

The contribution of trade fairs to city branding: comparative study of the cities Barcelona and Milan¹

La contribución de las ferias comerciales a la marca ciudad: estudio comparativo entre Barcelona y Milán



ARTICLE



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Abstract:

Trade fairs can help cities to differentiate themselves because they offer important possibilities regarding the relationship, promotion and brand positioning of the territory (de San Eugenio Vela & Jiménez Morales, 2009). However, the current literature provides few articles on the influence of these events on *city branding* (Kowalik, 2012).

The general objective of this publication is to analyze the coordination between municipal decision-makers and trade fair organizers in the *city branding* strategy, comparing the cities of Barcelona and Milan. The specific objectives are: a) to know the *city branding* strategy of both cities; b) to confirm whether the organizers are aware of it, as well as their objectives; c) to identify whether there is collaboration between them to achieve these objectives and, finally, d) to share recommendations thanks to the analysis of the management model of each city.

The methodology used, from a qualitative approach, has been firstly in-depth interviews with the city council and the most relevant actors in these cities. Secondly, online surveys were carried out to find out the opinion of the trade fair organizers who performe their activity in these cities.

Keywords: Trade show, place branding, city branding, Barcelona, Milan.

Resumen:

Las ferias comerciales pueden ayudar a las ciudades a diferenciarse porque ofrecen importantes posibilidades respecto a la relación, la promoción y el posicionamiento de la marca del territorio (de San Eugenio Vela & Jiménez Morales, 2009). No obstante, la bibliografía actual aporta escasos artículos sobre la influencia de estos eventos en la marca de la ciudad (Kowalik, 2012).

El objetivo general de esta publicación es analizar la coordinación entre los responsables municipales y los organizadores de ferias en la estrategia de *city branding*; al comparar las ciudades de Barcelona y Milán. Los objetivos específicos son: a) conocer la estrategia de *city branding* de ambas ciudades; b) confirmar si los organizadores la conocen, así como sus objetivos; c) identificar si existe colaboración entre ellos para alcanzarlos y, finalmente, d) compartir recomendaciones gracias al análisis del modelo de gestión de cada ciudad.

La metodología empleada parte desde un enfoque cualitativo y ha consistido, en primer lugar, en entrevistas en profundidad con el ayun-

tamiento y los actores más relevantes de estas ciudades. En segundo término, se han articulado encuestas online para conocer la opinión de los organizadores feriales que desarrollan su actividad en estas urbes.

Palabras clave: Ferias comerciales, place branding, city branding, Barcelona, Milán.

1. INTRODUCTION

This research aims to relate the organization of trade fairs to city branding (Kavaratzis, 2004), given that cities have a greater interest in positioning themselves to attract investors, talent and tourists (de San Eugenio *et al.*, 2019). In other words, the aim is to understand whether trade fair activity influences city branding (Kowalik, 2012). Likewise, the comparative study between Barcelona and Milan is based on the hypothesis that their trade fair events have an impact on the configuration of the brand of these cities. It also intends to suggest recommendations in the management model to achieve this. If we consider the surface area of its three trade fair venues, Barcelona is among the three cities in the world with the largest exhibition space, and Milan ranks sixth in the same ranking (UFI, 2022).

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1 THEORETICAL FUNDAMENTALS OF CITY BRANDING

The great cities of the world have a distinctive label of their own. Their image and identity project them as a destination that provides opportunities to create affinity and exchange knowledge (Ajuntament de Barcelona, 2021). However,

many cities design brands, logos and messages to identify and differentiate them from others. Nevertheless, limiting this strategy only to the design of promotional material can generate problems, as it partially applies to the branding process (Ashworth & Kavaratzis, 2009).

Place branding relates target groups, such as consumers or users, to the territory (Braun *et al.*, 2010; Zenker, 2011). Some authors even distinguish three main segments: visitors, residents and workers, and businesses and industry (Kotler *et al.*, 1993). The strategic reflection to address a process of conceptualizing the branding of the territory must consider the different groups; it identifies the starting point and projects its future scenario (de San Eugenio *et al.*, 2019). City branding is a strategic tool for destinations to captivate investment and attract talent (Romero-Lengua *et al.*, 2019).

