010; Roth & Romeo, 1992) because perceptions of a city are affected by the characteristics of its country. First, we include the country's financial context measured by the ratio of debt to GDP. Also, we have included the level of democracy of the country measured as the Democracy Index provided by The Economist. This score yields a range from 0 to 10 which 0 means a low level of democracy and 10 a high level of democracy of the country.

As the capitals of the countries tend to be more visible because governments and institutions are located there and usually provide

more services, we include this dichotomous variable. Being on the coast can also be a factor that affects the perception of cities, so we again include this as a dummy variable. We also include the variable political budget cycle measured as a dichotomous variable that takes value 1 if in the year has held elections for the local government and 0 if not, because politicians just before an election is held may allocate the cities resources with opportunistic goals (Shmuel, 2020). Finally, we introduce continent and year dummies as control variables.

4 | RESULTS

Tables 2 and 3 present the descriptive statistics of our sample and the correlation matrix, respectively. In Table 2, we can see that the average level of economic sustainability is higher than that of the social and environmental sustainability, with the environmental sustainability level being the lowest of the three of them. This indicates that cities are still more concerned about economic sustainability than the other dimensions. Furthermore, capital cities comprise approximately half the sample, and about half the cities in the sample are located on the coast.

Table 4 provides the results of the Tobit analyses and Table 5 shows the results of Tobit random effects. The variance inflation factors are all under 5 in all of the models, indicating that there are no multicollinearity problems (Alin, 2010; Cohen et al., 2002). Models 1, 2, and 3 show the results of social, environmental and economic city sustainability on corporate reputation. In addition, Model 4 analyses the effect of global city sustainability on corporate reputation. Model 1 presents a positive and significant effect of social city sustainability on city reputation (Model 1, $p < .01$). This finding confirms Hypothesis 1. Model 2 shows a positive and significant relationship between environmental city sustainability and city reputation (Model 2, $p < .01$), giving support for Hypothesis 2. Moreover, Model 3 presents a positive and significant effect of economic city sustainability on city reputation (Model 3, $p < .01$). This result confirms Hypothesis 3. Model 4, consistent with the results of models 1, 2 and 3, finds support for the effect of city sustainability on city reputation. Furthermore, the results of the Tobit random effects (Table 5) are also consistent with the Tobit analysis ones (Table 4). Models 5, 6, and 7 show a positive effect of social (Model 5, $p < .05$), environmental (Model 6, $p < .10$), and economic sustainability (Model 7, $p < .10$) respectively, on city reputation, confirming Hypothesis 1, 2, and 3 respectively. Again, results of Model 8 ($p < .01$) are consistent with all previous results, confirming the positive effect of city sustainability on corporate reputation. Concerning the control variables, all the models show a positive and significant effect of the level of democracy and financial situation of the country on its cities' reputation. Furthermore, most of the models show a positive and significant effect of having a coastline on city reputation. Conversely, most of the models reveal that being the country's capital is negatively related to city reputation. Regarding the variable hosting international events, such as the Olympics Games and World Expo, it is negatively significant in only one model (Model 1), and nonsignificant in the rest of the models. So, we cannot

consider that Hosting international events has effect on city reputation. Although, the results are not consistent between Tobit regression and Tobit random effects analysis about city population effect, the results may suggest a negative effect on city reputation. Finally, political budget cycle and city area have no effect on city reputation in none of the models.

5 | CONCLUSIONS AND DISCUSSION

Results from Tobit analysis and Tobit random effects analysis of an international sample of 62 cities between 2015 and 2018 confirm that city sustainability is a determinant of city reputation. Specifically, our results confirm that cities' management of the three sustainability pillars (social, economic, and environmental) are important cues that city's stakeholders consider when developing expectations about the city.

