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PROPOSTA DE ANÁLISE DA CAPACIDADE INSTITUCIONAL DE MUNICÍPIOS E POTENCIAL DE CRIAÇÃO DE MARCA TERRITORIAL

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ABSTRACT

This article aims to establish a theoretical relationship between municipal institutional capacity and the potential for creating a territorial brand, proposing an analytical framework that articulates these two dimensions within the territorial development approach. It is understood that territory is a historical and relational construct, whose development results from the articulated mobilization of its material and immaterial assets, as well as from the coordination among institutional and social actors. Territorial brands are conceived as a strategic instrument for identity activation and symbolic organization of the territory, going beyond a merely promotional dimension. The study is exploratory in nature, grounded in a theoretical and qualitative approach supported by bibliographical research. As a result, the levels of institutional capacity — micro, meso, and macro — are systematized and related to the stages of the territorial branding process, demonstrating that branding effectiveness depends on the integration of technical competencies, organizational structure, and political legitimacy. It is concluded that a territorial brand can only be consolidated as a strategic asset when supported by institutional robustness and alignment between planning, action, and communication.

Keywords: territorial branding; institutional capacity; territorial development.

RESUMO

O presente artigo tem como objetivo estabelecer uma relação teórica entre a capacidade institucional dos municípios e o potencial de criação de marca territorial, propondo uma matriz analítica que articule essas duas dimensões no contexto da abordagem territorial do desenvolvimento. Parte-se do entendimento de que o território é uma construção histórica e relacional, cujo desenvolvimento resulta da mobilização articulada de seus ativos materiais e imateriais, bem como da coordenação entre atores institucionais e sociais. A marca territorial é concebida como instrumento estratégico de ativação identitária e de organização simbólica do território, ultrapassando a dimensão meramente promocional. O estudo caracteriza-se como exploratório, de natureza teórica e abordagem qualitativa, fundamentado em pesquisa bibliográfica. Como resultado, sistematizam-se os níveis da capacidade institucional — micro, meso e macro — e sua correspondência com as etapas do processo de construção da marca territorial, evidenciando que a efetividade do branding depende da integração entre competências técnicas, estrutura organizacional e legitimidade política. Conclui-se que a marca territorial somente se consolida como ativo estratégico quando sustentada por robustez institucional e alinhamento entre planejamento, ação e comunicação.

Palavras-chave: branding territorial; capacidade institucional; desenvolvimento territorial.

INTRODUCTION

The territorial approach to development conceives of the territory and the heritage constituted within it as fundamental units of analysis, from which the configuration of territories and the conduct of their development processes can be understood.

The territory, understood as “[...] the result of a historical and relational process, of multiple economic, political, cultural and natural determinations” (Saquet, 2015, p. 25), concentrates the resources for planning and management that result in development dynamics. The processes and dynamics of territories are therefore related to the governance exercised by their institutional and social actors in the management of their resources.

The development trajectories of a territory are the result of a socio-historical process that articulates the productive, natural, human and intellectual, social, cultural and institutional dimensions, constituting its territorial heritage (Dallabrida, 2020). Each territory presents unique characteristics arising from its trajectory, possessing its own differentiated resources (Flores, 2006). However, such attributes are not always recognized, mobilized, activated and/or made visible to the population and other strategic audiences, leading to the underutilization of potential that could be incorporated into policies, projects and programs aimed at development.

According to Boisier (2000), territorial development is based primarily on the internal dynamics of the territories themselves, valuing endogenous initiatives, strengthening local capacities and synergistic articulation between institutions. For Pecqueur (2005, p. 12), “territorial development designates any process of mobilizing actors that leads to the elaboration of a strategy for adapting to external limits, based on a collective identification with a culture and a territory.”

The construction of a specific visual identity for territories, materialized in the creation and management of a brand, constitutes an instrument for enhancing ongoing development strategies and plans, by highlighting the distinctive elements that characterize them. From this perspective, territorial branding is configured as a development strategy, as far as it directly influences how the territory is perceived by its different audiences.

