

GRAPHIC DESIGN AND CREATIVITY IN URBAN IDENTITY: The Legacy of Nacho Padilla's Posters in the City of Madrid

LAURA GONZÁLEZ-DÍEZ¹, MARÍA TABUENCA BENGOA¹

¹ Universidad San Pablo-CEU, CEU Universities, Spain

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ABSTRACT

This article analyses Nacho Padilla's work as creative director of the Madrid City Council during Manuela Carmena's term of office. Created during that legislature, this position centralised the planning, supervision, and execution of all creative projects to project a coherent visual and graphic narrative, reinforcing the capital's brand image.

Padilla, a leading figure in the vibrant Spanish graphic design scene, has significantly impacted Madrid through his poster designs for campaigns like San Isidro 2018 and 8M 2019. At a time when cities need to regain confidence and captivate both residents and visitors, public image and institutional campaigns play a decisive role in the strategy to revitalise urban life.

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1. Introduction

The need to communicate messages graphically has always existed, and historically, countless visual representations have sought to convey information through images. As an advertising medium, the poster has been used for centuries to inform or persuade the public about events, products, and services.

The purpose of this article is to analyse the posters published by the Madrid City Council during Manuela Carmena's term in office, under the direction of its creative director, Nacho Padilla. This study will allow us to determine whether a distinct municipal graphic style emerged, contributing to the construction of Madrid's identity and its corresponding brand image.

1.1. *The Poster in the Urban Environment*

The poster, arising from the intersection of iconic and typographic art, serves as a medium where writing combines with graphics to convey a message. This element must be placed on a fixed and stable surface, fulfilling a public function within the community spaces it occupies. Thus, a poster corresponds, among other things, to Gubern's (1987) definition of "a printed advertisement, with iconic and sometimes literary components, displayed in a public space and not transportable" (p. 186).

For a poster to fulfil its intended purpose, it must not simply present the functional characteristics of the product for sale or the technical details of the event being promoted in a rational manner. Instead, it must go further and influence the recipient in a suggestive way. Therefore, "it is necessary that, on its surface, it combines intentional symbols that represent the product, but it must also integrate interpretative signs that contain cultural and aesthetic data that can provoke emotions in the receiver" (Tabuenca et al., 2020, p. 270). We must recognise the complex nature of the image as it is used in advertising, given that the advertising image goes beyond, and differs from, a simple marketing tool. As Victoroff (1983) points out, "It is also a game, a dream, and sometimes even poetry" (p. 24).

It is also interesting to note the statement by Coronado and Hijón, who argue that,

A poster, to be considered as such, must pay tribute to the advertiser's coffers through the effectiveness of its image [...] To achieve this effectiveness, the poster must respect a series of competencies in relation to the social environment and the public to which it is addressed, without which it could not successfully complete the performance of this main mission. (Coronado and Hijón, 2002, p. 37)

The purpose of any poster is its display in public spaces, on billboards, or on urban advertising supports specifically designed for its use, where it is exposed to the view of passers-by. Similarly, their effectiveness relies, above all, on the element of surprise they have on each individual, reaching them directly during a moment of distraction. Therefore, a thorough understanding of iconic symbology is crucial for effectively managing visual advertising on this medium, as "the poster is not simply an indicative sign, but rather a stimulus designed to elicit a dynamic response" (González-Díez et al., 2019, p. 40).

A poster has only one chance to make a good impression in a fleeting moment. If it fails to captivate in that initial instant, either through surprise or provocation, it is unlikely to do so upon a second viewing and, therefore, fails to achieve its objective of attracting attention and being memorable. The advertising poster's uniqueness lies in its image, which operates on two levels to achieve its commercial goal: "one, of a semantic, denotative nature, often made explicit with the help of a text that allows the appropriate interpretation of the other level, the aesthetic or connotative level" (Melendreras, 1985, p. 30). The semantic level provides information about the advertised product, while the aesthetic level is responsible for capturing the attention of the recipient.

The content of a poster must be decipherable in a few seconds, and the message it conveys must be easy to decode. Therefore, the combination of image, typography, and colour must be well-designed to achieve optimal reading organisation. Scholars in the field of advertising have examined in detail the different functions of image and text in a poster and have reached similar conclusions. Moles (1976), on the one hand, indicates that the poster offers two stimuli: a "strong stimulus", which is the image, "of an aesthetic nature that has the purpose of attracting attention and catching the reader's eye" (p. 19); and another "weak stimulus", which is the text, which "can constitute an argument, a commentary or an observation" (Moles, 1976, p. 19). For his part, Enel points out that, faced with the multiplicity of

connotations of the image, the text intervenes to "amplify the main message, correct ambiguous messages, and suppress parasites" (Enel, 1974, p. 23).

Historically, the poster is considered a prime collective expression of an era, largely because recurring manifestations "make this medium the best mirror of society and, therefore, of the culture that sustains it" (González-Díez et al., 2019, p.40). If we analyse the poster as a mass medium, it is impossible to separate the formal aspects from the political and social realities in which this medium develops.

1.2. The Construction of City Branding Through Municipal Posters

In a globalised world, cities are increasingly competing to attract resources and talent. The concept of *city branding* seeks to position a given city by attracting attention to it. It is a marketing tool that aims to project a distinctive image of a city in an increasingly competitive context. City branding is defined as a means to achieve a competitive advantage that allows the city to increase investment and tourism attraction, as well as to reinforce local identity and avoid social exclusion (Kavaratzis, 2004).

