

PLACE BRANDING ATTRACTION FOR INTERNAL STAKEHOLDERS

Luís Branco BARROS ^{1*}, Teresa BARROS ²

¹*Faculdade de Ciências Económicas e Empresariais, Universidade de Vigo,
Campus Lagoas-Marcosende s/n, 36310 Vigo, Spain*

²*CIICESI, IRIEM, Hong Kong ISCAP|P. Porto, Polytechnic of Porto, Rua Jaime Lopes Amorim s/n,
4465-004 São Mamede de Infesta, Portugal*

Received 15 March 2023; accepted 17 April 2023

Abstract. Porto and São João da Madeira are cities in the metropolitan area of Porto – Portugal. They are quite different regarding dimension and number of inhabitants. Nevertheless, they are considered as attractive for businesses, workers, and tourists. This study aims to analyse how the internal stakeholders of both cities relate to the place brand. An extended literature review of place branding was pursued to select the most relevant variables. Interviews and questionnaires were conducted. Findings concluded that the adopted place branding strategy influences the quality of life of the internal stakeholders, their level of engagement and their relationship with the local institutions.

Keywords: Place branding, place branding management, internal stakeholders, business administration, city branding

JEL Classification: M1.

Introduction

The trend of viewing cities as a brand is on the rise. According to Chan (2013), place branding has gained momentum as a research area and has collected significant attention and recognition. For many years, place branding has remained a complex and fertile research field that has attracted numerous scholars to delve deeper and comprehend the subject better to contribute to its literature and theory, as noted by Berrada (2018). Anholt (2010) sees places, their identities, reputations, and images as fascinating subjects to explore. Branding has become a crucial aspect of several disciplines such as Architecture, Business Studies, Economics, Economic History, Geography, International Relations, Marketing, Media Studies, Planning, Political Science, Tourism Studies, Sociology, and Urban Studies, as stated by Pike (2011).

Hereźniak and Anders-Morawska (2021) observed in a recent publication that in the last decades, place branding strategies have primarily centered on competing for tourists, businesses, and foreign talent. Unfortunately, such a focus has led to negative impacts for the residents in many cases. However, the authors suggest that place branding can serve as a facilitator for creating public value in three distinct ways: expressing public

values, enhancing social relationships, and moderating social behavior.

According to Oguztimur and Akturan (2015), the concept of city branding can be viewed through two lenses, namely marketing-oriented and planning-oriented, as it encompasses various disciplines. The former emphasizes city branding as a communication process that caters to the needs of the target audience, while the latter considers it a branding strategy.

To explore the relationship between internal stakeholders and place branding, this study conducted a comprehensive literature review of place branding management frameworks. An exploratory qualitative research approach was conducted in two Portuguese cities, targeting their most relevant internal stakeholders. The authors gathered 24 interviews with representatives of the internal stakeholders.

1. Place Branding Management

We address the concept of place branding management followed by the most recognized frameworks available in literature.

In the last decades, place branding has risen as main subject of analysis and discussion. It's commonly agreed

* Corresponding author. E-mail: lcb@estg.ipp.pt

that branding theory has begun in 1950's and was developed in the context of consumer products (Hankinson, 2015), as factories used brands to show quality and origin and reinforce consumer's confidence (Blackett, 2003). As cities needed to attract tourists their main actors paid attention to the best ways of selling a place, in the 1970's (Hankinson, 2015). The next decade was focused on the discovery of the most effective city management methods, while Philip Kotler added Marketing to this equation (Kotler et al., 1993). "Marketing Places", by Philip Kotler (1993), and "Selling the City", by Ashworth and Voogd (1990), are considered seminal books on place marketing. In 2004, Kavaratzis outlined three phases of city marketing development, namely: fragmented promotional activities, the city marketing mix, and the move towards city branding. Additionally, Kavaratzis identified four distinct trends in the place branding discussion, including branding nations, the impact of cultural and entertainment branding on the physical and social aspects of places, destination branding, and the application of corporate branding to place branding. Anholt (2003) attributes the economic disparity between poor and wealthy nations to branding. He argues that any brand strategy must acknowledge that a place's main assets are its people and the products and services produced there.

