



Methodological elements to design a city branding with the use of grounded theory *Elementos metodológicos para diseñar marca ciudad a partir de la teoría fundamentada*

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ABSTRACT

City branding was established as an endogenous development strategy – the need to build the city's own identity. This identity is reached through the study of the history, culture, economy, trajectory, products and potential development as well as the design of symbolic structures to attract investors and tourists and to create specific demands. The participation of a government entity is expected for these purposes thus encouraging those contributions from academic areas, entrepreneurs, cultural representatives including those community traditions. On the other hand, this participation should be supplemented with studies focused on the reality of the population, its history, and the actions that promoted city development. Cities and strategic associates should accompany these above mentioned entities in the purpose of designing their city branding, by building a model of participatory planning, a symbolic representation and a media plan guaranteeing that recognition as a territory with competitive values and advantages is a reality. To contribute to these goals, a methodological proposal with key elements for the design of the city brand using a research focused on quality review of documentation and grounded theory is presented. This study used Atlas Ti and VOSViewer software to analyze data. The research resulted in the precise definition of specific city branding and established strategic planning, management environment, and fundamental branding structure as those key founding elements for any particular city branding

Keywords: Identity, brand, city branding, urban marketing, methodology

RESUMEN

Desde la teoría del marketing territorial se establece como estrategia de desarrollo endógeno, la necesidad de construir una identidad propia para las regiones. Esta identidad se alcanza mediante el estudio de la historia, cultura, economía, trayectoria, productos y potencialidades de desarrollo. Además, debe pensarse en el diseño de constructos simbólicos para atraer inversionistas, turistas y generar demandas específicas. Para tales propósitos, se espera la participación de un ente del gobierno que dinamice el aporte de la academia, los empresarios, los representantes de la cultura y de las tradiciones de la comunidad. Por otra parte, este acompañamiento debe complementarse con estudios centrados en la realidad de los habitantes, su historia y las acciones que impulsaron el desarrollo regional. Las ciudades y socios estratégicos, unidos en el propósito de diseñar su marca ciudad, construyen un modelo de planificación participativa, una representación simbólica y un plan de medios que les garantice el reconocimiento como un territorio con valores y ventajas competitivas. Como contribución a estos fines se presenta una propuesta metodológica con elementos claves para el diseño de marca ciudad, por medio de una investigación con enfoque cualitativo de tipo revisión documental y teoría fundamentada. Para el análisis de la información se utilizaron los softwares Atlas Ti y VOSViewer. Como resultado de la investigación surgió una definición propia de marca ciudad y se establecieron como elementos fundantes o clúster, en la construcción de city branding, la planeación estratégica, el entorno de gestión y la estructura de marca.

Palabras clave: Identidad, marca, marca ciudad, marketing urbano, metodología

1. INTRODUCTION

The city brand strategy, or what is known as city branding, has been implemented as a result of population growth and the need to make tourism, investment and commerce more and more competitive in a city (Echeverri *et al.* 2012).

However, this strategy is not recent. There are indications of its practice since the nineteenth century intensified with the impact of globalization (San Eugenio Vela 2014). City branding integrates the infrastructure, the natural environment, the idiosyncrasy of the population and the culture, but, above all, it relates to what the population does, feels and expects (Gómez and Salinas 2017). That is why management of the brand of a locality requires the sum of various thoughts, disciplines, and knowledge. Also, this management applies theories of marketing, communication, and urban positioning, to express those advantages and benefits to others (Herranz-Arcones 2015).

There are different concepts about city branding, as well as models for its implementation. However, none of the existing models or definitions studied has focused or based any change on what is the evolution of this concept through time. Nowadays, with the development of data analysis software, it is possible to establish relationships between issues that constitute a concept and understand the methods that researchers have addressed throughout the years. Software like Atlas Ti and VOSViewer can help researchers clarify the evolution of a concept as well as find the necessary and effective elements to build the appropriate methodologies for each case. This software can work in qualitative research and different paradigms such as grounded theory.