In this ecosystem it can be said that graphic design has become a differentiating agent that can help a city stand out from others. In Padilla's words, "If it is not decisive, it is concomitant. I believe that the indispensable prerequisite is a story, a discourse. Graphic design is a declination, a tone, or a tool of that narrative" (N. Padilla, personal communication, 24 September 2024). Although the urban image may appear somewhat chaotic and beyond the control of city branding practitioners, a robust starting point for enhancing the city's image lies in implementing tangible actions and genuine changes that align with the image of the city as perceived by its inhabitants. For example, this could include transformations of the urban landscape (De San Eugenio et al., 2017; Oliveira, 2015; Peel & Lloyd, 2008).

Municipal signage constitutes a salient and immediate means by which urban centres articulate their visual identity. It assumes a pivotal role in the construction of a city's brand, concurrently serving to inform residents and visitors regarding municipal events and available services. Public notices disseminated by local governing bodies represent a foundational mode of visual communication, functioning to convey the identity and values inherent to a given urban locale.

To achieve this objective, it is essential to work coherently with the elements of graphic design: images, typographies, and colours. This integration can be seen in cities like Amsterdam, New York, or Madrid, the case study of this research, each reflecting its unique essence, historical heritage, or prevailing modernity. In order to do so, they have had to adopt coherent and distinctive visual styles, materialising them in their signage, which has led to the creation of a cohesive and recognisable image of these metropolises.

Consistent municipal signage is crucial for establishing a recognisable visual narrative, regardless of context. This familiarises citizens with the city's brand and projects a strong image internationally, playing a key role in attracting potential tourists. Rainisto (2007) argues that while territory branding should enhance a site's attractiveness, its primary purpose is to construct and effectively communicate a brand identity, with added value, to relevant audiences.

Urban signage, on the other hand, plays a crucial role in the organisation of public spaces and the overall civic experience. Such signage helps to invigorate neighbourhoods, enhancing their attractiveness by serving not only an informative purpose but also contributing to the aesthetic appeal of urban areas, making them more welcoming for residents. Indeed, poster design is sometimes employed to visually transform dilapidated environments, imbuing them with a renewed sense of reality and integrating them into the urban landscape. Graphic design, it could be argued, can even contribute to fostering a sense of representation among all citizens. As Padilla notes, "there must be this will on the part of the issuer, and it must also be deployed with a will for efficiency and excellence. Will is necessary in the intentions and in the processes" (N. Padilla, personal communication, 24 September 2024).

Municipal signage also serves to catalyse citizen participation by encouraging residents to engage in socio-cultural and civic activities. By disseminating and promoting events and initiatives of public interest, this type of signage fosters active participation in urban life, thereby strengthening the city's brand by building a community of individuals who are more connected to and involved with their surroundings. At this juncture, it is pertinent to note that communicating a city's image is a complex undertaking, as every interaction individuals have with it conveys something about that image (Kavaratzis, 2004).

In this context, it is also pertinent to consider Govers and Go's (2009) explanation of *place branding*. They suggest that it is a process designed to create brand value in relation to national, regional, and local identity. A territorial brand represents identity through the construction of a favourable image, both internally and externally. This, in turn, fosters recognition, quality, and other associations within the territory that are perceived as positive attributes of the brand.

1.3. The Framework

With the appointment of Nacho Padilla¹ as creative director of the Madrid City Council, the city's Framework Agreement for Creativity and Graphic Design was initiated. This public contracting model, distinct from those in other municipalities and unique within Spain, enables the capital city to contract communication and design professionals through a tendering process. These professionals are responsible for developing the city council's creative campaigns over a year, via a system of awards.

This agreement arose from the city council's aim to "respond to the needs and demands of the graphic design and advertising creation sector" (Bon, 2018), allowing it to manage the entire budget for graphic design and creativity under a single heading. This agreement superseded the management of numerous minor contracts, which often yielded inconsistent results in terms of graphic quality. The new agreement "promotes absolute transparency and accountability in public administration and avoids different forms of intrusiveness and precariousness in the sector" (Bon, 2018).

2. Objectives

The primary objective of this research is to provide a comprehensive overview of the posters that represented the image of Madrid during Nacho Padilla's tenure as creative director of its city council (April 2016 to June 2019), which coincided with Manuela Carmena's mandate. The specific objectives are twofold: first, to identify the form and background of these posters through an analysis of their design, elements, content, and discourse; and second, to identify their role in the transformation of the Spanish capital's brand image, both nationally and internationally, based on an interpretation of the collected data.

3. Methodology

Given that this is a descriptive research study designed to describe and evaluate specific characteristics of a particular situation within an object of study and longitudinal in nature with an observational study that codes data over an extended period, we have primarily employed the technique of content analysis. However, we also deemed it beneficial to conduct a semi-structured, in-depth interview with Nacho Padilla, whom we thank for his collaboration. His statements and reflections serve to complement and substantiate the results obtained following the completion of the fieldwork.

The methodology for our study is predicated on analysing the components that may exert a significant effect on the construction of the final message in each of the posters comprising the sample. These components are considered to influence the image projected of the city of Madrid, hence the suitability of content analysis. Prior to this, we identified and compiled all the posters commissioned by Padilla during his tenure as creative director of Madrid City Council. To achieve this, we consulted the council's website, specifically its repository² of municipal posters, where the council provides citizens access to a portion of Madrid's history. This allows for the downloading, printing, retention, or sharing of all available graphics, while respecting copyright. The result was a total of one hundred and seventy-two posters (8 in 2016; 36 in 2017; 72 in 2018; and 56 in 2019), some of which are different versions

¹ Nacho Padilla (Madrid, 1970) holds a degree in Advertising and Public Relations from the UCM (Complutense University of Madrid). He has worked as a copywriter at McCann Erickson and as a creative director at Contrapunto BBDO. In 2010, he founded Viernes, a studio that applies creativity to projects related to sustainable mobility, public administration, the third sector, CSR (Corporate Social Responsibility), and social economy and innovation. In 2016, he left the studio to take on the role of creative director for the Madrid City Council until 2019. Subsequently, until June 2023, he served as creative director for the Barcelona City Council. In 2019, he received the Gràffica Award for his example in reorganizing institutional design, offering a new urban narrative, implementing a contracting system that professionalizes and provides stability to suppliers, and for simplifying official documentation, reducing the complexity of bureaucratic language through clearer visual structures.