Almeida and Cardoso (2022) warn that branding applied to places should be understood as a process of strategic territorial management, while the territorial brand corresponds to the symbolic



expression derived from this process, configuring itself as a result of the social, political, economic and cultural interactions that structure the space. This interpretation converges with Anholt's (2007) perspective, according to which the brand associated with a country, state or city is not reduced to advertising or graphic design but constitutes the strategic management of competitive identity. Such approaches overcome the understanding of the territorial brand as a mere logo or promotional action and approach critical approaches to regional development, which conceive of territory as a social construction permeated by power relations.

According to Kavaratti's (2008), the brand assumes the function of a strategic device capable of mobilizing identity narratives, consolidating shared symbolic values and guiding concrete actions aimed simultaneously at territorial competitiveness and the promotion of collective well-being, which converges with Boisier's (2000) view of development, highlighting that it has an eminently qualitative nature, requiring the integration of cognitive, symbolic, cultural, social and civic dimensions to enable virtuous and sustainable trajectories in the territories.

For the strategic management of development processes, territorial management is a challenge influenced by a set of variables. At the municipal level - the dimension adopted in this paper in accordance with the Brazilian federative organization - governance is closely related to the institutional capacity of local public management. Institutional capacity is "a fundamental dimension of the development of a region, both in a sociological and economic sense" (Duarte, Drummond & Soares, 2018, p. 20).

Brazil has 5,570 municipalities, endowed with administrative, political and financial autonomy, as established by the Federal Constitution of 1988 (Brazil, 1988). Despite this legal and institutional condition, there is significant heterogeneity regarding local institutional capacities, particularly concerning organizational structure, the technical qualifications of administrative staff and the capacity for formulating, coordinating and implementing public policies. This inequity is evidenced by data from the Municipal Basic Information Survey (MUNIC), conducted by the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics (2025), which systematically collects information on the structure, dynamics and functioning of municipal public institutions, with an emphasis on city halls. This context is reflected in territorial development processes. According to Nunes *et al.* (2014, p. 305), "one of the greatest challenges in the territorial development process is the complementarity and integration of this cycle, which, at times, ends up being compromised



due to the fragility of spaces for dialogue and the delicate institutional capacity so necessary for social management.”

The objective of this paper is to establish a relationship between the institutional capacity of municipalities and the potential for creating a territorial brand. This theoretical approach will support the construction of an analytical matrix for the management structures of municipalities in the creation of a territorial brand, as a result of a territorial branding project.

The theme addressed is linked to the Sustainable Development Goals (Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics, 2026) from an analytical perspective that highlights the interdependence between territorial and institutional dimensions of development. In particular, it engages with SDG 11 – Sustainable Cities and Communities, by emphasizing the organization and management of territories as a condition for promoting more inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable urban spaces and with SDG 17 – Partnerships for the Goals, by recognizing that the effectiveness of these transformations depends on the articulation between actors, the strengthening of institutional capacities and the construction of collaborative arrangements for sustainable development.

TERRITORIAL DISTINCTION AND THE CONSTRUCTION OF SYMBOLIC VALUE THROUGH TRADEMARKS.

Academic production on brands applied to territories has been progressively expanding since its first studies, which began in the last decades of the 20th century, consolidating itself from the 2000s onwards. The field evolved from an initial emphasis on tourism promotion and associated with nation branding, an approach that sought to understand and manage the international reputation of countries, to a more integrated approach, involving territorial development, governance and collective identity (Kasapi and Cela, 2017; Anholt, 2007).

The incorporation of marketing concepts into the field of places stems from a broader understanding of the brand as a strategic asset, moving beyond its strict link to products and organizations to assume a central role in generating symbolic, reputational and competitive value. As the brand comes to be conceived as an intangible resource capable of influencing perceptions, decisions and economic flows, its application extends to the territory, being progressively incorporated into territorial promotion strategies, tourism and urban policies.



