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Card Sorting Method as a Participatory Approach to the Research Stage of City Branding Process: Understanding the City Experience from the Perspective of Stakeholders.

Abstract – The newest city branding approaches which identify cities as complex and uncontrollable entities, demands more stakeholder involvement that enables a participatory approach to city branding. As a city consists of many different stakeholders with diverse values and expectations of their own regarding the brand of a city, it is important to ensure that real stakeholder experience of the city is acknowledged, and the real perception of the city is not compromised in the city branding process. It is also important that branding strategy also includes all relevant actors and not just the dominant or the compatible ones. While most academic approaches to city branding agree to this sentiment and discuss 'what' to find out in order to ensure stakeholder involvement, they don't always mention 'how' to find that information. As a participatory research approach there is a potential to use card sorting in subject areas other than UX, as card sorting methods identify user insights, perceptions and mental associations about user's experiences. The objective of this study was to explore the potential of using Card Sorting, a main UXR method as a possible research method to understand the stakeholder perspectives about the city experiences to be used in the research stage of the city branding process. The selected card sorting methods Closed Card Sort, Open Card Sort and Hierarchical Card Sort uncovered insights about relationship between city experiences and stakeholders, stakeholder value systems about city experiences, negative and positive perceptions about city experiences and fundamental aspects of a city from the perspective of the stakeholders. The study revealed that different card sorting activities can be utilized to uncover what the city means to its stakeholders by understanding and acknowledging the stakeholders' experiences, values and outlooks of the city.

Keywords: City Branding, Stakeholder Experience, Card Sorting