² <https://diario.madrid.es/carteles/>

of the same theme disseminated across various locations and media within the city. In this regard, a total of 33 series, exhibiting similar graphic characteristics, were identified. For the purposes of our research, we considered only the series identified as the first in the aforementioned digital repository. Consequently, the sample comprises 60 units of analysis.

Upon compiling the object of study, we designed an *ad hoc* coding sheet comprising 22 variables (Figure 1). This was based on a modification of the sheet proposed by the authors in previous research (Tabuenca *et al.*, 2020; Tabuenca *et al.*, 2024), adapted to align with the objectives of this study. Thus, the instrument defined for data collection includes variables and categories relating to the identification of each poster, including the reference data: case number (V1), date (V2), author (V3), title (V4), and subject (V5). Subsequently, the variables related to the formal aspect and its design are specified. The initial three pertain to composition: format, horizontal, vertical, or other (V6); dimensions (V7); and compositional criteria, realistic or symbolic (V8). Regarding the latter, it should be noted that the "realistic criterion" is understood as the option that "attempts to objectively capture reality," while the "symbolic criterion" is that which "returns a symbolic reality, the product of imagination, significance, and valuation" (Nicoletti, 2003, p. 23).

Subsequently, the variables relating to typography (V9 to V13) are considered, focusing solely on the main text of the poster. This considers the family, according to the classification proposed by Thibaudeau³ (Ancient Roman, Modern Roman, Egyptian, sans-serif, script, or decorative), and the style, including round, bold, italic, uppercase, lowercase, small caps, condensed, expanded, outline, and shaded. Further considerations include alignment (left, right, centred, justified, or other), the number of text lines (whether the texts are arranged in multiple lines of composition or, conversely, occupy a single line), and position. The position of the texts in relation to the total area of the poster is defined, selecting from total area, halves, and thirds, differentiating, where appropriate, between the upper, central, lower, and left areas.

We posit that typography, alongside colour, constitutes the element with the most significant potential to influence the meaning of a design. As Tabuenca *et al.* (2020) asserts, "The text can articulate one message while the lettering conveys something quite different. It is the factor that most reinforces the intellectual content of the message, either transmitting or negating the credibility of the text" (p. 274). In this regard, they emphasise that

each typeface family possesses unique characteristics and a distinct personality, enabling it to express diverse sensations. Similarly, each typeface carries a meaning that must align with the overall meaning of the design. The selection of the most appropriate typeface is largely contingent upon the type of message the composition is intended to convey; thus, in certain instances, a refined, elegant, or delicate typeface may be required, whereas in others, sober, solid, and forceful types are necessary. (Tabuenca *et al.*, 2020, p. 274)

In Kunz's (2000) words, "The function of typography is to communicate a message in a manner that effectively conveys its intellectual and emotional meanings" (p. 8). Hence, our interest in this graphic attribute.

In the proposed data collection sheet, the subsequent level is defined by the variables related to the graphic elements (V14 to V16), identifying solely their typology, photography, photomontage, illustration, infographics, or collage. Further variables include the percentage of occupation of the iconic content with respect to the total surface area of the poster, and the presence of the council's brand image.

From V17 to V20, the data pertaining to colour are recorded, encompassing the colour of the main text, the colour of the dominant image on the poster (if any), the background colour, and the colour of the brand image.

This is followed by the section pertaining to content analysis, which includes a variable relating to the qualitative description of the message implicit in the poster (V21). This facilitates its subsequent connotative analysis, since, as Malalana (Galdón, 2002, p. 105) observes, "Although in the case of advertising we enter a realm imbued with subjectivity, both from the perspective of the creator and the

³ J. F. Thibaudeau, in 1921, in his work *La Lettre d'imprimerie: origen, développement, classification*, establishes this typographic classification.

recipient of the communication, it is beneficial to engage in the interpretation of the poster and its persuasive message".

Figure 1. *Ad hoc* poster analysis sheet

FICHA DE ANÁLISIS CARTELES AYUNTAMIENTO DE MADRID

BLOQUE A. DATOS GENERALES

V1. Número de caso:.....

V2. Fecha (año):.....

V3. Autor:.....

V4. Título del cartel:.....

.....

V5. Temática:.....

.....

V15. Porcentaje de ocupación de la mancha por el elemento gráfico

☐ Hasta 25 %

☐ 25 % - 50%

☐ 50 % - 75 %

☐ Más de 75 %

V16. Presencia en el cartel de la 'marca Madrid'

☐ SI ☐ IMAGOTIPO ☐ ISOTIPO

☐ No

BLOQUE E. ASPECTOS RELACIONADOS CON EL COLOR

V17. Color del texto principal (variable abierta con posibilidad de múltiples respuestas):

V18. Color dominante en la imagen principal del cartel:

V19. Color dominante en el fondo del cartel:

V20. Color de la imagen de marca:

BLOQUE B. ASPECTOS RELATIVOS A LA COMPOSICIÓN

V6. Formato

☐ Horizontal ☐ Vertical ☐ Otro

V7. Dimensiones (variable numérica abierta, en ancho por alto, en cm):

