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BRANDING CULTURAL EVENTS USING EXTERNAL REFERENCE POINTS

Cervantes and the Festival Internacional Cervantino, Mexico

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Introduction

Festivals and cultural events are an important part of the rising trend towards cultural tourism, not least because they motivate repeat visits, something particularly difficult for cultural tourism attractions. Furthermore, the wide benefits of events make them rival in importance with built heritage and cultural facilities since they are more flexible than some types of facilities, they normally cost less, they have stronger impact in the short term and they help differentiate urban spaces. In addition to these reasons, there is increasing interest in hosting cultural events thanks to their positive contribution to local marketing strategies.

Tourists make intense and short-term use of a very limited number of heritage assets and cultural attractions, including material and non-material ones. The reason is to be found in the fact that tourist experience in cities is measured in days and hours, even in minutes in the case of cultural attractions or seconds in particular sites. In addition, cultural tourists do not often repeat their visit to the same place, and therefore they are continuously looking for new attractions (Ben-Dalia, Collins-Kreiner & Churchman 2013). As a result of this, a process of selection of cultural assets takes place since only a few buildings and only a small number of social representations are able to be adapted to the tourist visit. The main difference between the selection of cultural assets made for locals and the one made for tourists is that in the second case, only a small choice is made among the largest, most spectacular and unique resources.

As Gunay (2008) points out, the tourist use of local culture and heritage can serve to reinforce local identity. However, when interest from the tourism industry is exclusively economic, the values of showcasing the culture and legacy of a social group are lost and only the most relevant elements of culture are promoted for tourists, always with the aim of achieving the maximum economic profit. As a result, when the selection of heritage assets and cultural representations made by and for tourists and locals differ significantly, conflict can arise not only in the choice of resources but also in their interpretation and use. This situation occurs

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especially when locals and visitors are from very different cultural backgrounds or when relatively recent cultural representations are considered (Ashworth & Larkham 1994).

This chapter will present a case study of the Festival Internacional Cervantino in Guanajuato, Mexico, to demonstrate how a city can use an event based on a character that has no factual or historical links to the city as part of its branding strategy. In this case, Cervantes and Don Quixote ended up inserted in the collective identity, contributing a new component to the traditional social representation about the city.

### Background

**Cultural selection and the role of events in city marketing and in the creation of a city’s brand**

In the global context, cities become an image to be transmitted to local residents and potential tourists and investors (Llovet Rodríguez 2011). The creation of new events and attractions, the improvement of the public services and urban landscapes, and the increase in local promotion brought about by cultural tourism assist with the dissemination of a new city image. In many cases, thanks to being the host of cultural events, a city starts to develop links with values widely considered as positive such as cosmopolitanism and tolerance. In the construction of that image, a city makes use of all available resources, seeking both differentiation and association with the most successful models of the global economy.

In order to create a seductive image that brings the desired status, a few elements are usually selected to design logos and mottos, which can be material, such as built heritage, infrastructures or iconic architecture (Law 1996; Maitland 2010). Nevertheless, in order to be competitive, non-material assets also play a leading role, such as identity referents, attractive ways of life and cultural values, since they help differentiating cities that were traditionally represented by similar buildings or urban spaces. Heritage also helps to differentiate cities, giving them authenticity, connection to the place and to local history (Burtenshaw, Bateman & Ashworth 1991; Heritage Counts 2012). To do so, a focus on a topic or a historical period is created, with which the city as a whole is then identified. As a result, a more intense heritage selection process can arise, which can make local people feel unrepresented. Uniformity is sought to reinforce the principles of authenticity and singularity, and to differentiate between similar cities. In the process, however, complexity is reduced to the simple idea that is to be transmitted to visitors. Simplification particularly affects historic centres, which, as symbolic of the city’s identity, are transformed into an icon of the whole city to clearly respond to the projected image.

Where it is focussed on non-material aspects, city marketing makes use of values transmitted by culture, which go beyond their function as attractions to the city and contribute to make public spaces vibrant (Rifkin 2001). According to Zukin (1996), culture suggests a brand’s coherence and consistency and strengthens local uniqueness, and promoting a city as ‘cultural’ creates less opposition than other values such as multiculturalism (Kavaratzis 2005), currently contested in certain places.