For Kavaratzis (2004), city branding is:

The means both for achieving competitive advantage in order to increase inward investment and tourism, and also for achieving community development, reinforcing local identity and identification of the citizens with their city and activating all social forces to avoid social exclusion and unrest. (p. 70)

2.2 TRADE FAIRS, CITY AND STAKEHOLDERS

Since 1980, event tourism has become an important and globally competitive economic phe-

nomenon (Getz, 1997). This sector generates higher quality tourism and not only from an economic perspective (Rogers, 2013). The organization and sponsorship of events give recognition to the territory and establish links between the event brands and the city (Hall, 1989). The organizer and public decision-makers must develop strategic planning that coordinates the activity of both (Ashworth, 2009a). Ritchie and Hudson (2009) argue that close collaboration between public administrations and business associations is necessary to get the most out of the event. Citizen participation also generates added value, demonstrating residents' complicity with the event (Dolles & Söderman, 2010). Likewise, the attitude adopted by citizens can determine the visitor's appreciation of the experience of attending the trade fair (Oppermann & Chon, 1997).

The strategic value of events is appreciated by policy makers. They are aware that these events help to generate a favorable brand image of the city (de San Eugenio *et al.*, 2009).

Trade fairs facilitate the advancement of economic activity, which brings innovation to the industry and facilitates dialogue between professionals (Hattendorf, 2020). They are also an important source of business tourism that can impact on mainstream tourism, as professionals discover the city (Köker & Maden, 2013). The 2019 report by UFI - The Global Association of the Exhibition Industry (UFI, Oxford Economics, 2020), which predates Covid19, indicates that 353 million visitors, from 180 countries, visited 4.8 million exhibitors at trade fairs held worldwide. This generated 3.4 million jobs.

The pandemic caused by Covid19 has dramatically affected tourism worldwide and the recovery of trade fairs is key to its reactivation (UPF Barcelona School of Management, 2020). Recently, major hotel chains have assured that

holding large trade fairs in Spain will allow them to exceed, in 2023, the turnover they obtained in 2019 (Molina, 2022).

2.3. THE IMPORTANCE OF TRADE FAIR EVENTS IN BARCELONA AND MILAN

Barcelona and Milan are two European cities with a high tourist attraction and intense trade fair and convention activity; they have become world benchmarks (Hall, 1989). Both cities manage modern, first-class trade fair centers, with a large exhibition area to host large global fairs. These major investments were made through public-private partnerships (Ashworth, 2009a). Milan has three venues with 345,000 m² of exhibition space. Barcelona has 321,000 m² in two exhibition venues (UFI, 2022) and 100,000 m² in the Barcelona International Convention Centre (hereafter CCIB).

2.3.1 BARCELONA

For 20 years, Barcelona has been among the five cities in the world with the most MICE events (EFE Barcelona, 2018). In 2019, it was the world's leading city in terms of the number of attendees at these events, with 157,000 delegates (ICCA, 2019). The economic impact that this sector generated in 2019 in Barcelona was €1.900.000.000.000; 20% of total tourism. The average expenditure of a professional visitor in the city is €115 per day (excluding accommodation); 52% more than the daily expenditure of a holiday tourist (Cugat, 2021).

Fira Barcelona, founded in 1932, is a consortium formed by Barcelona City Council, the Generalitat de Catalunya and the Barcelona Chamber of Commerce. It manages three exhibition centers: Montjuïc, Gran Via and CCIB. Fira 2000, S.A. is the owner of the Montjuïc and Gran Via exhibition centers, while the CCIB is owned by

Table 1*Evolution of MWC Barcelona results, 2015/2019.*

Data	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
Total area sqm % international	100.000 92% (92.000)	110.000 -	110.000 81% (89.000)	110.000 85% (93.500)	110.000 81% (89.000)
Total exhibitors % international	2.000 92% (1.833)	2.200 80% (1.760)	2.200 80% (1.760)	2.200 85% (1.870)	2.200 80% (1.760)
Total visitors % international	94.000 80% (75.200)	101.000 80% (80.800)	108.000 80% (86.400)	107.000 81% (87.000)	109.000 80% (87.200)

*Source: Association of Spanish Trade Fairs (AFE)***Table 2***Evolution of Milano Design Week,, 2015/2019*