V8. Criterio compositivo

☐ Realista ☐ Simbólico

BLOQUE C. ASPECTOS RELATIVOS A LA TIPOGRAFÍA

V9. Tipografía

☐ Romana Antigua ☐ Romana Moderna

☐ Egipcia ☐ Pulo Seco

☐ De escritura ☐ Decorativa o de Fantasía

V10. Estilo de la tipografía (variable con respuesta múltiple)

☐ Redonda ☐ Cursiva ☐ Hueca

☐ Negrita ☐ Caja alta ☐ Sombreada

☐ Versalita ☐ Caja baja

☐ Condensada ☐ Expandida

V11. Alineación

☐ Izquierda ☐ Derecha

☐ Centro ☐ Justificado ☐ Otra

V12. Número de líneas del texto principal

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3

☐ 4 ☐ 5 o más

V13. Posición

☐ Área total ☐ Tercio superior

☐ Tercio inferior ☐ Tercio central

☐ Media página superior ☐ Media página inferior

☐ Media página izquierda ☐ Media página derecha

BLOQUE D. ASPECTOS RELACIONADOS CON LA IMAGEN PRINCIPAL

V14. Tipología del elemento gráfico

☐ No hay ☐ Fotomontaje

☐ Fotografía ☐ Ilustración

☐ Infografía ☐ Collage

BLOQUE F. ASPECTOS RELACIONADOS CON EL CONTENIDO DEL CARTEL

V21. Descripción cualitativa del cartel:

V22. Observaciones

Source: Own elaboration, 2024.

Finally, an open variable (V22) is included, allowing coders to record any observation they deem relevant at the time of data recording.

To conduct this research, the degree of reliability of the content analysis was assessed. The intercoder reliability index was calculated in two phases: initially, a pre-test was performed using Holsti's formula, yielding an initial agreement of 0.85. This served to refine the variables and categories initially considered. Subsequently, a two-coder test was conducted using Krippendorff's alpha (Marzi *et al.*, 2024), resulting in an index of 0.90, which is considered satisfactory in terms of reliability.

4. Results

The main results of the content analysis of the posters in the sample are set out below.

4.1. *Authorship of the Posters*

Concerning the authorship of the posters, it is pertinent to note that, as previously mentioned in the introduction, the framework agreement served as a pioneering legal instrument. This agreement was notable for its capacity to coherently regulate matters pertaining to creativity and design. It enabled Nacho Padilla and his team to draw upon a pool of professionals whose expertise could be enlisted according to the scope and nature of each specific graphic project.

Following the completion of fieldwork, a total of 39 design and visual communication professionals were identified as having contributed their proposals towards generating a fresher and more innovative graphic image of Madrid, described by some specialist journalists as 'visual glory' (Balaguer, 2020). This group included both established names in the fields of illustration and design, and emerging young talents who were just beginning to make a name for themselves. The Madrid-based studio Apéritif was responsible for the most projects (seven), followed by Bakea —Juan Carlos Paz, an illustrator from Puertollano based in Madrid—, with five works. The independent creative director, Aníbal Hernández, produced four posters. The Barcelona-based creative studios Atipus and Familia, the Valencian studio Yinsen, the Murcian studio Rubio y Del Amo, and the Madrid-based agency Zapping also contributed. Behind them, with three projects, was the creative agency September, currently part of the Padre Group, with offices in Madrid and Mexico.

These data illustrate the Madrid City Council's practice of contracting studios, agencies, or independent professionals from various geographical locations, extending beyond Madrid to include cities such as Barcelona, Valencia, and Murcia. This demonstrates the diversification of suppliers facilitated by the framework agreement promoted by Padilla.

4.2. *Composition of the Posters*

Regarding the composition of posters, it is necessary to begin by specifying considerations related to their format, namely the shape and size of the print, taking into account its width and height. This is a crucial element in the design, as it directly influences its perception, the organisation of information, and its capacity to capture the viewer's attention. Of the 60 posters in the sample, all are vertical, with 80% (n=50) adopting a size of 500 mm x 700 mm (width by height). This size is suitable when the poster is intended to be viewed from a distance of between two and ten metres, making it one of the most common sizes for street advertising, as well as for posters located in enclosed spaces. Furthermore, two posters were identified measuring 700 mm x 1,000 mm, which is also common for this medium. In two further cases, 297 mm x 420 mm was used, and in another two, 1,208 mm x 1,773 mm was employed, representing the largest size among the posters in the sample. Conversely, the smallest poster detected measured 242 mm x 329 mm, which is unusual for this type of medium. The format of a poster influences its overall visual impact. A large format, such as that of a typical entertainment poster or street advertisement, has greater presence and is able to attract the attention of passers-by from a greater distance. Smaller formats can be effective in enclosed or targeted environments but may be overlooked in large spaces.

Regarding the compositional criteria of the posters, there is near parity between the realistic criterion (48.4%) and the symbolic criterion (51.6%). The use of realistic images or elements in a poster provides visual clarity and facilitates immediate understanding of the message. A realistic approach depicts elements as they appear in reality, allowing the viewer to quickly identify the subject of the poster, be it a product, an event, or a person. This is ideally suited for posters where information must be conveyed unambiguously, such as those for events, public signage, commercial advertisements, or citizen participation initiatives. The realistic criterion in a poster ultimately provides immediate clarity, a rapid emotional connection, credibility, and accessibility, making it perfect for clear and direct advertising where the aim is for the message to be understood without ambiguity. In contrast, a symbolic approach may require the viewer to interpret the message, adding a layer of abstraction that allows for multiple interpretations. This is more commonly found in artistic or conceptual posters, where the meaning may not be immediately apparent, but seeks to evoke deeper reflection.