With theoretical and empirical advancements, a shift in focus is observed from place marketing to place branding, characterized by the broadening of the brand concept beyond promotional campaigns. The brand is now understood as a set of symbolic associations constructed in the minds of the public, involving identity, values, strategic vision and territorial positioning (Vuignier, 2016).

With this theoretical and interdisciplinary expansion, branding has adapted to multiple scales and territorial purposes, giving rise to specializations such as destination branding, nation branding, regional branding and city branding. These developments consolidate the territory as a strategic object of symbolic management, identity construction and competitive positioning, articulating economic, cultural and institutional dimensions in the context of territorial development (Vuignier, 2016), which is close to the territorial approach to development.

Expanding place branding beyond a purely promotional logic, incorporating political, institutional and identity dimensions, directly aligns with the territorial approach to development. By recognizing that brand building involves culture, history, quality of life, governance and urban planning, the concept begins to engage with the understanding of territory as a social, historical and relational construct (Saquet, 2011). From this perspective, territory is not merely a physical support, but a space for articulation between actors, institutions and resources, whose internal dynamics condition its development possibilities, as Boisier (2000) argues when emphasizing the importance of endogenous capacities and synergistic capital.

Similarly, Dallabrida (2020) argues that territorial development results from the activation of territorial heritage - a set of tangible and intangible assets accumulated throughout the local historical trajectory. Thus, when place branding incorporates elements such as cultural identity, memory, governance and social participation, it ceases to operate exclusively as a marketing tool and becomes a strategic instrument for mobilizing territorial assets and constructing collective meaning. This approach also aligns with Pecqueur (2005), for whom territorial development stems from the mobilization of actors around a shared project, supported by processes of identification with the territory.

Anchored in the articulation between the evolution of the brand concept - understood as a strategic, symbolic and relational asset - and the territorial approach to development, the term “territorial brand” was chosen as the structuring concept of this study, which is constructed through a territorial branding project. This choice seeks to highlight that the brand, when applied to the territory, transcends



the promotional dimension, becoming integrated into processes of activation of local assets, identity construction and coordination between actors, in line with perspectives that conceive development as a territorialized and socially constructed phenomenon.

Building a territorial brand requires a multi-stage process. As systematized by Vuković (2018), the process can be understood as a strategic cycle structured in interdependent stages. Initially, a situation analysis is conducted, involving the diagnosis of the internal and external conditions of the territory, including instruments such as SWOT analysis, evaluation of the current image and analysis of the competitive context. Next, the stakeholders are identified, with the mapping and engagement of public, private and civil society actors who influence or are impacted by the territorial brand.

The third stage consists of defining the vision and strategic objectives, establishing the long-term direction and intended results. Subsequently, the brand identity is developed, building core values, distinctive attributes, personality and the essence of the territory. Following this, the brand positioning is defined, determining its value proposition and the elements of differentiation in relation to competing territories.

The next step involves developing the brand elements, which includes creating visual and symbolic components such as the name, logo, slogan and visual identity. The following stage involves implementation and communication, operationalizing strategies for activating and disseminating the brand to internal and external audiences. Finally, the process culminates in monitoring and evaluation, tracking performance indicators, measuring results and making strategic adjustments, ensuring the sustainability and consistency of the territorial brand over time.

From another perspective, Kavaratzis (2008) systematizes four stages in the process of building brands applied to territories: definition of vision and strategy; alignment between identity and strategic planning; concrete actions, materialized in structural dimensions of the territory; communications, the stage in which the identity and the implemented transformations reach internal and external audiences.

In turn, Sevin (2011) organizes the process into two stages. The first stage (domestic communicative action) refers to the construction of brand identity within the territory. This is a deliberative process between legitimate actors and their central ethical concerns: legitimacy (the authority to define and represent the territory) and inclusion (who effectively participates in the symbolic construction process).