When designing marketing strategies, many cities decide to promote themselves through a brand. Creating a brand is useful to strengthen a city’s external image, and it is one of the most influential factors at the time of choosing a destination (Correia, Kozak & Ferradeira 2011). Moreover, a brand gives a certain order and coherence to the complex reality of a city, making it easier to ‘read’ the place. In order to decide which brand best suits a city, normally a topic is chosen. Public administration, cultural institutions and businesses tend to
be involved in the choice of the topic, but it is necessary to include citizens’ participation to make the brand long lasting (Lichrou, O’Malley & Patterson 2010), since branding through a topic without the agreement of local people would generate an imposed identity. Although branding has proven as a powerful way to differentiate relatively similar cities from each other and as a source of collective identity, it entails the risk of reducing local society to a few messages easily embraceable by visitors, leaving aside the variety and contradictions of local culture (Eshuis & Edwards 2013).

In some events that are held periodically, the event brand value is more powerful than that of the city itself, as in the case of European Capital of Culture, where the brand has eclipsed individual hosting cities. In other cases, the event brand and the city brand feed each other. The case of the 1992 Olympic Games in Barcelona is considered successful in this sense (Richards & Wilson 2007). In order to develop a successful co-branding between the event and the city, events become the creators of meanings and the core of the city’s image, and they dominate the city’s public life (Richards & Palmer 2010). The case of Guanajuato and the Festival Internacional Cervantino can be considered as co-branding, since the cultural identity of the city is now intrinsically linked with the festival. The link of Guanajuato with Cervantes has gone beyond tourism-related sources and has become omnipresent in public spaces and in the perception of locals and visitors about the city.

Guanajuato and the Festival Internacional Cervantino

Guanajuato

The city of Guanajuato, capital of the state of the same name, is located in central Mexico, 360 km north from Mexico City. It is a semi-arid area. The city has 184,239 inhabitants (Instituto Nacional de Geografía y Estadística 2016) and is the sixth-largest city in number of inhabitants in the state. Focussing on the history of the city, the remains of pre-Hispanic origin are relatively scarce in the site. It was not until colonial times that the discovery of the mineral wealth of its mountains led to a stable urban settlement. Mining gave great splendour to the city, which became the world’s largest producer of silver during the 18th century. Mining remains a relevant activity in the local economy, although its previous preponderance has been surpassed by other sectors such as tourism, public administration and the university (García 2007).

The prosperity brought by mining left an important legacy in Guanajuato in the form of monuments, which today are the most recognisable icons of the city, including the Basílica Colegiata de Nuestra Señora de Guanajuato and the churches of La Valenciana, La Compañía and San Roque. Apart from mining, another important historical fact was the participation of Guanajuato in the Mexican independence, symbolised in the Alhóndiga de Granaditas, where an important battle occurred. This rich heritage of the silver mines along with the technological innovations that were produced and the quality of its monuments resulted in the inclusion of Guanajuato in UNESCO’s World Heritage List in 1988.

Festival Internacional Cervantino

As mentioned, the economy of Guanajuato has diversified in recent decades, and tourism, especially cultural tourism, is an important source of income. In 2015, over 2.2 million people visited the city (around 795,000 of them stayed overnight) and spent over 6.3 million pesos in the local economy (US$330,000) (Guanajuato State Government 2015). The main attraction of the city in terms of number of visitors and external impact is the Festival Internacional
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Cervantino. In 2016, 478,710 people attended the festival (Guanajuato State Government 2016). It takes place every year and is currently considered one of the most important cultural events in Latin America. In this chapter, the 2015 festival has been used as a case study. More than 400 activities took place, including concerts, performances, theatre and exhibitions in both open-air and indoor venues. Outdoor activities are free and aimed at a wider audience, while those held indoors are focused on new artistic trends and a more specialised audience. Although most of the activities take place in the centre of the city, in recent years there has been an effort to extend the activities to neighbourhoods of the periphery and to other municipalities of the state (Barrera-Fernández & Hernández-Escampa 2017a).