4.3. *Typography of the Posters*

Concerning typography, there is a clear predominance in the use of sans-serif typefaces for the title or main text of the posters analysed. Approximately 68.4% of the posters (n=41) employ this typeface family in the primary text. These typefaces emerged in the 19th century, although they did not gain widespread popularity until the 20th century. They are primarily characterised by the absence of a serif, or final stroke of the letter, which lends them a simpler and more functional appearance. They have historically been regarded as a departure from tradition and formality, adopting a more technical character. Due to their simplicity of form, they are also considered modern, clean, and objective. Furthermore, they are highly legible in larger font sizes, making them a suitable choice for posters and other advertising media (Lupton, 2024).

Serif typefaces are used in 14.9% of the posters (n=9), comprising 8.3% old-style Roman and 6.6% modern Roman. Old-style Roman typefaces, characterised by their classical forms and balanced proportions, evoke a sense of elegance, seriousness, and tradition. When used on a poster, they communicate sophistication and authority, which is ideally suited for cultural events and academic institutions. These typefaces typically exhibit a moderate contrast between thick and thin strokes, creating a visually balanced appearance. In poster design, this balance ensures that the text is not only legible but also aesthetically pleasing. This visual equilibrium provides order and structure, which can be particularly useful in complex or information-dense compositions. Conversely, modern Roman typefaces, unlike their old-style counterparts, are characterised by a greater contrast between their strokes, and their serifs are typically straight and very thin. This contrast can provide a certain dynamism that attracts the eye and maintains the viewer's visual interest. These families lend the poster a sense of modernity and refinement, ideally suited for projects that seek to be perceived as contemporary while retaining their classical elegance.

In terms of style, 63.4% (n=38) of the posters employ bold type, while 33.3% (n=20) use regular or round type for the main text, and only two cases feature hollow and shaded type (3.3%). The prevalent use of bold lettering is undoubtedly due to its greater visual weight, which renders it more visible and striking from a greater distance. This is crucial in a poster that must compete for public attention in crowded spaces, such as streets or exhibition halls. Furthermore, bold type creates a stronger visual impact, which can convey a sense of dynamism, urgency, or importance. Conversely, regular type has a softer, more discreet presence, which can be effective when a more relaxed tone is desired or when the design needs to be balanced to avoid overloading the space.

Regarding the use of upper- and lower-case letters, 71.7% of the posters use capital letters to compose the headline, while the remaining 28.3% use lower case letters. In this respect, it should be noted that the use of capital letters in a poster can have a significant impact on the design and communication of the message. Capital letters tend to immediately attract attention due to their uniform size and stronger visual presence. This makes the key element more noticeable and visible from a greater distance. Furthermore, the use of capital letters can convey a sense of urgency and importance. When something is written entirely in capital letters, it can be interpreted as indicating that the message is relevant or requires an immediate response. It can also suggest that the event or product is exclusive or represents a limited opportunity. In addition, capital letters eliminate the visual differences between ascending and descending letters, creating a more uniform and compact appearance. This can facilitate ease of reading in certain circumstances, particularly on posters with minimal text or short messages that need to be understood quickly. In terms of design, capital letters create more regular and geometric blocks of text, which can provide a more stable visual balance on the poster, especially if alignment and letter spacing are carefully considered. Finally, in large sizes, such as those used on posters, capital letters are often easier to read and can help to avoid confusion with similar letters. This improves legibility when the sign is viewed from a distance or in conditions of low visibility.

In terms of the alignment of the main text on the poster, the majority (n=24) are aligned to the left (40%), followed by those that are justified (26.6%), then those aligned centrally (20%), and finally those with irregular alignment (13.4%), which may appear rotated or with some lines on the right, others on the left, or others in the centre, aiming to impart a more carefree and playful feel to the final result.

Our analysis has identified that the most common number of lines for the layout of the main text is three, appearing in 33.4% of cases. This is followed by headlines that occupy only one line (21.6%), and

finally a three-way tie between those arranged on the printed surface in two, four, or five lines, each accounting for 15% of the units of analysis ($n=9$).

Finally, regarding the position of the main typographic element of the poster, the majority, 53.4% ($n=32$), are located in the upper third of the poster; 8.3% in the central third; 11.7% in the lower third; 18.3% in the total area of the poster; and 8.3% occupy half a page in the upper area of the poster.

4.4. Relative Aspects of the Images

Regarding the use of images in posters, the primary finding is the overwhelming prevalence of illustration over photography or posters based solely on typography. In 76.7% of the sample, illustration is used as the main graphic element. Photography was used in only three cases, photomontage in two, and collage in one. As for the posters that do not use any images, there are seven instances where typography is the absolute protagonist (Figure 2). This demonstrates the priority attention given to this essential element in poster design and the council's commitment to this graphic resource. Illustration is essential in poster design because it captures attention, conveys emotions, reinforces the message, and adds originality. Its versatility and ability to tell stories graphically contribute to making the poster memorable, distinctive, and effective in its communication. Furthermore, illustration has the power to connect with the public in a more emotional way, making it an essential tool for designers.

Figure 2. Sample typographic posters



Source: Madrid City Council, 2024.

Regarding the percentage of space occupied by the graphic element used, 83.4% of the cases ($n=50$) exceed 75% of the available area. Only one of the works has a percentage of less than 25%, two are between 25% and 50%, and seven are between 50% and 75%. These data highlight the importance of this visual resource in the cases analysed.

As Wong (2014) points out, illustration acts as a direct visual tool that allows for instant message capture. Wong emphasises that visual impact is paramount in any design that seeks to be perceived quickly, and illustration offers the ability to generate an instantaneous response on a cognitive level. In the case of posters, where the viewer's interaction time is short, illustration facilitates rapid understanding of the content. Meggs (1998), for his part, points out that illustration gives the designer a creative versatility that goes beyond what photography or text can offer. This author argues that illustration allows the poster to have a unique style, aligned with the identity of the project or the message it seeks to communicate. This originality is key to making posters stand out in information-saturated spaces, such as urban environments or mass events.