The objective of this research was to propose some methodological elements to implement the marketing strategy called city brand. For that, a qualitative approach of the grounded theory type was used and Atlas Ti and VosViewer software were applied as tools for the analysis of the information; these benefited the research done, by filling an existing gap and finding suitable ways to manage the positioning of the territory from different perspectives.

The grounded theory is a type of qualitative research to interpret the observed facts or documents and describe through networks and connections between one category and another, showing existing relationships, agreements, and disagreements. It is about finding causal, contextual, intervening conditions as well as results and their consequences (Bolségui and Fuguet 2006). The contribution of the theory based on research is the conceptual explanation of the methodological elements involved in the implementation of that particular city branding from its theoretical formulation.

To begin the study of theoretical perspectives in which the theme of city branding or city brand is framed, it is necessary to start from the general concepts of marketing; applying methods, and methodologies to understand the unique city brand in its true perspective. A theme present in the last decades has been positioning itself with research and practices in many cities of the world (Oguztimur and Akturan 2016; Lucarelli and Berg 2011).

Consequentially, the methodology used for the construction of the definition and the elements of "city branding" is presented through the grounded theory; finally the results and discussion can be projected.

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The theoretical review allows visualizing different approaches to address the city brand. Thus, some studies have been developed with a planning, marketing, sociological and urban approach; the latter has been used in studies from the field of governance and public policies; these respond well to different academic disciplines.

Taking this into account, Lucarelli and Berg (2011), found recent studies on the city brand that have been developed under three perspectives: the brand as production, appropriation or critical perspective, meaning that city brand is emerging in character processes and multidisciplinary aspects; everything depends on the interest of the researcher. In this sense, Klijn (2012) perceives that political and urban branding has been widely used and applied to influence public perception of people, places, organizations, projects, and physical objects.

According to Treinta *et al.* (2010), since the 1990s, the term brand is associated with loyalty, esteem, and preference and is linked to distinctive names or words. Also, de Paz (2005) indicates that the brand is a socio-historical manifestation between citizen creativity along with the production of identity signs typical of any society. Similarly, Zizaldra and Ramos (2015), define the brand as the mental image that generates a specific provision in the population.

Regarding the term city branding, García (2010) refers to it as an active policy of actions that are oriented towards two fronts: one that contributes to the identification and determination of needs that their clients may have, and another, oriented to the development of products and services that meet the identified needs. Obviously, these products and services seek to boost real and potential demands.

Within the marketing studies, Heredero and Chaves (2015), find great benefits when managing corporate brands with the city brand. In addition, they focus the analysis on the relationship that exists between product brands and city brands and how brand management can definitely be a dynamic demand agent, when and if, it is possible to associate those needs with a determined place; something that does not happen with traditional brands associated with a particular product or service. The authors in question identified a definite preference for the consumption of products or brands, which by the mere fact of coming from developed countries, are considered of better quality; therefore, the consumer feels that he is earning higher social status and a higher standard of living in comparison with other consumers of national products.

In recent years, cities have become centers where relationships and exchanges of an economic social and cultural nature are developed; these result in the mobilization of investors, enterprises and tourism with a series of characteristics typical of each region. These events lead to the development of urban marketing hoping that cities respond to the needs of consum-

ers and the essential design of strategies that respond to the identity that each city recognizes and differentiates (Muñiz and Cervantes 2010).

Regarding the concept of city branding, Lynch (1960) refers to it as the image perceived by inhabitants or city planners based on geographical aspects or significance. Eshuis and Klijn (2012), recognize the city brand as a very broad strategy that must arise from the government and include a distinctive image. According to Ye (2018) there has been a change in city brand practices from a focus on promotional and marketing activities towards a more strategic state with a form of multi-level urban government, interconnected on the national, regional and local level.

For authors like Lucarelli (2012), the city brand goes beyond the concepts of city marketing; moreover, it relates to an important phenomenon that the city and its surroundings can have in economic, cultural, social and political terms. In this sense, brand management proposes a political vision of the brand as the main analytical dimension of that certain branding of a place; this could be understood as the materialization of “neoliberalism” in its political “praxis.” This political dimension is crucial to understand the penetration of specific place marks compared to others constituting an important activity in a global context.