The author argues that the brand cannot be reduced to governmental decisions or marketing strategies, as it involves power struggles and negotiations about values, norms and representations (Sevin, 2011).

The second stage consists of the external projection of the constructed identity, involving interaction with foreign audiences. Here, the fundamental ethical question is the consistency between internal and external discourse. The author problematizes the risk that international communication may become mere strategic persuasion or propaganda, disconnected from reality and internal deliberations (Sevin, 2011).

For the construction of projects of this nature, it is fundamental that municipal governments act effectively to mobilize the social and institutional actors of the territory, which is closely related to the institutional capacity of local governments.

INSTITUTIONAL CAPACITY OF MUNICIPAL PUBLIC MANAGEMENT

Analyzing institutional capacity is a fundamental step in understanding the existing asymmetries between Brazilian municipalities and the structural limitations that condition their development trajectories. Although the Federal Constitution of 1988 (Brazil, 1988) ensured political and administrative autonomy to local entities, the scientific literature (Grin, De Marco and Il Abrucio, 2021) shows that such formal autonomy does not necessarily translate into equivalent capacities for planning, coordinating and implementing public policies.

The reflection on the institutional capacity of the municipal scale is linked to the approach to the local question formulated by Alain Bourdin (2001), who highlights that the local level is not limited to an administrative instance, but constitutes a strategic space for regulation, coordination and the production of collective action. For Bourdin (2001), the centrality of the local stems from the intensification of urban dynamics, the complexity of actors and the need for mediation between general norms and specific contexts. In this sense, municipal institutional capacity is not limited to the formal existence of instruments provided for by law, but involves the concrete aptitude to mobilize resources, articulate interests and produce territorialized responses to urban problems. Thus, the effective implementation of urban policies depends not only on the normative framework, but also on institutional density and local governance, dimensions that configure the local as a decisive arena in the materialization of development and planning strategies.



Huerta (2008) proposes an intermediate conceptual point between an overly broad view, which equates “capacity” with “development,” and an overly narrow view, which limits it to the simple development of skills and competencies in human resources. For the author, institutional capacity refers to the process of strengthening individuals, organizations and institutions to face development challenges in a sustainable way. The different definitions converge on the idea that capacity building involves the improvement of technical, administrative and organizational skills. Huerta (2008) lists three dimensions: a) human resource development (personnel systems and processes); b) organizational strengthening (management systems); and c) institutional reform (institutions and systems at the macro level).

It is possible to relate institutional capacity to the institutionalist view (North, 1990), according to which development is associated with the construction of efficient and adaptive institutional arrangements, capable of favoring investment and learning over time. On the other hand, this approach also receives criticism for its emphasis on institutional efficiency as a central explanatory variable, which may underestimate social conflicts, power asymmetries and cultural dimensions that permeate territories.

When analyzing local issues, it is fundamental to consider their articulation with other instances of territorial insertion, recognizing that development is not limited to the municipal scale. The scalar dimension of development, as problematized by Carlos Brandão (2007), highlights that territorial processes are produced at multiple levels - local, regional, national and global - and that economic, political and institutional dynamics operate interdependently. Thus, understanding the local requires situating it within broader networks of power, flows and decisions, avoiding isolated analyses that disregard structural constraints and interscalar relationships that shape the possibilities for development.

To analyze institutional capacity, it is necessary to situate the locality within the macro context, through the analysis of dimensions, as proposed by Huerta (2008) and explained below.

The dimension of local government and its institutional capacity is understood as the set of bodies that make up the municipal executive apparatus. This dimension encompasses administrative competencies, human resources, technical capacity, organizational structure, internal coordination and the ability to formulate and implement public policies.

The second dimension refers to other levels of government, indicating the insertion of the municipality into a federative or multi-level arrangement. It includes relations with state and federal



governments, mechanisms for intergovernmental cooperation, resource transfers, higher-level regulations and shared policies, which condition the autonomy and capacity for action of the local government.