The imagery section included a variable to identify Madrid's brand image (logo or isotype) in the poster. This element, we believe, strengthens the connection between the city council and its citizens. We detected that in only two of the sixty posters neither the city council's logo nor its isotype⁴ appears (*Suerte es tener un barrio limpio*, 2016 and *Festival de cine de Carabanchel*, 2019). However, the Madrid City Council's logo is present in 90% of the posters ($n=54$) and the isotype in 6.6% ($n=4$). In these cases, we observed that in 81.6% of the posters ($n=49$), it is located in the lower third of the poster, typically

⁴ The logotype is the combination of image and text that can function separately. The isotype is the symbolic part of the brand, which can be recognized without text (Wheeler, 2013).

on the right; in 8.3% in the central third (n=5); and in only three posters is it located in the upper third of the poster (5%).

4.5. Colours in the Posters

Colour plays an essential role in poster design, not only from an aesthetic perspective but also from functional and psychological standpoints. Hence, our interest in determining how it is used in the posters studied. Colour can contribute to attracting attention, emotional transmission, the visual organisation of content, the legibility of texts, and even reinforcing identity. Appropriate use of colour not only enhances the aesthetics of the poster but also significantly improves its ability to communicate effectively. A well-chosen colour palette is a fundamental tool for the designer, allowing the creation of striking, functional, and expressive posters.

In this case, the first point to highlight is that virtually all the posters are designed in colour, with only four in black and white (Books as Windows I, 2018; Books as Windows II, Data and Transparency, and Municipal Management Guide, 2019). Regarding the colour of the main text, black predominates (60% of cases), followed by a three-way tie between red, blue, and white, beige in two cases, and finally, pink, green, and orange, each with only one case. Also noteworthy is the case of the Carnival 2019 poster, in which each letter of the word 'carnival' uses a different colour, very much in keeping with the idiosyncrasy of this festival.

Regarding the dominant colour in the main image of the posters, although blue is the most common (23.4% of cases), there is greater diversity. Black stands out in 15%, red, yellow, and white in 11.6% each, green in 6%, brown in 5%, and finally, pink and beige in 3.3% each.

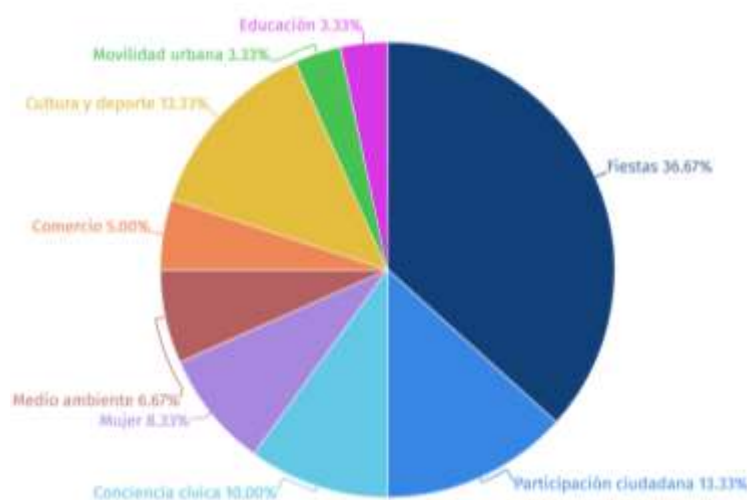
In terms of the background colour, the data indicate that the most frequently used colour is white (35%), followed by blue (13.3%), red (11.6%), yellow (10%), green (8.3%), pink (6.6%), grey, beige, and orange (3.3%), and finally, black and purple (1.6%).

Finally, regarding the colour used in the trademark image on the posters, 32 of them appear in black, 18 in white, 6 in beige, and only 1 each in red and blue, always seeking to match the main image.

4.6. Content of the Posters

In relation to the main themes of the posters, a series of content have been identified, which can be grouped into nine categories: 'fiestas' (festivals), 'culture and sport', 'civic participation', 'civic awareness', 'environment', 'women', 'trade', 'urban mobility', and 'education'. The most numerous posters are dedicated to 'fiestas', followed by 'civic participation' and 'culture and sport'. After these come 'civic awareness', 'women', 'environment', 'trade', and finally, tied, 'education' and 'urban mobility' (Figure 3).

Figure 3. Content of the posters



Source: Own elaboration, 2024.

Firstly, as we can see, 'fiestas' (festivals) are the focus of 36.6% of the posters (n=22). Particularly noteworthy are those designed for the traditional festival of San Isidro (Figure 4), those inviting attendees to the celebration of the Chinese New Year, and those informing the public about the festival of San Antón or Pride. It should be noted that 2017 marked a milestone in the San Isidro festivities, as it was the first edition in which the Madrid City Council implemented its renewed vision of graphic culture and creativity. Carmen García Huerta was responsible for designing that year's poster, visually synthesising the essence of one of the most important festivities for the people of Madrid. Her style, characterised by colourful floral illustrations, gave a new feel to the city and was enthusiastically received by the population. The following year, Mercedes DeBellard was responsible for designing the poster, and her proposal focused on a series of four posters, each featuring portraits of women of different characteristics, origins, and ages, demonstrating a commitment to feminism. Traditional elements such as the shawl, floral motifs, and animals are integrated into a fresh and attractive visual language.

Figure 4. Posters related to emblematic festivities in Madrid



Source: Madrid City Council, 2024.