Fierro *et al.* (2015) see the city branding, as a commercial strategy that consists of delivering a brand to the cities to build a positive image in the mind of the client, investor or consumer. Similarly, for Castillo-Villar (2016), the concept of the city brand must be transversal to the theory of urban, economic and social aspects; thus suggesting that it can be a symbolic representation of regional identity that integrates the characteristics, benefits and intrinsic values with which the consumer associates himself to a territory; this allows him to differentiate that region from similar ones, presenting the growth of both the territory and its inhabitants.

Torres and De las Heras-Pedrosa (2017), consider that the city brand seeks to extrapolate the attributes of a region to achieve positioning and recognition in image, culture, values, and words of evocation in the minds of visitors as well as for the public objective; these circumstances invite the tourist or public to get to know and to explore this area as a competitive attraction for tourists’ destination. These authors circumscribe the dimensions that the city brand must have, referring to honesty and coherence, enthusiasm, competition or competitiveness over others. All in all this must show sophistication, robustness, and consistency that it should convey. Similarly, Almiña (2017), mentions other dimensions to take into account: the brand of origin and the place of origin; the first, corresponds to the place that supports the product or service provided; the second, permits the association that the consumer makes with the product regardless of where it is made.

However, it is necessary to maintain a vision that goes beyond seeing the city brand process as entirely commercial; thus, for Braun, cited by Godoy and Vásquez (2018), in Latin America, several countries have ventured into what could be called, the fashion of branding, without losing sight of the fact that this strategy also aims to take into account the public it

addresses, emphasizing the emotions, the culture and those intrinsic values as citizens.

The city not only constitutes the infrastructure it possesses but it also interacts with citizens who intervene in social practices, building or rebuilding according to individual and collective imagery; in this way, the city is transformed according to the image and actions of its inhabitants, its government and those who occupy or visit it; all of these mentioned intermingles traditions, history and habits that give it differentiating characteristics (Reyes-Guarnizo 2014). Therefore, the construction of an image for a city must be established by mutual agreement with its citizens; this not only has the purpose of strengthening the economy and expansive development of the region, but also, it ensures a better quality of life for the people. Accordingly, this then, will establish a differentiation in values and minimize the environmental, political, economic, social and cultural impact that could tend to harm the communities; (Gómez and Salinas 2017), with this consideration, the image must be addressed to the external public that identifies with it and that in addition, wants to meet and share different experiences.

Regarding the implementation of urban marketing or strategic direction, from the economic-business principles in the urban sphere, cities are understood as places or as institutions where marketing approaches are managed and developed; from that point of view, Muñiz and Cervantes (2010) state that cities are energized under a series of complexities given by the processes of exchanges and relations among citizens and tourists or institutions and investors that require the design of strategies; these interrelate the offers with the demands from those various groups; these include the identification of their physical development, analyzing aspects of urban planning and infrastructure. It also addresses the identification of business activities and the social model. moreover, it includes competition and cooperation strategies with similar cities, when carrying out urban comparative analysis exercises that impulse the city marketing phase thereby introducing a city or regional brand. This strategic vision is also shared by Kolo-touchkina and Blay (2015) and Almiña (2017), who add as a starting point for this type of project the necessity of having management strategies and urban planning, where citizens, the government sector, companies, the cultural and social sector are involved; also, making it necessary to have a professional specialized entity in public relations to achieve the proposed objectives (Torres and De las Heras-Pedrosa 2017). Precedo *et al.* (2010a), indicate that there has been a shift in the center of attention, the material aspects of cities being less relevant, since intangible aspects have gained value, referring to urban morphology and infrastructure; Thus, the lines of action also change, requiring new tools and forms of strategic planning, emerging new approaches, guided by urban marketing trends.