The origins of the festival go back to 1953 with the performance of the Entremeses of Cervantes organised by Enrique Ruelas. The success was immediate and was repeated every year until the festival was formally established in 1972 (Noticiero del Servicio Exterior Mexicano 2013). Many cities around the world have traditionally represented the works of Miguel de Cervantes, but the case of Guanajuato is particular because over the years it became a city centred on the figure of the author, despite having no historical connection with him. The success of the first performances drew attention to Cervantes, and the formal establishment of the festival only reinforced it. As a result, Cervantes is today represented in the most symbolic places of the city through sculptures, statues and urban art in general and street names. In addition, a museum devoted to Don Quixote and related works was opened. Furthermore, conferences are regularly held, books are presented and diverse activities are organised on topics related to the author by the university and the city council. As a result, the wide acceptance of the Guanajuato-Cervantes binomial was recognised with the rebranding of the city as ‘Capital Cervantina de América’ (America’s Capital associated with Cervantes) (Figure 16.1).

The urban presence of Cervantes in the streets of Guanajuato rivals in importance that of the city’s most famous son: the world-famous muralist Diego Rivera. Another prominent character of the city is Pipila, a hero of Mexican independence, who is represented in a large statue crowning a hill and facing the city centre. However, other famous characters related to the city, such as the writer Jorge Ibargüengoitia, do not have the same urban presence and are not as well known by either locals or visitors.

With regard to the organisation of the Festival Internacional Cervantino, the Department of Foreign Affairs, the Department of Tourism and the National Institute of Fine Arts were responsible when it was initially set up (Guanajuato State Government 2008). The first festivals were not held in the historic centre, but in the Cata mining site, in the suburbs, in recognition of the historical importance that mining had in Guanajuato. In 1976, four years after the official establishment of the festival, a federal decree decided upon the organisational structure that has been maintained to this day with only minor changes. The federal government took charge of the organisation, and the president of the republic directly elects the president of the committee (Diario Oficial de la Federación 1976). Today, representatives of all levels of government participate in the organisation: the National Council for Culture and Arts at the federal level, the State of Guanajuato’s Institute for Culture at the state level and the City Council of Guanajuato at the local level. The University of Guanajuato also participates in the organisation (Festival Internacional Cervantino 2015).

As can be seen in this brief contextual discussion, the main theme of the Festival Internacional Cervantino is based on a figure that is completely alien to the city but has nonetheless ended up inserted in the collective identity, contributing a new component to the traditional social representation around mining. This is what makes this case study particularly interesting.
Methods

The co-branding of Guanajuato–Cervantes is widely accepted and is encouraged in the tourism industry. This co-branding has its core representation in the Festival Internacional Cervantino, but it has also appeared in other parts of the city’s branding, as happens in many cases of identification of a city with an author, such as Salzburg with Mozart (Ashworth 2005), Stratford-upon-Avon with Shakespeare (Herstein & Berger 2014) and Malaga with Picasso (Barrera-Fernández & Hernández-Escampa 2017b). However, these examples have a historical, biographical or artistic relationship between the city and the artist. What makes the case of Guanajuato special is the lack of that direct connection. The objective of the research was to analyse the impact of the Festival Internacional Cervantino and related cultural and tourism strategies in the consolidation of the co-branding of Guanajuato–Cervantes. To address this objective, a mixed methodology was developed based on fieldwork to identify where the references to Cervantes are located and what type they are. Questionnaires were presented to visitors and locals, and written sources from the official tourist administration were analysed.
Questionnaires were presented to attendees at the Festival Internacional Cervantino during the 2015 festival. In all, 206 questionnaires were collected (31% from residents in Guanajuato City, 23% from people living in other localities in the state, 32% from people from other Mexican states and 13% from people from abroad). Fieldwork was undertaken to identify the urban presence of Cervantes-related references. References to the author himself, to his works, especially to Don Quixote and to the Festival Internacional Cervantino, were included. Photographs of these spaces were also taken, and the result was presented in a map, identifying sculptures, public art, street names and cultural buildings (Figure 16.2).