Data	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
Total area sqm	200.000	207.000	205.000	205.000	205.000
Total exhibitors % international	2.000 30% (600)	2.310 30% (693)	2.300 34% (782)	2.491 30% (747)	2.418 34% (822)
Total visitors % international	310.840 69% (214.480)	372.151 67% (249.341)	343.602 67% (230.213)	434.509 70% (304.156)	386.236 65% (251.053)

Source: Barozzi, 2023 (consultant and collaborator Faculty ITA/ICE).

the city council. Fira 2000, S.A., created in 1993, was founded by the Generalitat de Catalunya, Barcelona City Council, Barcelona Provincial Council, Barcelona Metropolitan Area, L'Hospitalet City Council and the Barcelona Chamber of Commerce. Its current projects are the extension of the Gran Via site (Orihuel & Zanón, 2022) and the remodeling of the Montjuïc Exhibition Center (Barcelona City Council, 2022). In 2019, prior to Covid19, Fira Barcelona had a turnover of €215,000,000 and organized more than 150 events. The Mobile World Congress, hereafter MWC (see Table 1), was the largest event held that year (Fira Barcelona, 2019).

2.3.2 MILAN

Milan leads trade fair activity in Italy and is one of the most important cities in the sector at

European level. It organizes important international trade fairs attended by world-class professionals (Milano & Partners, 2022). The Milano Design Week (see table 2), stands out as the largest design event in the world, which brings together the Salone del Mobile and the Fuorisalone. The latter has activities in the city (Dezzen, 2022).

Fiera Milano has been organizing trade fairs and events since 1920. It has been listed on the Italian stock exchange since 2002 and had a turnover of €280,000,000 in 2019. It holds 80 trade fairs in Italy, 30 trade fairs abroad and 160 congresses (Fiera Milano SPA, 2022). It manages three fairgrounds, owned by Fondazione Fiera Milano (Fondazione Fiera Milano, 2022).

3. METHODOLOGY

For this study, six in-depth interviews were carried out to decision-makers in the cities of Barcelona and Milan (one interview per city council), with the owners of trade fair venues (one interview per city) and with the main organizers of trade fairs (one interview per city). In addition, 46 online surveys were sent to the other trade fair organizers holding their events in both cities.

3.1 INTERVIEW WITH THE CITY COUNCIL, OWNER OF THE FAIR GROUNDS AND MAIN ORGANIZER OF TRADE FAIRS IN THE CITY

The in-depth interview was based on personalized questions depending on the profile of the interviewee. The persons that were selected are related to the city council, the owner of the fair grounds or the main organizer of trade fairs in the city. Six interviews were conducted, three in Milan and three in Barcelona, with professionals with extensive and recognized experience in the subject of this research (Lindlof & Taylor, 2011). One of these interviews was a double interview, as one of the interviewees acts both as a venue owner and as a main trade fair organizer. This typological sample of interviewees was as follows: (Table 3)

Table 3

Typological sample of interviewees

Name and surname	Position in the organization	Date of interview
Sr. Lorenzo Di Pietro	Executive Director of Entrepreneurship, Enterprise and Innovation of Barcelona Activa (city of Barcelona).	17/02/2022
Sr. Salvador Tasqué	Member of the Management Committee of Fira Barcelona (venue owner).	08/06/2021
Sr. Salvador Tasqué	Director of Own Business of Fira Barcelona (main trade fair organizer).	08/06/2021
Sr. Luca Martinazzoli	Managing Director of Milano Partners (city of Milan).	25/11/2021
Sra. Enrica Bacchini	Research and Development Director of Fondazione Fiera Milano (venue owner).	25/10/2021
Sr. Nicola Orsi	Director of Public Affairs and Corporate Communications, Fiera di Milano (main trade fair organizer).	26/11/2021

Source: own elaboration

The interview questions were open-ended and related to the city branding objectives of each municipality. To corroborate whether venue owners and organizers of major fairs were aware of them and participated in achieving the objectives.