In this sense, participatory citizen marketing, proposed by Precedo *et al.* (2010b), to design product-city, based on local values and identities, is developed in four phases: they begin with the identification of positioning; followed by a strategic analysis, then sectoral strategies are established which are part of individualized urban projects and participatory pro-

jection plans, finally the product-city that emerges from this participatory planning experience is born, thus constituting the basis of the design of the marketing plan.

In the construction of a branding [Fierro et al. \(2015\)](#); [Andrade \(2016\)](#), add the influence that social media and internet have, while [Kolotouchkina and Blay \(2015\)](#) indicate that they promote and facilitate business and leisure; positioning an identity of the city that differentiates it from other territories and that allows us to understand how users perceive the brand through the virtual scenario and as a means where a symbolic environment is built with images that give a reason for the type of city and its characteristics; in this way, the need to promote cities through different digital tools has been identified, designing websites as mobile promotional applications where all the information to access tourist services is located.

The selection of the city brand, [Irigoyen \(2017\)](#) associates it with the dynamism that is promoted in the region, in this sense, to identify the brand requires a clear knowledge of the characteristics of the city; Therefore, not only aspects such as quality and infrastructure have to be taken into account, but others that are integrated to attract consumers and investors are required. Thus, it is necessary to diagnose their impact levels to determine if the standards are met or if it is necessary to strengthen them; stressing also the importance of supporting city brand plans with nation brand plans.

Within the methods for the design and implementation of the city brand, an important aspect that researchers have been working on is the communication issue ([Almiña 2017](#); [Gómez and Salinas 2017](#)), an integral brand management system is proposed, as a communication system that revolves around three subsystems: the management environment, brand structure, and link building. The Integral Brand management, part of the analysis of the management environment as a comparative process of the environment and the contour of the city, also, of the identity design from the verbal, visual, cultural, objectual and environmental, which makes reference to the public, private spaces, the architectural style and mobility infrastructure and services of the city, in such a way, the integral brand management must include media platforms for the city to manage its brand ([Fuentes 2007](#)).

Likewise, [Almiña \(2017\)](#) in his studies examined the graphic communication of the contents and compares it with the brand of other municipalities of the same country; concluding that the city brand must work together with the community to achieve effectiveness in the strategy.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The research carried out corresponds to a qualitative approach of the grounded theory type, which sought from the documentary review of different authors to build a concept of city brand and from the concept to develop some methodological elements, which support the different actors in the construction of a brand for its territories. The investigation fulfilled the following phases: in Phase one (1) 50 scientific documents related to the city brand theme were reviewed,

taken from the Scopus, Scielo, Redalyc, Dialnet, Proquest and Ebsco databases, in a period between 2006 to 2018; The criterion for the selection of articles was based on resorting to arbitrated databases in the research field.

Phase two (2), corresponded to the construction of analysis categories and subcategories with Atlas ti 7.0 software; the coding was carried out by means of a comparative method ([Quilaqueo and San Martín 2008](#)). Open coding or code construction, consisted of selecting segments of a text: paragraphs or phrases, which represented significance for the study. Once the segments were selected, an axial coding was done, which consisted of constructing semantic networks joining similar codes to explain, relate or deduce categories. Finally, through selective coding, categories and subcategories were integrated, seeking connections between them to develop a central category, until theoretical saturation occurred ([Carvalho et al. 2009](#)).

In Phase three (3), the city brand was defined, by analyzing the categories and subcategories found in the Ti Atlas (See Figure 1).

Phase four (4) resulted in the construction of methodological elements for the creation of a city brand, in this phase the VOSViewer software and the Scopus database were used to identify the methodological elements of the cluster (See Figure 2).

In phase five (5) the methodological elements of the city brand were defined; this was done through the Atlas Ti software and taking into account, the clusters identified in Figure 2, then the subcategories were found for each of the methodological elements or cluster (See Figure 3).