As for the Pride celebrations, the team led by Nacho Padilla also developed visual proposals of significant impact. In 2017, Koln Studio designed a poster where typography was the main element, using the Lÿno⁵ font, which combines four typographic styles interspersed with the colours of Gilbert Baker's rainbow flag. For Pride 2018, the collaboration between Aperitif Studio, Ana Galvañ, Bnomio, and Del Hambre resulted in a graphic in which diversity was championed under the slogan "Ames a quien ames, Madrid te quiere" (Love who you love, Madrid loves you), using symmetry and restrained colours.

Other festivities and neighbourhoods in the capital have also been the subject of careful graphic production. The Chinese New Year festivities, for example, had posters designed by Bakea in 2016, 2017, 2018, and 2019, where animals were the central figures (a dragon, a rooster, a dog, and a pig). Similarly, Christmas 2018 also featured a poster by Bakea, while the Fiestas de Moratalaz included contributions by Aníbal Hernández and Yinsen. Other examples include Carnival (with posters by Carole Hénaff and Rocío Cañero/Koln Studio) or the San Antón festivities (designs by Aníbal Hernández, Simone Nicotra, and Rubio & Del Amo). All of this reveals a strategy that reflects the City Council's commitment to creating a powerful and coherent visual identity for all its festivities.

In second place are posters related to 'culture and sport', accounting for 13.3% (n=8), including those related to "Los Veranos de la Villa" in 2018, designed by Micol Talso and Nuria Úrculo. This series comprised four symbolic posters full of colour and vitality (Figure 5). Within this category, we also find the series dedicated to the "Municipal Museums of Madrid" (Familia, 2019), which safeguard a significant cultural heritage and serve as valuable educational and leisure resources. The promotion of reading has also been a recurring objective of the city council in recent years, encouraging citizens to engage with literature through the campaigns "Books as Windows I" and "Books as Windows II" (Atipus, 2018 and 2019), featuring a collection of posters that reproduce pages of books as though they were windows open to the world. In the realm of sport, the poster entitled "Get Down to Play" (Koln Studio, 2019) is notable, promoting sport by asserting its presence in public spaces.

⁵ Created by Radim Pesko and Karl Nawrot between 2009 and 2012, it features the Jean, Stan, Ulys, and Walt styles. It is a typeface with playful shapes, with open and diverse characters, whose free spirit seeks to escape the norm.

Figure 5. Posters designed for Veranos de la Villa



Source: Madrid City Council, 2024.

In third place, also accounting for 13.3%, are eight posters dedicated to promoting 'citizen participation' among the residents of Madrid. Among these is one entitled "Pleno Abierto" (2016), designed by Riki Blanco, which invites citizens to attend the Plenary Hall of the City Council to present proposals to their representatives in the consistory. Of particular interest is the series of four posters entitled "Pon Chulo Madrid" (September, 2018), which encourages citizens to participate in deciding how part of the municipal budget will be allocated to improve the city's aesthetics.

This was followed by six posters (10%) in the 'civic awareness' category. These works demonstrate the Madrid City Council's commitment to conveying specific messages to citizens, often in social terms, through which it has sought to raise awareness and make Madrid a better place. In this section, the series designed in 2016 by the Viernes Studio and Aníbal Hernández is noteworthy. They proposed four signs that focus on specific situations related to cleanliness and the reinforcement of positive behaviour, appealing to the importance of being aware of the waste we generate (Figure 6). Special mention should be made of the series "Adopta" (Rubio and Del Amo, 2019), which encourages the adoption of pets, and the poster "Salimos sin Molestar" (AR Difusión, 2017). The latter promotes habits aimed at minimising the impact of nightlife, featuring a cat as an animal associated with stealth and silence, but which also represents one of the nicknames by which Madrilenians are known.

Figure 6. Posters that make up the series "Signs of Cleanliness."



Source: Madrid City Council, 2024.

A further thematic category is that of posters that champion the role of women, comprising five posters (8.3%). In this vein, the city council has implemented proposals such as "Madrid Libre de Violencias Machistas" (Zapping, 2017), "Las Mujeres Hacemos Madrid_8M" and "I Encuentro Feminismo,

Medios e Igualdad" (Aperitif Studio, 2018), "Gala Mujeres Deportistas" (Rubio y Del Amo, 2018), and the "8M" series of 2019 (Yinsen Studio). This series reflects on the successes, shortcomings, and the ongoing need to defend advancements in women's rights and their presence in society.

The 'environment' is another category into which the posters have been classified, identifying a total of four works (6.6%). One of these celebrates the natural environment of the Manzanares River, a poster designed by Aníbal Hernández featuring various species of birds that can be observed by any passer-by when strolling along Madrid Río and other green spaces. As Silvia Llorente (2019) notes, it is "a direct invitation to immerse oneself in the wildest side of the city" (n. p.). Also of interest is the poster dedicated to the "Bicentenary Viveros Municipales" (Aperitif Studio, 2019), which similarly highlights the city's green infrastructure, and the series entitled "Madrid Central" (2018). With a graphic proposal by La Despensa and Stracto Studio, this series encourages visitors to explore the city that has "the biggest heart."

Conversely, there are three posters dedicated to activities related to "commerce" (5%), with particular mention of the series aimed at encouraging shopping in the municipal markets of Madrid (Idea Hotel, 2017). This series is an ode to these spaces, which foster social cohesion and form an active part of city life. In a similar vein, the series designed a year later by the Familia studio (2018), entitled "Mercados Municipales de Madrid", features the letter "M" as the central element (Madrid, market, modern, mythical, mmmm...).