3.2 ONLINE QUESTIONNAIRE TO THE REST OF THE TRADE FAIR ORGANIZERS IN THE CITY

The questionnaire, entitled The Influence of trade fairs on the city brand, was addressed to the other trade fair organizers in both cities. The questionnaire was customized per city, and had questions with a closed Likert-type scale (1-5) for the answers. These are the links to the online surveys: trade fair organizers in Barcelona (14 companies) <https://forms.gle/41q6KZ3ZNLjYzSAJ9>; trade fair organizers in Milan (32 companies) <https://forms.gle/WjbfAyEZf51r9nM96>. Out of a total of 46 companies, twelve responses were obtained (nine from Barcelona and three from Milan); 26% of the total (64,28% in Barcelona and 9.3% in Milan).

4. RESULTS

4.1. THE OBJECTIVES OF CITY BRANDING

4.1.1 BARCELONA

Barcelona Activa

Barcelona Activa is the city's department for economic promotion and development. For the person in charge, the objectives of city branding are heterogeneous because they represent different ecosystems in Barcelona. However, its main objective is: "To promote the economic competitiveness of the city and its strategy is based on connecting the various local ecosystems with other global ones to achieve this goal". Therefore, all international events held in Barcelona are essential connectors be-

tween both ecosystems (L. Di Pietro, personal communication, 17 February 2022). This requires a strategic plan to coordinate management between the various stakeholder groups (Ashworth, 2009b).

Trade fairs have a special mention, as they amplify the message that the city wants to give internationally (Kavaratzis, 2004), with the aim of creating a hub of entrepreneurship in the city; for example, this occurs in technology sectors (L. Di Pietro, personal communication, 17 February 2022). In this regard, it is worth noting that the MWC led to the creation of the Mobile World Capital Foundation in 2012. This foundation is currently a partner of the 22@NetworkBCN association, which promotes the 22@ district of Barcelona. The aim is to consolidate it as an innovation hub for the technological and creative sectors (Associació 22@NetWorkBCN, 2022).

Barcelona Activa has a close relationship with Fira Barcelona: "We articulate a program to promote trade fairs that are considered key to promoting strategic sectors for the city". This initiative, which has more than 10 years of experience, allocates specific resources annually to promote these types of fairs (L. Di Pietro, personal communication, 17 February 2022).

When asked about the facilitators that make collaboration possible, the person in charge of Barcelona Activa stated: "For decades, Barcelona has consolidated the culture of public and private collaboration to tackle strategic projects in the city" (L. Di Pietro, personal communication, 17 February 2022). This collaboration is the main facilitator for the consolidation of the projects that are promoted by the city (Ritchie

& Hudson, 2006). On the other hand, when talking about the difficulties, he points out: “The main obstacle is not having a focus and wanting to cover everything. Not having a clear objective” (L. Di Pietro, personal communication, 17 February 2022).

Fira Barcelona

Fira Barcelona acts as the owner of the venue, attracting external organizers. At the same time, it acts as an organizer with its own portfolio of fairs. The head of Fira Barcelona said: “When we deal with external organizers, coordination with the public administrations is led by Fira Barcelona. It is we who accompany them in the relationship with state institutions” (S. Tasqué, personal communication, 8 June 2021). This is especially true for international fairs that have a significant economic impact on the city, such as the MWC (Nadeu, 2022).

According to this manager, the relationship and coordination between Fira Barcelona and the City Council has always been smooth (S. Tasqué, personal communication, 8 June 2021). This is partly explained by the fact that the presidency of the General Council of Fira Barcelona is held by the Mayor of Barcelona (Fira Barcelona, 2022). As argued above, the representative of the trade fair institution states: “Between Fira Barcelona and the City Council there is a development program for those fairs that are considered strategic for the city” (S. Tasqué, personal communication, 8 June 2021).

When asked about the facilitators for this coordination, he said that it is necessary to “collaborate to join forces and achieve the objectives, such as promoting fairs or events that are important to create a hub of innovative industries that help internationalize local companies” (S. Tasqué, personal communication, 8 June 2021). The definition of local development policies takes form in ideas that bring capital and

knowledge to the territory in order to boost the brand identity of the city and its local policy (Kavaratzis, 2004).

The attraction of business tourism is another contribution made by Fira Barcelona, which brings millions of national and international professionals who visit it every year (Getz, 1997). “Fira Barcelona is one of the key actors that the city has to consolidate the international projection of the Barcelona brand given the attendance of foreign visitors” (S. Tasqué, personal communication, 8 June 2021).

