

THE BRANDING OF A PUBLIC INSTITUTION IN THE EYES OF THE CITIZENS IT SERVES

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A few weeks ago, this writer attended an interesting event organised by Eibar Town Council, [a conference specialising in communication and transparency in public administration](#). In its second edition, the event was attended by professionals in branding, analytics and web accessibility, as well as people working in communication or open government in the administration itself. The day culminated with a round table discussion among all the speakers in which several relevant issues arose.

One of the issues that stood out in this multidisciplinary talk was the **contrast between the construction of the brand of a public institution and that of a private company**. In both cases, the brand is not only composed of a logo, a name and a slogan, **the brand is everything** that has to do with the entity, **particularly the experience** of the user at all points of contact.

The particularity of an institutional brand is that public bodies cannot limit themselves to offering attractive services; in a state governed by the rule of law, **they have the duty to guarantee rights and impose obligations**, sometimes with coercive tools. This means that citizens are often forced to approach institutions, due to circumstances, to demand a right or pay a sanction. When building or thinking about a brand to project to citizens, it must be taken into account that those who receive it will most likely suffer these **points of pain**. It is not something automatically palatable, like choosing the flavour you want in an ice-cream parlour.

It is necessary to incorporate this **multidimensional vision** into the institutional brand in order to project it in a balanced way.

All this also means that the experience of **different user profiles** from different backgrounds and capacities must be taken care of, guaranteeing accessibility for all those who are going to approach. They will not have the option of knocking on another door, in most cases.

As far as messages are concerned, this writer would like to add another particularity: not all citizens can be expected to agree with the ideas with which the brand is associated, at least not under democratic conditions. Institutions, however, have a duty to serve all citizens, whether or not they agree with those ideas. As we said in a previous article on the [Country Brand](#), basic consensuses need to be reached for coexistence, and the messages associated with a brand will have to be aligned with the **construction of shared frameworks, based on what is common**.

Inevitably, there will be a number of people who approach the institution who will not feel involved, or will be against it, but care must be taken to ensure that no vulnerable group of people feels directly confronted, because that is the same as making them feel excluded from their rights and obligations.

These particularities may make institutional branding, or more broadly, institutional communication, more boring to work with for professionals, who have to follow a line of correction, but, seen from another point of view, the challenge is more exciting because it involves more complexity, and because it affects all citizens.

Acting politically incorrect can be reserved for political communication, which should not be mixed with the communication of an institution that is shared.

Main picture: Jonas Kool in Unsplash

