

Prologue

This book explores the brand development process of regional destinations in-depth, focusing on the supply-side perspective and the concept of brand identity, as well as the perceptions of stakeholders involved in the governance of tourist destinations. Research on destination branding has often focused on the demand-side of tourism, while fewer studies have looked at the supply-side perspective. Additionally, many studies have focused on either entire countries or individual cities, paying little attention to place branding at the regional and sub-regional levels. In order to fill these gaps, this book adopts an integrated perspective which examines the various stakeholders influencing the process of destination brand development in regional destinations.

The first chapter of this book presents an overview of the main issues and challenges in the processes of place branding of regional destination, while each of the following chapters focuses on a different group of stakeholders in the brand development process of different types of regional and sub-regional destinations.

In particular, the second chapter examines the role that Destination Management Organizations (DMOs) and Local Tourism Agencies (LTAs) play in regional branding and their perceptions of the regional brand. It also explores the relationship between regional and sub-regional brands by analysing the views of both the public sector and regional government; and local public sub-regional tourism organisations. Public stakeholders are particularly relevant, as they are responsible for managing and coordinating the entire branding process, and providing a comprehensive view of the regional destination, and their views are likely to be critical.

Additionally, it is recognised that the opinions of private operators are also important for a successful branding process. The third chapter investi-

gates how accommodation establishments may exert power and influence in the place branding process of regional destinations. Accommodation establishments have direct contact with visitors and they are their main point of reference for their entire stay in the destination. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to verify how accommodation establishments project the identity of a place during the tourist stay. This section sheds light on the characteristics and factors that foster a more homogeneous projection of place identity in regional destinations, in harmony with the messages projected by the main public actors leading the place branding process.

Finally, the fourth chapter addresses perceptions held by residents. This further key stakeholder group has seen a growing interest over the past decade, and still has much to investigate. This chapter focuses on their involvement in the co-creation of brand identity in regional destinations, by providing a conceptual framework which investigates residents' perceptions of their own destination identity from the initial stage of the branding process. The study suggests that brand creation should be achieved through a participative decision-making process that includes the numerous stakeholders involved in the governance of a destination, including its residents. It is also argued that taking the residents' stance into consideration is critical, given that this group of stakeholders plays a very significant role that can affect the whole brand development process. It is also shown that incorporating residents' perceptions can minimize the risk of negative impacts that might be generated by residents in disagreement with the identity conveyed by the brand.

In the light of these considerations, this book contributes to the lack of theoretical and empirical studies on brand identity from a supply-side perspective by focusing on regions, a geographical scale that has long been neglected in the branding literature, in favour of nations and cities. Secondly, this work also contributes to the ongoing debate surrounding the definition and delimitation of regional destinations. It offers an in-depth analysis of the dynamics and characteristics influencing the brand development process and identities in both conventional administrative Regions and new, less artificial, sub-regional destinations. The book also contributes to the study of place branding issues in both established and emerging destinations. Lastly, it deepens knowledge of the supply-side perspective of tourism destination branding, which has long

been addressed and largely examined from a demand-side perspective, with a consumer-perceived-image approach.

Overall, using an integrated supply-side perspective based on the identity of places, this book contributes to the existing body of tourism literature by providing an innovative understanding of the role and influence of the various groups of stakeholders in the brand development process of regional and sub-regional destinations.

Book outline

Chapter 1

Introducing regional destination branding. Main issues and challenges

Chapter 2

The influence of public stakeholders in regional branding

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|-----------------------|----------------------|
| • PERSPECTIVE: | SUPPLY SIDE |
| • TOPIC: | BRAND IDENTITY |
| • STAKEHOLDER: | PRIVATE OPERATORS |
| • GEOGRAPHICAL SCALE: | REGIONAL DESTINATION |

Chapter 3

Private stakeholders and the communication of place identity in regional destinations

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|-----------------------|--------------------------|
| • PERSPECTIVE: | SUPPLY SIDE |
| • TOPIC: | BRAND IDENTITY |
| • STAKEHOLDER: | RESIDENTS |
| • GEOGRAPHICAL SCALE: | SUB-REGIONAL DESTINATION |

Chapter 4

Involving local communities in regional brand development

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|-----------------------|----------------------|
| • PERSPECTIVE: | SUPPLY SIDE |
| • TOPIC: | BRAND IDENTITY |
| • STAKEHOLDER: | PUBLIC BODIES |
| • GEOGRAPHICAL SCALE: | REGIONAL DESTINATION |

Conclusions

Chapter 1

Introducing Regional Destination Branding

Main Issues and Challenges

1.1. Introduction

The tourism industry is witnessing a remarkable rise in international tourist arrivals, showing an uninterrupted growth in the past nine years. International tourist arrivals reached 1,400 million in 2019, around 470 million more people than in the past decade (WTO, 2018; 2019). Tourism is currently a global industry and a major economic contributor to many countries (Mohajerani & Miremadi, 2012). Over the past few decades, many authors have pointed out how tourist destinations express the need to define adequate branding policies and strategies in order to secure a competitive edge in increasingly global consumer markets (Ritchie & Crouch, 2000; Morgan, Pritchard & Pride, 2011; Almeyda-Ibáñez & George, 2017).