4.1.2 MILAN

Milano & Partners

Milano & Partners is a public and private agency that aims to make the city of Milan the best and most attractive destination in the world. In the interview with its head, he confirms that all city branding objectives are desirable. However, the main mission of Milano & Partners is to attract new visitors, talent and investors to the city. To this end, the brand Yes, Milano! has been created. During the interview, the manager confirms: “More importance is given to attracting business tourism” (M. Martinazoli, personal communication, 25 November 2021). This is why they recognize the relevance of trade fairs for this purpose (Köker & Maden, 2013). Milano & Partners works in coordination with its sponsors and partners, some of which are multinationals. The head of Milano & Partners states: “The main facilitator is our leadership, which ensures the smooth functioning of the working committees with the stakeholders. This makes it possible to defend the heterogeneous interests of the different groups involved. He also points out that “not leading these projects, in order to preserve their objective and look after the interests of the public, is the main limitation on these committees” (M.

Martinazzoli, personal communication, 25 November 2021). He also indicates that delegating tasks according to competences is part of their strategy: 'For example, if the city sets itself the goal of attracting talent, attracting international students, universities and business schools are involved to ensure the success of this project, as they are the experts and specialists' (M. Martinazzoli, personal communication, 25 November 2021).

Fondazione Fiera Milano

Fondazione Fiera Milano, founded in 1922, was one of the pioneering institutions in fostering the economic development of Milan. This foundation is the owner of the three Milan fairgrounds: Fiera Milano (Rho), Fiera Milano City and Mi-Co Milano Congressi. In addition, Fondazione Fiera Milano is the majority shareholder of the city's main trade fair organizer, Fiera Milano Spa, which manages a portfolio of its own and external products in the MICE sector (trade fairs, congresses and events). Some of these events are of international importance (Fondazione Fiera Milano, 2022).

The head of this institution states that the celebration of the Universal Exhibition in Milan in 2015 led to the interest to continue to work as a team for the international promotion of the city: "Thanks to the success of the Milan Expo, the agency Milano & Partners was founded. In this way, stakeholders could continue to work together; this time to achieve the objectives of promoting the Milan brand through Yes Milano!" (E. Baccini, personal communication, 25 October 2021). In fact, the former CEO of Expo Milano, Giuseppe Sala, is now the current mayor of the city (Comune di Milano, 2022).

The head of Fondazione Fiera Milano confirms that the agency's main objective is to attract business tourism. A facilitator of the management is to work in a collaborative way: "Each stake-

holder has the opportunity to act in its own field. Thus, in the case of the Fondazione Fiera Milano and Fiera Milano, we strive to attract international conferences and trade fairs to the city. Likewise, the industrial associations in attracting new companies and creating a hub, for example a technology hub" (E. Baccini, personal communication, 25 October 2021). As for the limitations, she explains: "The experience of the 1990s is a clear example that consensus was not reached due to the conflict of interests and the heterogeneous profile of the stakeholders" (E. Baccini, personal communication, 25 October 2021). Fiera Milano and Fondazione Fiera Milano also represent all trade fair organizers in front of the institutions. The Italian government is sometimes involved, as it depends on the international importance and impact of the trade fair in question (E. Baccini, personal communication, 25 October 2021).

Fiera Milano

Like *Fira Barcelona*, Fiera Milano acts as a venue owner when it has to attract trade fairs and congresses to be held at its fairgrounds. At the same time, it acts as a trade fair organizer, having its own portfolio of trade fairs. For the head of this company, the leadership of Milano & Partners is a facilitator for the achievement of the promotion objectives. In the particular case of Fourisalone, he affirms: "Thanks to the institutional leadership, the stakeholders have consolidated the "marriage" between the Salone del Mobile and the city through the Fuorisalone; creating the Milano Design Week. This global event attracts hundreds of thousands of design professionals from all over the world. For more than 30 years, this initiative has also turned the city itself into another exhibition space" (N. Orsi, personal communication, 26 November 2021). For this manager, "the main obstacle is a partisan and biased vision of stakeholders, which prevents us from betting on strategic projects

such as Milan Design Week” (N. Orsi, personal communication, 26 November 2021). As a summary of the most relevant responses from all these interviews, the following contributions can be highlighted (see table 4 and 5):

Table 4

Main objectives of city branding of both cities.