![Figure 16.2 References to Cervantes in Guanajuato](image)

*Figure 16.2 References to Cervantes in Guanajuato*

*Source: The authors.*
Written sources from the official tourist administration include tourist profile surveys to the festival (Guanajuato State Government 2014; Guanajuato State Government 2015, Guanajuato State Government 2016) and official reports (Festival Internacional Cervantino 2015; Guanajuato State Government 2008; Noticiero del Servicio Exterior Mexicano 2013). This information was useful to ascertain the official discourse around the identification of Guanajuato with Cervantes and to identify the venues of the festival’s performances, organisation and changes in management and particular initiatives from different editions.

Findings

When asked about the adjectives that best define Guanajuato, ‘associated with Cervantes’ was the most popular response (30%), followed by ‘colonial’ (27%), ‘cultural’ and ‘historic’ with the same share of 13.6% and finally ‘modern’ (9%) and ‘cosmopolitan’ (6%). Among the most relevant characters related to the city, Diego Rivera was the most recognised one (46%), followed by Cervantes (27%) and Pipila (23%), and considerably further behind was Jorge Ibargüengoitia (2%). In relation to the number of places of interest visited, 57% of respondents visited 1 to 4 selected tourist sites and 43% visited between 5 and 8 places of interest during their stay in Guanajuato.

Additionally, a series of analyses were made on the previous data using cross tables and chi-squared tests. When associating ‘place of origin’ and ‘adjectives that best define Guanajuato’, it was found that 63% people from Guanajuato City defined their city as colonial. People from other cities in Guanajuato better agreed with its description as associated with Cervantes (54%), visitors from other Mexican states thought that Guanajuato is mostly associated with Cervantes (30%) and foreign people answered that the city is best defined as cultural (30%) and associated with Cervantes (26%). A chi-squared test reinforced the suggestion that the origin of visitors leads them to choose different adjectives to describe Guanajuato (Table 16.1).

The main difference was between local people, for whom the city is mostly colonial, and visitors, for whom the city is mostly associated with Cervantes. The explanation likely relates to the deeper knowledge and experience of the architecture and the history of the city experienced by locals all year long, for whom the Festival Internacional Cervantino and other Cervantes-related cultural facilities and events are only some of the many activities that happen in their city. On the other hand, most of attendees to the festival come from other states in Mexico, and for them Internet and the social media play a key role in organising their journey (Guanajuato State Government 2016). As a result, it is relevant to analyse the discourses issued by these media as generators of meanings and expectations for attendees to the festival. For example, eight hashtags were promoted from official accounts, such as #ViviendoElCervantino, #PostalCervantina and #SelfieCervantino, all of them

| Table 16.1 Chi-squared test ‘place of origin’ and ‘adjectives that best define Guanajuato’ |
|-----------------------------------------------|---------|----------------|
| Value                                        | gl      | Asymptotic significance (bilateral) |
| Pearson’s chi-squared                        | 86.417  | .000            |
| Likelihood ratio                             | 95.869  | .000            |
| Linear-by-linear association                 | 25.718  | .000            |
| No. of valid cases                           | 206     |                 |

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encouraging attendees to share their personal experience during their visit (Guanajuato State Government 2016). Another source of promotion of the co-branding Guanajuato-Cervantes is the official discourse around the festival, where it states that

The Festival Internacional Cervantino was born 40 years ago as a result of a singular artistic experience: the staging of the Cervantes Entremeses. These works of Cervantes marked the cultural vocation of Guanajuato. The spirit of the Spanish Golden Century with all its festive and reformist power took the streets and squares of Guanajuato and settled deeply in its inhabitants.

(Festival Internacional Cervantino 2015, p. 2)

In conclusion, both the official discourse and dissemination initiatives through social media appear to have an impact on attendees from outside the city, who are more exposed to these sources and have a weaker knowledge and experience of the city.

When seeking relationships between ‘place of origin’ and ‘most representative character’, it was found that 50% people from Guanajuato City chose Diego Rivera, people from other cities in Guanajuato considered Diego Rivera (43%) and Cervantes (37%) as the most relevant characters related to the city. Visitors from other Mexican states opted for Diego Rivera (40%) and Cervantes (33%), while people from abroad answered that the most relevant character is Diego Rivera (63%). A chi-squared test reinforced the proposal that the origin of visitors leads them to consider different characters as being linked to the city (Table 16.2).