Finally, in Phase six (6) the methodology was validated through discussion, based on different authors. For each proposed element, a literature review was carried out to corroborate its importance in the construction of the city brand.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1. Towards a city brand definition

From the fifty (50) scientific articles found in the databases selected for research and when applying the grounded theory, by analyzing data with the Atlas Ti software (See Figure 1), the city brand or city branding, can be defined as: "A participatory planning model implemented to improve the positioning of a region, seeking recognition with the design of the symbolic representation that integrates the characteristics, values, the territory of which it is a part and its competitive advantages; and at the same time, that generates in the visitors confidence, security and positive image "In the construction of a city brand, the political, economic and social efforts of all sectors and institutions interested in projecting the development of the region are fundamental. For the effectiveness of territorial positioning, the proper use of social networks, emails, communication without borders and the integration of different disciplines is required".

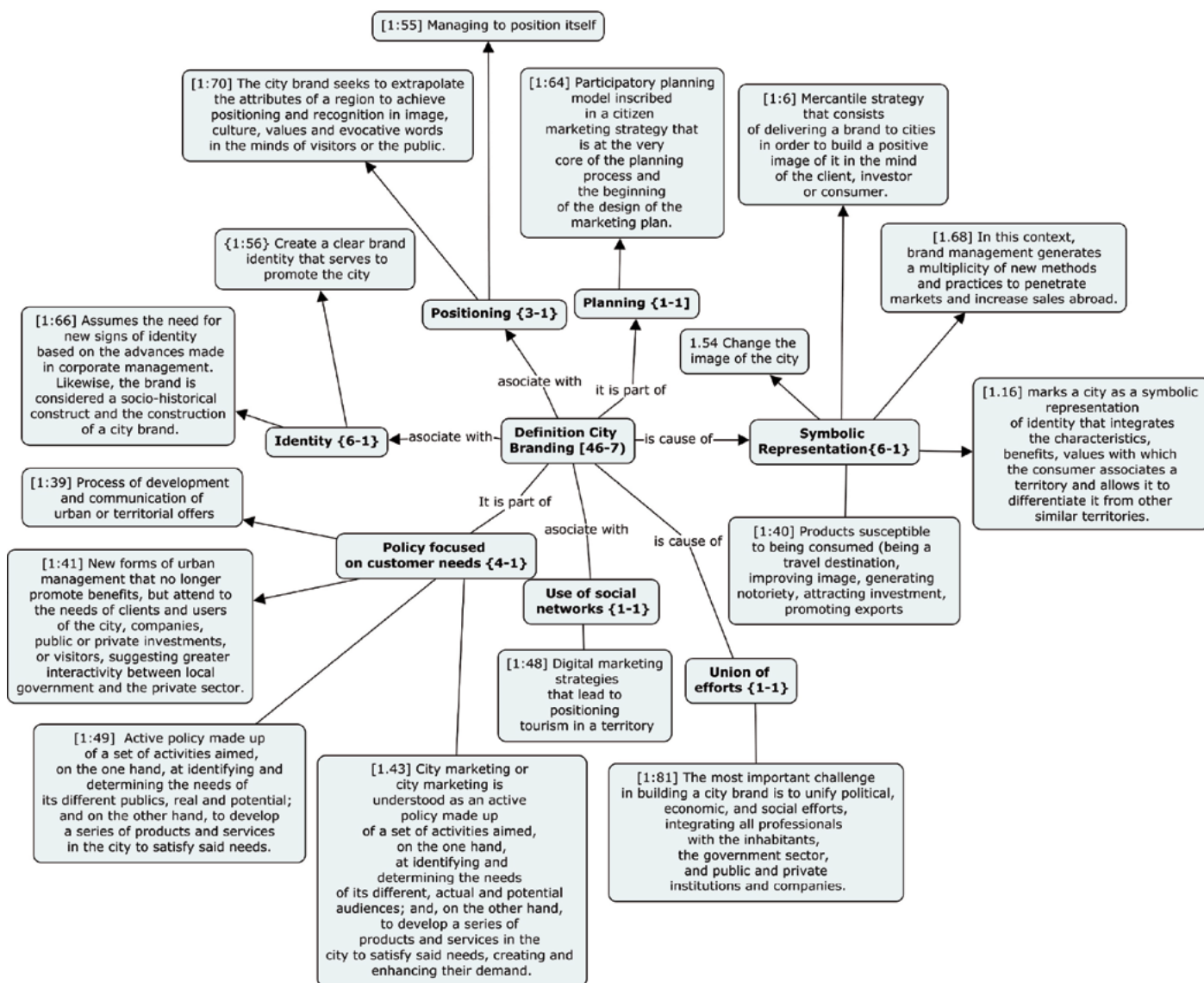


Figure 1
Definition of the city brand^a

Source: Prepared by the authors.

^a This elaboration is based on the documentary review and the qualitative analysis. The Atlas ti presents relationships: in the category {x: x} the first number represents the documents it is in and the second the number of relationships between categories; in the quotes [x: x], the first number represents the number of the document in which it is located and the second, the number of the appointment.

4.2. Elements for the construction of a city brand

For a first approach to the elements that are required to establish a city brand methodology, the keywords and the summaries of the articles were linked to the VOSViewer software; this grouped the words into three specific clusters (See Figure 2). The first cluster in red shows territorial planning, urban development, and potential opportunities to take advantage of. This was called strategic planning. The second cluster, in blue, shows the market strategies that can be implemented

and the alliances that are required; this cluster was designated as a management environment. Finally, the third cluster, in green, shows brand strategies for the positioning of the city in the mind of the consumer; therefore, it was named as brand structure. The clusters were identified to then be put into the categories.

In order to deepen the categories, the articles were reviewed again with the help of the Atlas Ti program, in order to define the theoretical formulation of the methodological elements necessary for the construction of the city brand (See Figure 3).