Main objectives	Relationship with trade fairs
Connecting local ecosystems with global ecosystems.	The fairs are facilitators of relationship and connection between both ecosystems.
Internationalize local companies and attract new ones to establish themselves in the city.	International fairs help develop the local ecosystem, which becomes attractive to investors and companies.
Attract new international events to invite business tourism	Trade fairs are a great source of business tourism.

Source: Own elaboration.

Table 5

Facilitators to achieve city branding objectives between city council, fairground owners, main fair organizer, and other stakeholders.

Facilitator	Justification
Public-private partnerships.	To bring resources, visions and initiatives beyond the focus and scope of public administration.
Involve other stakeholders.	To share concerns, identify needs and expectations, join efforts and reach a consensus that allows supporting projects that are considered strategic for the promotion of the city brand.
Creation of competency-based working groups.	In this sense, involve, to a greater extent, those stakeholders who have experience in the field of the objective to be achieved. For example, universities and business schools, to attract foreign talent and students.
Leadership.	The main facilitator for well-functioning working committees between the city and the different stakeholders is leadership (de San Eugenio et al., 2019).

Source: Own elaboration.

4.2 FAIR ORGANIZERS

4.2.1 BARCELONA

In the online surveys carried out with trade fair organizers in Barcelona (table 6), are the most important city branding objectives for the city's decision-makers:

Table 6

Trade fair organizers in Barcelona.

What do you think are the most important city branding objectives for those responsible for the Barcelona brand?	Assessment (out of 5 points, with 1 being “not important at all” and 5 being “very important”)
To increase the positioning of the Barcelona brand.	5
Resident satisfaction.	5
Creation of an entrepreneurial ecosystem.	4,8
Encourage the creation of a hub of innovative industries.	4,6
Internationalization of local companies.	4,6
Attracting investors.	4,4
Attracting talent.	4,4
Attracting business tourism.	4,2

Source: Own elaboration (online surveys).

However, when asked how satisfied they think the City Council is with the achievement of these objectives, the highest score was for the objective of attracting business tourism, which scored 4.4 out of 5. Likewise, they also consider that notable progress has been made in the creation of a hub for innovative industries (4 out of 5 points) and in increasing the positioning of the Barcelona brand (4.2 out of 5).

When asked whether they consider that trade fairs can contribute to the achievement of Barcelona's objectives (table 7), the organizers replied:

Table 7*Trade fair organizers in Barcelona.*

Which of these goals do you think trade fairs can contribute to achieving?	Assessment (out of 5 points, with 1 being "hardly at all" and 5 being "very much".)
Attracting business tourism.	5
Internationalization of local businesses.	5
Increase the positioning of the Barcelona brand.	4,8
Creation of an entrepreneurial ecosystem.	4,6
Encourage the creation of a hub of innovative industries.	4,6
Attract investors.	4,6

Source: Online surveys

As can be seen, the three objectives in which the fair organizers believe that they can contribute to their achievement with the fair activity are attracting business tourism, internationalization of local companies, and increasing the positioning of the Barcelona brand (mentioned by 80% of those surveyed).

4.2.2 MILAN

In the surveys carried out with the organizers of the city of Milan, the answers on what they believe are the most important city branding objectives for the city's decision-makers (table 8) were:

Table 8*Trade fair organizers in Milán.*

Which do you think are the most important city branding objectives for those responsible of Milan brand?	Assessment (out of 5 points, with 1 being "hardly at all" and 5 being "very much".)
Attracting business tourism.	5
Internationalization of local businesses.	5
Increase the positioning of the Milan brand.	5
Creation of an entrepreneurial ecosystem.	4,3
Attracting investors.	4,3
Attracting leisure tourism.	4,3

Source: Own elaboration (online surveys).

Regarding the satisfaction that, according to the organizers, the City of Milan has with regard to the achievement of these promotional objectives, the highest score is shared by two of them: attracting business tourism and attracting investors, since those surveyed value their achievement at 4.3 points out of 5. They are followed by increasing the international positioning of the city and the satisfaction of residents (4 out of 5).