Next, the other branches of government appear, such as the Legislative and Judicial branches. This dimension highlights that the institutional capacity of the local Executive branch does not operate in isolation, being influenced by processes of control, oversight, normative production and judicial decisions that shape the institutional environment.

The socio-historical context dimension involves structural and cultural factors that shape the territory, such as political trajectory, civic culture, social capital, patterns of participation and development history. These elements influence institutional practices, legitimacy and governance patterns.

Finally, the international context is considered, recognizing that local government is embedded in global dynamics, such as economic flows, international agreements, multilateral agendas, city networks and transnational normative standards, which also impact its institutional capacity.

Institutional capacity can be understood through its components and levels of analysis. It encompasses, on the one hand, administrative capacity and, on the other, political capacity. At the micro level, it refers to the individual, considering their competencies, skills and performance in public management. At the meso level, it concerns the organization, involving structures, processes and institutional arrangements that support administrative action. The macro level relates to the broader institutional context, encompassing norms, rules and political constraints that shape the actions of organizations and public agents. These levels are interdependent and, together, structure institutional capacity (Huerta, 2008) and were adopted as parameters in the proposal of this paper.

METHODOLOGICAL PROCEDURES

The method is characterized as exploratory, with a theoretical and qualitative approach, based on bibliographic research. The concepts of institutional capacity and territorial branding were adopted as conceptual axes for the theoretical approach, from an exploratory perspective. The selection of references was intentional; prioritizing studies aligned with the paradigm that underlies this reflection - the territorial approach to development. The chosen texts contribute both to the identification and systematization of indicators of institutional capacity at the municipal level and to the proposition of structuring stages



in the process of building territorial branding. In this sense, the contributions of Huerta (2008), in the field of institutional capacity and of Vuković (2018) and Kavartzis (2008), regarding the structuring and operationalization of branding processes applied to territories, stand out.

Having established the conceptual framework, key questions were identified to support the analysis of a municipality's institutional capacity to conduct a territorial brand building project.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

As a result, the dimensions that make up institutional capacity were listed, based on Huerta (2008) and a relationship was established with the steps necessary for building a territorial brand.

Table 1 approximates the components of institutional capacity and how each of them is reflected and corresponds to the stages of territorial brand building.

Table 1 | Relationship between components of institutional capacity and stages of territorial brand building.

CI COMPONENTS	CI LEVELS	TERRITORIAL BRANDING STAGES	REFERENCES
administrative capacity	Micro level: individual	Technical competence of public agents to conduct territorial diagnosis, organize participatory processes, systematize information and structure the strategic planning of the brand (analysis and vision definition phase).	Huerta (2008); Vuković (2018).
	Intermediate level: organization	The existence of administrative structures, intersectoral coordination and formal governance mechanisms that allow for the implementation of brand actions, ensure institutional continuity and align identity, planning and communication (implementation phase).	Huerta (2008); Kavartzis (2008).
Political capacity	Macro level: institutional context	Capacity to mobilize diverse social groups to obtain legitimacy in the representation of the territory, guaranteeing inclusion and deliberation in identity construction (domestic communicative action) and coherence between discourse and practice in external projection (international communicative action).	Sevin (2011); Kavartzis (2008).

Source: Elaborated by the author, 2026.



As a way to guide an analysis of the institutional capacity of municipalities to build a territorial brand project, in an exploratory approach, key questions were listed, systematized below.

a. Administrative Capacity – Micro Level (Individual)

Does the municipality have a qualified technical team to conduct a territorial diagnosis (economic, social, cultural and institutional)?

Do the employees involved have training or experience in strategic planning, public communication, or territorial marketing ?

Are there internal capacity and data available to conduct a SWOT analysis of the territory?

Are there professionals capable of systematizing territorial data and producing strategic reports?

Does the team demonstrate the ability to organize and facilitate participatory processes?

Does the municipality have prior experience in developing strategic plans or territorial development plans?