Finally, with two posters each (3.3%), are the thematic categories of 'education' and 'urban mobility'. Regarding education, the "Children's Schools" campaign promoted by the city council is noteworthy, comprising a series of six posters (Yinsen Studio, 2019) designed to advocate for the importance of education. In terms of urban mobility, the campaign (Aperitif Studio, 2017) supports modes of transport such as the taxi, a means of transport that has been part of the character and history of Madrid for over a century.

5. Conclusions and Discussion

Following the analysis conducted, it has been confirmed that during Nacho Padilla's tenure as creative director at the Madrid City Council, the institutional posters underwent a significant transformation. This shift distanced them from traditional institutional communication, aligning them more closely with a contemporary approach that is more relatable and relevant for citizens. The content of these posters reflects a dual emphasis on visual renewal and communicative effectiveness.

One of the central tenets of the content of these posters is the simplification of the message. For Padilla, clarity was a paramount objective, ensuring that citizens could comprehend the message at a glance. The work of the Madrid-based creative director adheres to the principles of visual minimalism espoused by designers such as Dieter Rams, who emphasised that good design is "as little design as possible" (Rams, 2011). Accordingly, the posters from this period eschew information overload and limit the use of text to the bare essentials. The tone employed in the posters during this stage was characterised by its approachability and accessibility, utilising everyday language to humanise institutional communication. This approach aligns with Dondis's (2017) assertion regarding the importance of visual language in generating empathy and understanding in the viewer. Padilla aimed to make the posters comprehensible to all audiences, avoiding technical jargon and excessive formalities.

Another distinguishing characteristic of these works is their playful tone, as they introduce an innovative approach by incorporating irony and puns into their graphics, which are strategies that were uncommon in institutional communication at the time.

Moreover, during the period under analysis, the posters adopted an inclusive and diverse perspective, both in their content and visual representation. In this respect, the Madrid City Council's posters depicted a pluralistic city, encompassing a wide spectrum of ages, genders, ethnicities, and lifestyles. For instance, in campaigns such as LGBTIQ+ Pride or International Women's Day, the importance of diversity was emphasised, presenting an open and inclusive city. Posters, like any form of communication, have the potential to alter citizens' perceptions or influence their sense of belonging to their locality. Padilla himself observes that "we talk about capacity, about possibility, but it does not guarantee a result. Changing a perception is complicated. In that sense, it seems to me that a patient, fine-grained approach is less intrusive and more effective" (N. Padilla, personal communication, 24 September 2024).

These posters also demonstrate a concern for social and civic issues, such as gender equality, sustainability, and citizen participation. The content of these graphic materials aimed to raise awareness and engage the public regarding these issues. For example, the "A pie por Madrid" campaign promoted sustainable mobility through straightforward content designed to encourage respect for the environment and the adoption of alternative modes of transport.

From a design perspective, it should be noted that, in accordance with the principles of visual hierarchy outlined by Wong (2014), the information in the analysed posters is organised to enable viewers to quickly grasp the essential elements. The strategic application of colour, typography, and text layout allows the most critical aspects of the message to stand out. For instance, posters for public events, such as festivals and celebrations, were clearly structured, featuring prominent titles and secondary details, such as dates or locations, presented on a smaller visual scale. This ensures that the most important information is the first to capture attention.

Another pertinent feature is the use of simple and readily recognisable iconography. Padilla and his team chose a design approach that would connect directly with Madrid's identity, employing symbols of the city as visual or textual references, adhering to the principle of visual identity that Joan Costa deems essential for strengthening institutional recognition (Costa, 2004). Iconic elements of the city, such as the bear and the strawberry tree, the Puerta de Alcalá, the Metrópoli building, or the Matadero, appear on posters for celebrations like San Isidro or Chinese New Year, reinforcing the emotional connection between citizens and their city.

On the other hand, many of Padilla's posters aimed to educate and raise public awareness regarding important issues such as recycling, sustainable mobility, or civic coexistence. As Munari (2019) points out, graphic design can serve not only to beautify urban spaces but also to provoke reflection and behavioural change. Concrete examples of this within the analysed sample are the campaigns on urban cleanliness or waste reduction, which emphasise the shared responsibility for the well-being of the city and its inhabitants, appealing to citizen awareness.

All of this leads us to assert that, under the creative direction of Nacho Padilla, the Madrid City Council posters acquired a transformative character in terms of content. A closer, more human, and visual approach was adopted, emphasising the importance of clarity, humour, inclusivity, and civic awareness. These changes aligned with contemporary theories on design and visual communication, positioning posters not only as informational media but also as educational tools and agents of social change, creating a model that has subsequently been adopted by other cities. As Padilla notes, "Posters have a special capacity to generate iconic pieces that become symbols" (N. Padilla, personal communication, 24 September 2024).

Furthermore, the implementation of this strategy in Madrid has positively impacted the design and creative industry by recognising its strategic value within public administration. This has fostered collaboration between the public and private sectors, established a replicable model for other cities, and promoted a coherent and distinctive visual identity that reflects the cultural and social values of the city. Additionally, it has generated opportunities for local professionals and raised the profile of these fields within the public sphere, marking a shift in how graphic design and creativity in institutional communication are perceived and valued. Madrid's experience can serve as an inspiration to other cities interested in improving their own city brand, while simultaneously creating a richer and more diverse environment for the professional and economic development of the design and creative industry in the city, offering unique opportunities and enriching collaboration with local talent. It has also contributed to the professionalisation of design and communication decision management in public administration, generating greater recognition and support for local talent, and has demonstrated how graphic design and creativity can be powerful tools.

As Antonio Checa (2014) noted, "In the 21st century, the poster is experiencing a revival in the city. In an increasingly urban society, it has found its place. All culture and all events in the city today have recourse to it" (p. 185). Nacho Padilla's work at the head of Madrid City Council serves as a clear example of this phenomenon.

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