When asked about the contribution that fairs could make to achieving these city branding objectives (table 9), their answers have been:

Table 9*Trade fair organizers in Milan*

Which of these goals do you think trade fairs can contribute to achieving?	Assessment (out of 5 points, with 1 being "hardly at all" and 5 being "very much".)
Attracting business tourism.	5
Increase the positioning of the Milan brand.	5
Internationalization of local businesses.	4,7
Creation of an entrepreneurial ecosystem.	4,3

Source: Online surveys

Like the Barcelona organizers, their response has been clear. With their activity, they believe that they can contribute to attracting business tourism, increasing the positioning of the Milan brand (these two objectives with a score of 5 out of 5) and internationalization of local companies.

4.2.3 TRADE FAIR ORGANIZERS IN BARCELONA AND MILAN

Grouping the responses obtained in both cities (table 10), it can be seen that the trade fair organizers of Barcelona and Milan coincide in stating that the most important city branding objectives for their city councils are:

Table 10*Trade fair organizers in Barcelona and Milan.*

What do you think are the most important city branding objectives for the brand managers of your city? (consolidation of answers from Barcelona and Milan)	Assessment (out of 5 points, with 1 being "hardly at all" and 5 being "very much".)
Increase the positioning of the city brand.	5
Internationalization of local businesses.	4,8
Creation of an entrepreneurial ecosystem.	4,6
Attracting business tourism	4,6

Source: Online surveys

Regarding the satisfaction that both cities have with the results obtained, the organizers have responded that their city councils have achieved results in attracting business tourism, since they value this achievement at 4.37 points out of 5; and the international positioning of the city brand, which has 4.10 points.

Regarding the contribution that trade fair organizers can make to achieving city branding objectives (table 11), the same responses were mostly mentioned in the two cities:

Table 11*Trade fair organizers in Barcelona and Milan.*

Which of these goals do you think trade fairs can contribute to achieving? (consolidation of responses from Barcelona and Milan)	Assessment (out of 5 points)
Attract business tourism.	5
Increase the positioning of the city brand.	4,9
Internationalization of local businesses.	4,8
Creation of an entrepreneurial ecosystem.	4,4

Source: Online surveys

From the point of view of the trade fair organizers of both cities, they believe that their trade fair activities contribute to attracting business tourism and to the international positioning of the city brand. These two objectives appear in 90% of their answers.

5. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

Both Barcelona and Milan are recognized as cities with solvency and the capacity to host large events. This fact links them, globally, with the industries that these events represent (Cuadrado-Roura & Rubalcaba-Bermejo, 1996). Therefore, they are considered as “a node in a global mosaic and annual timetable.” (Weller, 2008, p. 13). It is evident that the synergy that can be generated by associating the name of the city with the trade fair implies a possible image transfer between both brands; in these

specific cases, Milan is linked to the Milano Design Week and Barcelona, with the MWC (Hall, 1989). In addition, the business and associative representation that gathers at these fairs undoubtedly contributes to creating a positive image among potential investors. Likewise, the participation of public administrations is key to demonstrating the vision of the future that both cities project; which gives prestige to both the image and the brand of the city (Kowalik, 2012). Equally, among the main actors of both cities there is a support program for those fairs that are considered strategic for the economic development of the city (Hall, 1989).

Both city councils work together with the trade fair organizers, and the rest of the stakeholders, to define strategies and promote projects with the aim of taking advantage of the positive impact that the holding of these international events generates in the city (Hankinson, 2009). In addition, promotion managers in Barcelona and Milan proactively publicize and communicate these global events and there is a specific working group that aims to promote trade fairs that help the city's economic development (Ashworth, 2009b).

Trade fairs are key players in developing an industrial ecosystem in their area of influence, as they facilitate investment, generate employment and add value to the territory. Undoubtedly, all of this has a direct impact on the city's brand (Rubalcaba-Bermejo & Cuadrado-Roura, 1995). In this sense, international trade fairs are unique and unquestionable events that

help to consolidate the reputation of the city's brand. Therefore, international trade fairs in both cities help the brand positioning and reputation of both Barcelona and Milan. This association is sustainable over time because it links the city to the event; most importantly, it is linked to a particular sector or industry (Köker & Maden, 2013).

As previously argued, four most relevant facilitators have been identified for good coordination between city actors, which allows the achievement of promotion objectives:

The first is public-private collaboration, to provide resources and initiatives beyond the scope of public administration.