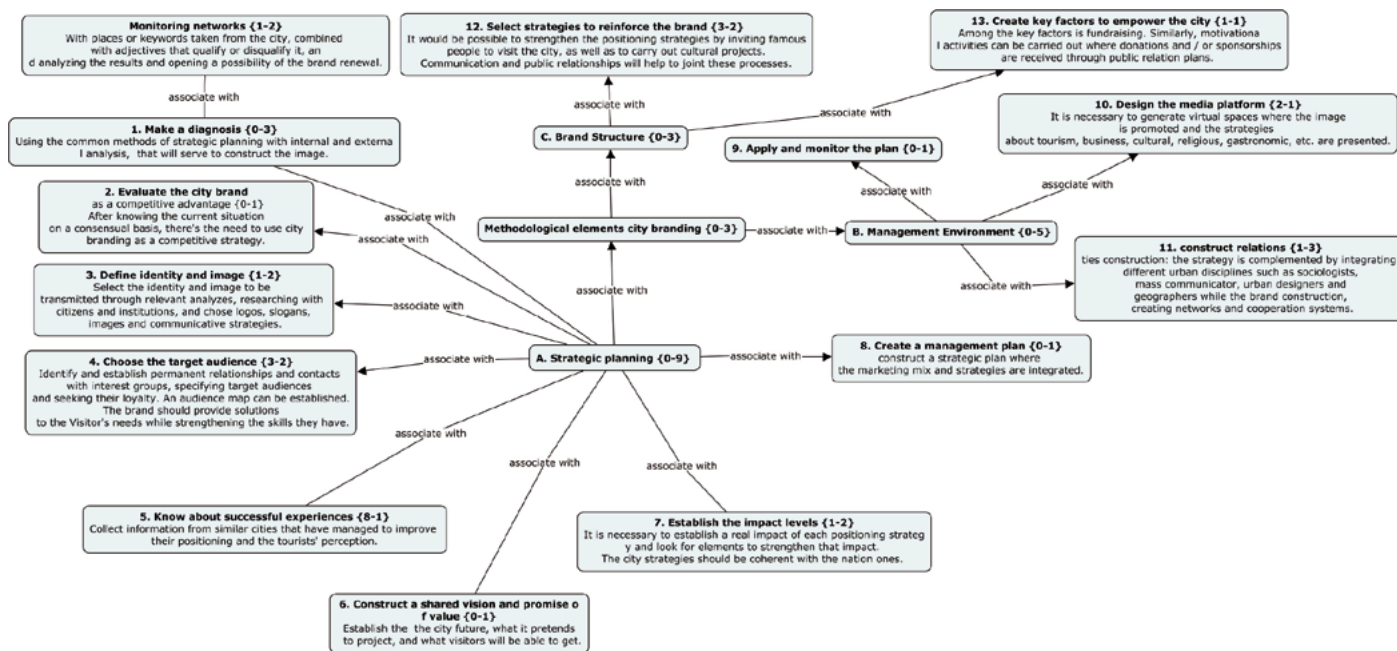


Figure 3
Elements or subcategories for the analysis of the city brand^c

Source: Prepared by the authors.

^c Elaborated with the categories appearing in capital letters (A-C) and the methodological elements appear in Arabic numerals (1 - 13).

Identity and image definition. Identity is defined for what it is and serves as well as its place of origin. Verbal identity is applied to the name. The same is done for the visual identity. It must be of a graphic nature represented by logos, colors, a slogan and icons or what visual representation could be for that city. Cultural identity expresses traditions, customs and developments (Fuentes 2007). In this sense, the image projected by the city brand must integrate the elements of its identity since this will constitute what it is and what the city will be (Fernández and Delgado 2011).

Target audience choice. This consists of building a public map from the inventory of destinations pointed to reaching a specific area; then, the public profiles and communication strategies are constructed to interact with these. They are then separated into market niches according to the characteristics and the strategies for each niche to be built (Fuentes 2007).

The proposed strategies must be differentiated in the content of experiences between one niche and another, thereby reaching different target audiences (Climent-Rodríguez and Navarro-Abal 2017). The strategies must be constructed through territorial mixtures of marketing theories to give it competitive value and be related to the identity and image of both the city and the country. Finally, a plan for communication must be implemented (Regalado et al. 2011).

Knowledge of successful experiences. Although the difference between one city brand and another is what defines the competitive strategy, it is important to know the processes of brand

building in other cities, the management carried out and the impact achieved in order to be able to count on successful experiences that can be adapted to local reality (Echeverri et al. 2012).

Building a shared and innovative vision and a promise of value. The shared vision determines the goal to be achieved and the offer or promise of value; these consist in all those attributes created to meet the needs and expectations of the target population. In this sense, it is required that both one and the other have effective, attractive and contain characteristics that make it special. The value proposition must be able to communicate briefly and build trust (Pol 2015).