Interestingly, despite the co-branding efforts, Diego Rivera was widely accepted as the most representative character related to the city among all visitors independently of their origin. Cervantes was only relevant for people from other cities in Guanajuato and other Mexican states. As in the previous analysis, those are the people most exposed to the official discourse, social media and TV coverage about the festival, which is mostly broadcast in Spanish, and therefore the presence of Cervantes is more visible for them. Foreign attendees mostly spoke English, and Cervantes may not have such relevance as Diego Rivera in their cultural background. Local people, unsurprisingly, also considered other characters such as Pípila and Jorge Ibargüengoitia, taking into account their deeper knowledge of the city’s history and culture.

When seeking relationships between ‘place of origin’ and ‘number of tourist sites visited during festival days’, it was found that 88% people from Guanajuato City and 71% visitors from other cities in the state visited between 1 and 4 sites. However, 72% people from other Mexican states and 71% foreign tourists visited between 5 and 8 places of interest. A chi-squared test reinforced the hypothesis that the visitors’ origin is linked to the number of places they visit, with people from other Mexican states and from abroad more likely to visit more places (Table 16.3).

Table 16.2 Chi-squared test ‘place of origin’ and ‘most representative character related to the city’

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Value</th>
<th>gl</th>
<th>Asymptotic significance (bilateral)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pearson’s chi-squared</td>
<td>29.450</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Likelihood ratio</td>
<td>37.325</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Linear-by-linear association</td>
<td>2.784</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.095</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No. of valid cases</td>
<td>204</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
As might be expected, people from Guanajuato City and other localities in the state visit monuments and tourist sites in the city on a regular basis, and they take advantage of their promenade in the city to visit or revisit only some of them. On the other hand, for people from other Mexican states and from abroad the festival is an occasion not only for attending performances but also for getting to know the rich heritage and culture of the city.

Finally, when examining the relationship between ‘adjectives that best define Guanajuato’ and ‘most representative character related to the city’, 38% of people that chose Cervantes think that Guanajuato is a cultural city and 44% of people that selected Pípila believe that Guanajuato is mostly a colonial city (Table 16.4).

This analysis is closely related to the meanings associated to the city. It is possible that those people that are aware of the importance of Cervantes are also sensitive to other cultural values of the city, taking into account that Cervantes is acknowledged as the most important writer in the Spanish language. Likewise, people aware of the importance of Pípila (noting that Pípila was a hero of the Mexican Independence War) may also be sensitive to Guanajuato’s importance in colonial times thanks to silver mining and its outstanding monuments.

## Conclusions

The Festival Internacional Cervantino is an effective creator of meanings and expectations for people visiting Guanajuato and as the main promoter of the co-branding Guanajuato–Cervantes. This is especially relevant for Mexican visitors, who are the main receivers of the official discourse broadcast through the festival’s webpage and advertisements, TV and social media.

The co-branding between Guanajuato–Cervantes has now been consolidated to the point that it has become materialised in the urban scene in the form of a number of cultural facilities, street names, sculptures and public art. Thus, the selection of heritage and cultural manifestations made for and by tourists nowadays includes a repertoire of Cervantes-related
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places of interest, all of which were created very recently and can be considered as a production of new tourist attractions from a resource that is actually alien to the city.

As this research demonstrates, cultural events have broad potential as a source of differentiation for cities that share similar features. In addition, the research has added to the field a new case study that shows the capacity of cultural events to create new motivations and attractions. In the case of Guanajuato, its importance as a colonial and mining city is widely acknowledged, including by UNESCO’s World Heritage List. However, these features are shared with other localities in the region that also promote themselves as cultural tourism destinations, such as Zacatecas and San Miguel de Allende. Due to the vast array of performances, the Festival Internacional Cervantino has contributed to highlight the city of Guanajuato as a main cultural destination. Besides the positive role of the event itself, there has been a successful theming process, implying the association of Cervantes with the city even when no true historic links exist. This way, the Festival Internacional Cervantino effectively contributes the distinction factor that the city needs to maintain its competitiveness.

References


