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The brand campaign of the Catalan city councils as a reflect of their local policies

I. INTRODUCTION

The image campaigns promoted by the local administrations have proliferated enormously in the last years, becoming increasingly complex. Thus, we have gone from campaigns promoted by large cities (in the area of study, basically Barcelona), to campaigns with a greater distribution.

Image campaigns tend to reflect the priorities of municipal policies, the importance they attach to certain aspects or the weaknesses that are exposed. They are an instrument of first order in the definition of the municipal policies since they can serve to analyze the social, economic and political model of the different municipalities. The study will focus in analyze these aspects.

II. METHODOLOGY

We will analyze the city image promoted by the Catalan municipalities (946 municipalities). We have compiled those initiatives originating from the local administration that focused directly on the creation or reinforcement of a certain perception of the city. In this sense, these are actions aimed at strengthening some aspects of the municipality or limiting its weaknesses.

The information has been collected from the web pages of the different municipalities. Specifically, the analysis has focused on the main page of municipalities, as well as on municipal information bulletins (if existing). We believe that any image campaign with a certain ambition should appear on the main website of the mu-

nicipality. For this reason, we believe that there are few unidentified initiatives. The information was compiled between December 2013 and January 2014.

The information collected was compared with an earlier work (Paül, 2005). This work was less ambitious at a space level (it analyzed only the image campaigns of the municipalities with strategic plan) and the methodology was based on the telephone contact (the internet was not yet providing the currently available information). Despite this, the objectives were identical and we consider that the comparison between the two studies allows us to observe the changes in the images of the different Catalan municipalities.

III. IMAGE CAMPAIGNS IN CATALAN MUNICIPALITIES

A first element of interest is the number of municipalities reporting campaigns. Of the 946 Catalan municipalities, 121 had some type of image campaign (12,8%). As shown in table 1, the percentage of municipalities with image campaigns is over 50% in municipalities with more than 25,000 inhabitants, with maximums of up to 92% in municipalities with between 50,000 and 100,000 inhabitants. However, as the volume of population declines, the presence of campaigns becomes scarce. In spite of this, the volume of population of the municipality does not seem to condition the possible existence of an image campaign. The nucleus with the lowest population where any aspect related to the treatment of its image has been identified was Gósol, 221 inhabitants in 2012

(an identifying logo of the municipality). For more ambitious actions, properly campaigns, we would find Ribarroja d'Ebre, with 1,316 inhabitants.

Another highlight is the presence of image campaigns in the main administrative cities. The four provincial capitals have some kind of image campaign. The same outstanding presence is repeated among the district capitals (comarques). In 26 of the 41 capitals, 63,4%, there is some type of campaign. However, there is a significant volume of municipalities that without being capitals, have also developed some type of initiative.

Regarding territorial distribution, as can be seen in map 1, there is a predominance of image campaigns in the municipalities of the Catalan coast. In spite of this, virtually every district has some municipality that has developed a campaign. Only in the Cerdanya, Priorat, Pla d'Urgell and Pla de l'Estany districts no image campaign has been detected. This fact demonstrates the wide distribution of these campaigns.

IV. ASPECTS PRIORITIZED BY THE DIFFERENT IMAGE CAMPAIGNS

The thematic approach of the campaigns is one of the elements that best show the policies prioritized by an institution. Most of the municipalities analyzed focused on a single issue. Some municipalities, however, had more campaigns. Thus, we have a total of 165 image campaigns in the 121 Catalan municipalities.

In general, the campaigns tend to repeat a limited number of themes. Specifically we have been able to identify 67 campaigns (40,6% of the total campaigns analyzed) aimed at promoting tourism. In fact, tourism is the main object of image campaigns. For 66 campaigns (40,0%) the objective was transversal; campaigns aimed at increasing the sense of pride in belonging to the city, as well as spreading multiple aspects: heritage, traditions, characters ... At a much greater distance, with 10 campaigns (6,1%) we find the initiatives aimed at creating a powerful brand image for the municipal institution.

Campaigns related to other areas of municipal management are practically non-existent: we have located 7 campaigns dedicated to promote peaceful coexistence (4,3%) and 5 to cleaning services (3,0%). We should note that in some cases the campaigns to which we have referred above may contain some concrete reference to other aspects. As an example, a tourist campaign can boost the commerce of the city. As for the initiatives aimed at promote the economic activity of the municipality, be-

yond tourism, the numbers of campaigns are extremely scarce. Only 5 campaigns (3,0%) bet on aspects related on the innovation; 4 related to commercial areas (2,4%) and a single campaign broadcasts the universities (0,6%).

V. CONCLUSIONS

As we have shown throughout the article, although the use of image campaigns is relatively widespread among the different Catalan municipalities, their themes tend to be quite repetitive. This situation implies the preference to promote the diffusion of certain aspects. The commitment to new topics could help to better identify the potential of different cities. But this thematic repetition is to some extent a demonstration of the lack of ambitious objectives in the policies of a large number of municipalities.

We can observe another limitation in the field of actuation. Most initiatives only refer to a municipality. We have not seen any campaign in which several municipalities collaborate to achieve a goal.

The duration of the campaigns is also problematic. The succession of campaigns, often coupled with the succession of municipal governments, makes the creation of a strong image difficult. Hardly a campaign lasting a few weeks or months can change the perception of a city. Long-term campaigns are needed to achieve these goals. A sign of the importance of maintaining a campaign may be found in the State of New York, whose tourism page is still based on the famous slogan created in 1977 (<<http://iloveny.com/>>, accessed 11/28/2014).

Most campaigns are the responsibility of a specific area of the city council, without support from other areas. This conditions the effectiveness of the campaigns. Thus, the possibility of developing joint initiatives (and policies), which will benefit the inhabitants, is lost.

Poor coordination is observed too in collaborations with the private sector. There is a lack of joint planning mechanisms and the sharing of costs and benefits between public and private initiative. The participation of the private agents in the different campaigns, except in the cleaning campaigns, tends to be limited. Greater collaboration between the two areas would strengthen the various campaigns and could help achieve the desired objectives.

Finally we can point out confusion between the legitimate promotion of the City Council, understood as administrative organ of the city, and the dissemination of the image of the city, understood as a set of all citizens, activities and policies. This confusion is distorting both, generating negative impacts on the brand campaigns.