Despite the fact that the concept of branding has long been applied extensively to products and services, it is only in the past fifteen years that studies on tourism destination brands have gained increasing momentum among researchers and practitioners (Blain, Levy & Ritchie, 2005; Franch, Martini & Buffa, 2008; Hernandez, Talavera & Parra López, 2016), and further theoretical and empirical analysis in destination branding is still needed. In general terms, multiple and diverse definitions of destination branding exist, exposing the difficulty of defining the concept (Louro & Cunha, 2001; Balmer & Greyser, 2003; Brown, Dacin, Pratt & Whetten, 2006). Moreover, the destination branding literature still presents major issues and challenges compared to the general product and services marketing literature, mostly because of the complexity of connotations of the term destination (Gnoth, Baloglu, Ekinici & Sirakaya-Turk, 2007). Lastly, a commonly accepted framework for Destination

Branding theory still needs to be fully developed (Ritchie & Ritchie, 1998; Konecnik & Gartner, 2007).

With these premises in mind, the purpose of this volume is to increase the still limited empirical knowledge on destination branding. In particular, the book examines the brand development process of regional destinations in-depth, focusing on the supply-side perspective, which is based on the concept of identity and stakeholders' views. This focus stems from four main gaps identified in the literature, and are addressed in the following chapters:

1. the need to further investigate destination branding through the concept of brand identity from the supply-side perspective;
2. the need to define regional and sub-regional destinations, and focus on these rather than just on countries and cities;
3. the need to address destination branding by adopting a supply-side internal stakeholder perspective, as opposed to a consumer-perceived-image approach;
4. the need to further discuss the dichotomy between established destinations and new destinations, considering that in both cases, cooperation among all stakeholders is more successful when their perceptions are taken into consideration from the initial stages of the branding process.

The following sections of this introductory chapter detail these gaps, and identify the main contributions to the body of knowledge on destination branding.

1.2. Defining the concepts of Brand Identity and Destination Branding

For decades, destination branding has been partially covered under the alternative label of destination image studies. However, brand identity of tourism destinations has received little attention from a supply-side perspective (Konecnik & Go, 2008; Bregoli, 2012).

Several studies have supported the idea that brand identity and brand image are both key to obtaining a popular destination brand (Cai Liping,

2002; Nandan, 2005; Martins, 2015). However, authors frequently conflate or confuse these two concepts (Wagner & Peters, 2009; Qu, Kim & Im, 2011). While brand image focuses on tourists' perceptions of destination-brand differentiation, brand identity tends to be more concerned with how actors in the destination's network make a particular brand unique (Harris & de Chernatony, 2001). Furthermore, brand identity characterizes the self-image and desired image of the market, whereas brand image signifies the actual image retained by (potential) tourists (Pike, 2002). In other words, «identity is created by the sender, whereas the image is perceived by the receiver» (Kapferer, 1997, p. 32). In summary, a destination brand should be considered as a projection of destination identity from the senders' perspective; and as the image of a place from the receivers' perspective (Florek, Insch & Gnoth, 2006).

Within the field of marketing, some authors have claimed that brand identity is even more important than image, especially from a strategic point of view (Morgan, Pritchard & Piggott, 2002; Cai Liping, 2002; Hankinson, 2004). According to Hankinson (2004), this emerges from the view that positioning and communicating the destination brand needs to be rooted in reality, which then helps fulfil the experience promised to visitors (Saraniemi, 2009). Brand identity is created by private organisations or public administrations in relation to how they want their brand to be perceived (Kapferer, 1998). According to Konecnik & Go (2008, p. 179), «Brand identity clearly specifies what the brand aspires to stand for and has multiple roles». As stated by Aaker & Joachimsthaler (2000), brand identity is a set of positive associations with a particular destination that destination management organisations strive to build and maintain.

Destination branding can, therefore, be defined as «a way to communicate a destination's unique identity by differentiating a destination from its competitors» (Qu *et al.*, 2011, p. 466). «Moreover, a place brand must embody something unique and different for a destination» (Campelo, Aitken, Thyne & Gnoth, 2013).

Although the importance of brand identity is recognized in the literature, there is still a lack of empirical studies on brand identity from a supply-side perspective. Moreover, this paucity of empirical studies is even more evident for regional and sub-regional destinations, leading to the identification of a further gap, which is analysed in the following paragraph.