The second is to create working groups between those responsible for the city brand and the stakeholders, to share concerns, identify needs and expectations, join efforts and seek consensus to support projects that are considered strategic for the promotion of the city brand.

The third facilitator is to involve the stakeholders in the deployment of the plan and, specifically, in the achievement of the city's promotional objectives. In this sense, it seeks to involve, to a greater extent, those who have experience in the field of the objective to be achieved.

The fourth, and last facilitator, is the leadership of municipal officials. This is the key to addressing strategic projects in the city, as they focus and avoid dispersion. At the same time, they involve various actors to ensure the interests of the stakeholders. The main facilitator for the proper functioning of the work committees between the city and the different stakeholders is leadership (de San Eugenio *et al.*, 2019).

In the case of Barcelona, the GSMA, organizer of the MWC, highlights the tireless work carried out jointly with local, regional and state institutions to promote and make the 2021 edition a reality, in the midst of the Covid19 pandemic. John Hoffman, the CEO of the GSMA, admits: "Barcelona is our home" (Molina, 2020). In this sense, the head of the GSMA has personal interviews with the Mayor of Barcelona that allow him to share relevant aspects of the relationship between Barcelona and the trade fair (Colau, 2023). The GSMA has recently decided to designate Barcelona as the permanent venue for the MWC. In the opinion of Pau Relat, president of Fira Barcelona: "This is news of an extraordinary dimension, not because of the renovation in itself, but because of what the gentlemen of Mobile are telling us: we want to link our future with yours" (Martín, 2022).

The trade fair organizers in Barcelona and Milan believe that they contribute to achieving the objectives of city branding in these cities. In this sense, the ones that stand out are: attracting business tourism, internationalizing local companies and the entrepreneurial ecosystem. However, special mention should be made of the objective that has inspired this research work: the trade fair organizers of both cities claim that, through their work, they contribute to consolidating the international positioning of the city's brand (Köker & Maden, 2013).

Trade fairs are key to improving the city's image. If they are also international events, they generate a strong complementarity and synergy between their brand and the city. For this reason, global trade fairs should be part of the city's long-term development strategy (Ashworth, 2009a).

In the case of Milan, Milano & Partners' commitment to Milano Design Week is based on the fact that the Salone del Mobile and Fuorisalone are consolidated as the perfect marriage between the fair and the city. It thus becomes the world's capital of creativity and design. Precisely, the leadership of Milano & Partners consists of joining forces and leading this type of projects, as they benefit the city and the stakeholders (Aitken & Campelo, 2011). However, for other authors, the Salone del Mobile is entirely geared towards promoting the export of Italian companies and other foreign exhibitors (Jansson & Power, 2008). After two years, in 2022 Milano Design Week returned to its usual format, where it achieved very positive results: 2,175 exhibitors, 27% foreign, and 262,608 visitors from 173 countries. This edition showed the city of Milan's enthusiasm and will to offer this global experience as the world's design capital is still intact (Il Bagno News, 2022).

The Barcelona MICE Destination Support Program (Cugat, 2021) demonstrates Barcelona's strategic commitment to consolidating its policy of economic promotion and branding of the city through events. This initiative also recognizes the influence of trade fairs in achieving this. Barcelona is hosting two new trade fairs: Global Sea Food, the largest seafood event, and Integrated System Europe (ISE), the world's leading trade fair for audiovisuals (Martin, 2022). ISE 2023 recently closed its doors, breaking attendance records with more than 58,000 visitors (Europa Press, 2023). The coincidence of the MWC and ISE in Barcelona gives the city a good opportunity to position itself as one of the world's technology capitals (Bracero, 2023).

Structured interviews and online surveys were crucial in order to get the opinion of experts; both fair organizers and institutional deci-

sion-makers. In this sense, their participation was necessary in order to have a sufficient representative sample of their opinions. Lack of time, busy schedules and other professional factors were obstacles that have prevented us from expanding the typological sample of interviewees and respondents for this research. In this sense, this activity has had to be constantly rescheduled, given the low response rate of the participants. Despite these drawbacks, a sufficiently representative sample has finally been achieved to carry out these interviews and surveys, which, it is believed, justify the research value of this communication.

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