Establishment of impact levels. The implementation of city brand strategies must be evaluated based on the expected impact; for this, it is necessary to establish evaluation mechanisms before and after their execution. One way to measure or review the impact can be based on the experiences of other locations or regions (Calvento and Colombo 2009)

The management of the image of a brand requires the local government and its groups for the implementation of a strategic plan aimed at encouraging individuals to want to know the city in reference. This action starts from a first idea or image of what it is promoting; what it entails to coordinate all the activities that demand the fulfillment of the image (Tinto 2008). The plan developed must be in constant evaluation, both from the outset of its concept, plus, the experiences of visitors in terms of esteem, quality, preferenc-

es, satisfaction, loyalty, associations, attitudes and changes, (Cruz 2018). With regard to the evaluation of the image, the feelings and thoughts of the consumers must be taken into account; this allows the perception of how they see the city and how it is expected to be known by means of the city brand; these periodic evaluations are a way of maintaining a long-term competitive advantage (González *et al.* 2011). Additionally, in the measurement of the image, consisting of factors that measure not only the perceptions of the external attitudes that must converge but also, the transformation that is generated from the city brand in aspects such as social stability, employment, diversity, prestige, and development (Del Barrio *et al.* 2009).

Construction of a management plan based on consensus. Strategic planning is completed with the construction of the management plan that integrates all the elements to consider in the following aspects: objectives, strategies, managers, goals, compliance times and budgets. In this construction, all the aspects of organization that have been part of the planning must collaborate to be able to count on the commitments of the institutions based on long term sustainability.