Furthermore, results show that being the capital of a country has a negatively affects city reputation. This may be explained by the fact that negative news has more of an impact than positive news (Zhang, 2016). As mentioned above, the capitals attract more media focus, thus adverse events occurring in capital cities have greater diffusion and visibility, neutralizing positive reputational events. We find no effect of big city events, such as the Olympic Games and World Expo, on cities' reputations. In fact, previous literature is ambiguous because some studies have found support for a positive impact of the Olympic Games and World Expo on city reputation (van Wynsberghe et al., 2012), whereas others report a negative effect (Randeree, 2014) or a positive but not lasting effect (Xue et al., 2012). Conversely, our results also reveal a strong positive relationship between city reputation and coastal location. In this respect, the results are consistent with previous literature (e.g., Hirte et al., 2020; Ioannou & Wójcik, 2021; Rauch, 1991) which highlights that proximity to the coast offers a natural advantage over inland cities in terms of improved economic conditions such as access to international trade, high wages, residential rental rates, and large populations. Thus, having a coastline enhances city reputation; indeed, it is not surprising that a resource such as the sea generates positive perceptions about the cities located near it. The level of democracy of the country favor a good city reputation of the municipalities. Cities' stakeholders expect higher satisfaction of their interests in cities located in more democratic countries. Our results also show a positive effect of the debt to GDP on corporate reputation. Although at a first glance this result is unexpected, it could be explained because the debt favors resources to satisfy stakeholders' interest at least in the short term. Furthermore, there is evidence that debt reduces welfare only for high-income individuals (Bjørnskov et al., 2008), therefore, when a country increases its indebtedness the generalized citizens' perceptions may be positive because there are more resources available that it will make easier get more interests satisfied in the current period.

This research goes further than previous studies in the analysis of the determinants of city reputation. Prior research has analyzed a few different determinants of city reputation, such as the organization of specific events including European Cities of Culture, the Olympic

Games or a World Championship (Harmaakorpi et al., 2008; Turok, 2009), the urban architecture (Aula & Harmaakorpi, 2008), or the presence of important organizations and institutions (Harmaakorpi et al., 2008; Turok, 2009). However, none of these factors are related to the daily management of the city. The present study suggests that the sustainable management of urban issues makes a difference to city reputation. Therefore, this research builds on previous findings from the field of company reputation and extends them to the sphere of public administration, highlighting the fact that stakeholders demand sustainable behavior from all the agents around them.

Despite the contributions made by this study, we are aware that it is not without limitations. First, due to the nature of the data, all the cities analyzed are big. Therefore, future research should attempt to repeat the analysis with a sample of smaller cities. Furthermore, this research suggests new lines of research to deepen in the study of sustainability and reputation of cities. For example, it would be interesting to analyze what specific city policies may improve city sustainability. Also, analyzing how the composition and political bias of the local government affects the sustainable development of the city and its reputation can be a future avenue of research. Finally, future studies may analyze if the achievement of SDGs affects city reputation.

Local governments of the municipalities should be aware of the importance of sustainability in their city when it comes to consolidating their city's reputation. Indeed, city management that fosters social, environmental, and economic sustainability will build up a city's reputation. Authorities should promote policies that enhance the sustainability of cities, promoting policies that favor the achievement of the SDGs, specifically the 11 SDG, since this, in turn, will strengthen the link between stakeholders and the city, thereby boosting the city's ability to secure new resources that can be invested in improving the quality of life of local communities. This process will create a virtuous circle in the city, consolidating the sustainability and reputation of the city over time. Furthermore, sustainable cities will be better prepared to provide a framework that facilitates sustainable living for all the agents that interact with them. On the other hand, because municipalities manage the context in where people live and interact, authorities also, have the opportunity and the obligation to promote sustainability among citizens. Therefore, they have an important role in fostering practices and behaviors that lead their citizens to a more sustainable way of life. In fact, many of the fund international institutions as the World Bank or the European Union are focused on achieving sustainable life models, which is why local governments can take advantage through projects to obtain resources to promote sustainability in their municipalities.

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