Is there technical clarity in the definition of long-term strategic vision and objectives, as manifested in the management instruments characteristic of municipalities, such as Master Plans and sectoral strategic plans?

b. Administrative Capacity – Meso Level (Organization)

Is there a formal administrative structure responsible for institutional communication or territorial development?

Does the municipality have a specific department, coordination office, or unit responsible for brand management or territorial promotion?

Are there formal mechanisms for intersectoral coordination (e.g., committees, technical chambers)?

Is the brand planning integrated into the Multi-Year Plan (PPA) or the Master Plan?

Are there formal governance instruments in place to ensure the continuity of the strategy beyond political mandates?



Does the municipality have a specific budget for territorial positioning or promotion actions?
Is there alignment between territorial identity, strategic planning and sectoral public policies?
Has the municipality already implemented institutional campaigns aligned with a strategic narrative for the territory?

c. Political Capacity – Macro Level (Institutional Context)

Does the municipality have a history of social participation in strategic processes?
Any forums, hearings, or public consultations have been held to discuss territorial identity?
Is there collaboration with the private sector, universities and organized civil society?
Does the construction of territorial identity encompass social and cultural diversity?
Is there consistency between institutional discourse and administrative practices?
Does the municipality participate in intermunicipal networks or regional arrangements that strengthen its external projection?
Is there a differentiated communication strategy for internal and external audiences?
Is the territorial brand (if it exists) recognized and legitimized by local stakeholders?
Are there mechanisms in place to monitor and evaluate the image of the municipality?
Does the municipality demonstrate the ability to maintain a coherent narrative across different scales (local, regional, national, international)?

d. Integrative (Cross-cutting) Issues

Does the municipality demonstrate coherence between its symbolic identity and concrete public policies?
Is the brand strategy aligned with a territorial development project?
Are there defined indicators to monitor brand results?
Is brand management institutionalized or does it depend exclusively on the current political administration?
Does the municipality demonstrate the capacity for institutional learning and strategic adjustments over time?



The proposal presented can be used as a parameter for analyzing the structures of municipalities and developing data collection instruments to support the diagnosis of the institutional capacity of municipalities, which can underpin their preparation for a brand project articulated with the characteristics of the territory.

This systematization highlights that building a territorial brand depends on the articulation between technical capabilities (diagnosis, planning and execution), organizational capabilities (coordination and institutionalization) and political capabilities (legitimacy, inclusion and coherence), corresponding to the different stages of the branding process: analysis, strategic definition, implementation and communication.

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

The articulation between institutional capacity and the process of building a territorial brand, systematized in the analytical framework, allows us to affirm that territorial branding, which results in the creation of a consistent and coherent brand for the territory, cannot be understood as a merely communicational or aesthetic initiative. The conceptual approach conducted showed that the elaboration of a territorial brand depends on the integration of administrative, organizational and political capacities, operating at different levels - micro, medium and macro - and articulating actors, structures and institutional contexts. Thus, the construction of territorial identity requires technical competence for diagnosis and planning, organizational structure for implementation and political legitimacy to ensure inclusion and coherence between discourse and practice.

It can be concluded, therefore, that the effectiveness of territorial branding is less associated with the creation of logos or slogans and more linked to the institutional robustness that supports the process. The territorial brand can only function as a strategic asset when anchored in internal deliberative processes, administrative institutionalization and coherence between planning, action and communication.

The proposed model contributes to the understanding of this relationship by offering an analytical tool that integrates territorial development and institutional capacity, opening possibilities for future empirical applications and for the improvement of public policies oriented towards the legitimate and sustainable construction of territorial brands. Limitations of the study include the absence of empirical



application of the proposed model, which currently restricts the verification of its operability and validity in concrete contexts. Therefore, this is a theoretical-methodological contribution whose analytical robustness still requires testing in diverse empirical situations, capable of demonstrating its applicability, adjustments and potential for generalization. In this sense, it is suggested, as a future research agenda, that empirical studies be conducted to not only validate the model but also improve it based on different territorial realities.

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