B. MANAGEMENT ENVIRONMENT

Once the strategic plan is built, it is necessary to implement it and for this purpose evaluation, plans and the design of a media platform are required. In the same way, professionals from different disciplines and institutions should be sought to contribute their knowledge and management possibilities for the benefit of the brand strategy having been identified and that requires:

Execution and monitoring the plan. Here is where city branding plays a fundamental role; therefore, the principles of planning must be taken into account as well as orienting all actions towards the fulfillment of the objectives, the schedule and budgets, among others; also, highlighting the leadership of the actors and the impact they must generate in the community is essential. In this case, monitoring consists of implementing the plan and reviewing the fulfillment of tasks, requesting reports from those responsible, anticipating planning problems that may arise or deviations that may occur. It is necessary to be sure of the effective implementation of the plan (Kolotouchkina and Blay 2015).

Design of the media platform. To relay identity messages and value propositions to consumers, it is necessary to design and use a media platform or websites, either on official sites of the city, or on pages visited by the target population (Fuentes 2007). These platforms also allow representation in a graphic way showing the evolution of the strategy and seeing how the operational objectives and their impact are met or not.

Building links. The city brand is built in an interdisciplinary direction; however, in its execution, new links with different disciplines must be created and maintained with the purpose of establishing networks and cooperation systems, expanding the impact, serving as a reference of good practices for other cities. For this case, the strategy must be subject to permanent renovation and updating (Calvento and Colombo 2009).

C. BRAND STRUCTURE

Regarding the brand structure, this is related to strategies that allow expanding the impact of the plan for those special dates. There are two elements: the first, related to the reinforcement of the brand and the second the creation of key factors. This is studied in order to establish loyalty links to achieve the desired positioning and establish a relationship with the beneficiaries of the strategy.

Select strategies to strengthen the brand. This deals with implementing strategies, based on public relations, positioning approaches for the city brand, taking advantage of special dates to invite famous people to visit the city, or to perform special cultural events to promote the brand strategy (Valenzuela 2015).

Create key factors to empower the city. This area of tactics are related to the search for funds through donations such as fundraising or motivation directed to companies to join the causes of the city brand. This is done through correspondence, specific events, marathons, lotteries, among others (Palencia 2001).

5. LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

Since the study was developed under the type of research 'Theory Based', it would be interesting, in future research to apply quantitative techniques with insightful and perceptive results.

6. CONCLUSIONS

The grounded theory allowed the identification of the methodological elements to be present when organizing a city brand process because it facilitates the documentary analysis of the evolution of the object of study. In this way, it contributes to its own concept of city branding and the identification of the elements involved in the implementation of any particular city brand.

The cities, town halls, organizations or companies that come together to design their brand of the territory, must build a participatory planning model, a symbolic representation of the territory and a media plan seeking recognition, those essential values and competitive advantages that are generated in visitors' confidence, security, and positive image of that area.

In the construction of a city brand, the political, economic and social efforts of all sectors and institutions focused on customer and population's needs tending towards the development of the region and the promotion of its competitiveness that are intrinsically relevant.

The research results identify three clusters that constitute methodological elements that contribute to the cities or town councils proposed for improvement when building a city brand. In the first cluster that is related to planning, it is necessary to perform a diagnosis and monitoring of the networks, defining the identity and image, choosing the target audience, and learning about successful experiences, building a shared and innovative vision, establishing the levels of impact so that finally, a management plan can be created and generated.

The second cluster refers to the market strategies that can be implemented based on effective management; here, it is necessary to permanently execute and monitor the plan, design the media platform and build links; thus, this will reinforce the desired image.

A third cluster that shows the brand strategies for positioning the city in the consumer's mind and the need to create links with the political, business, social and educational sector, based on strategies to support the brand and key factors to strengthen the city, consolidating the cities or town councils to achieve the expected recognition and competitiveness.

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