If place branding is often misunderstood as place selling (Zenker & Braun, 2015), branding is based on abstract and intangible factors, which become part of the consumer's memory, and affects future interactions with the brand (Keller, 2003). Place brand is "a network of associations in the consumers' mind based on the visual, verbal, and behavioural expression of a place, which is embodied through the aims, communication, values, and the general culture of the place's stakeholders and the overall place design" (Zenker & Braun, 2015, pp. 212–213). According to Zenker and Braun (2015), the bottom line of place branding is the perceived image of a place by the target audience, which is formed by a combination of communication and physical characteristics. Place branding, as defined by Anholt (2010), is the process of enhancing a place's image by promoting an authentic place identity and changing the mindsets of its consumers.

In a branding perspective, cities are more complex than products or services because they have a wider range of stakeholders and target groups, such as citizens, tourists, and decision makers from both public and private sectors, each seeking different benefits (Middleton, 2011). And for Merrilees et al. (2009), city branding emerges from place branding focused on the marketing and branding of cities as places for residents to live, businesses to develop, and investments to be made.

This sub-field is centred on people's perceptions and images. Therefore, place brand management is the attempt to influence and treat mental maps favourably (Kavaratzis, 2004). Each place brand should deliver value to

the stakeholders, namely resident and local organizations, which pay taxes, invest, and benefit from it (Hankinson, 2015).

In the next sub-topic, the most recognized frameworks on place branding are presented.

1.1. Place Branding frameworks

Kotler et al. (1993) suggest that places must be projected with a business approach and excel in some way, thinking strategically about four dimensions: (a) place identity, (b) place products, (c) place buyers, and (d) place selling. The strategic marketing of places is crucial for a country's position in the global marketplace, as it involves managing the image, attracting tourists, factories, and companies (Kotler & Gertner, 2002).

Rainisto (2003) proposes that places can be marketed like products and services to increase their value and attractiveness, provided that certain success factors are considered, such as a planning group, a vision and strategic analysis, place identity and image, public-private partnerships, political unity, the global marketplace, local development, process coincidences, and leadership.

The city image communication framework is divided in three main pillars (Kavaratzis, 2004) Primary communication – related to the communicative effects of the city actions - *Landscape Strategies* – urban design, architecture, green spaces and public spaces in the city; *Infrastructure Projects* – accessibility and diversity of public facilities; *Organisational and Administrative Structure* – community development networks and citizen's participation in the decision making, and public-private partnerships; and *Behaviour* – vision, strategy, financial incentives, number and type of events organised in the city; 2) Secondary communication – formal and intentional communication, like advertising and public relations; 3) Tertiary communication – communication not controlled by marketers, like word of mouth, linked to the other dimensions as it depends in those marketing efforts. Cities are simpler, smaller, and easier to generalize than a whole country. Anholt (2003) developed the Anholt-GMI City Brands Index to demonstrate this idea. The index uses a hexagonal evaluation framework that is distinct from the Anholt Nation Brands Index. The six dimensions of its hexagon are: a) Presence; b) Place; c) Potential; d) Pulse; e) People; and f) Prerequisites. Trueman & Cornelius (2006) argue that city's brand identity is made of Presence, Purpose and Pace, as well as the immediate visual impact of the built environment. The place brand, associated to destination branding management, has five guiding principles, derived from the corporate brands literature: a) strong, visionary leadership; b) brand-oriented organisational culture; c) departmental co-ordination and process alignment; e) consistent communications across a wide range of stakeholders; and f) strong, compatible partnerships (Hankinson, 2010).

Table 1. Place Branding Frameworks (source: authors)

Authors	Place Branding definition	Main Variables
Kotler et al. (1993)	“Places are more than budgets and businesses. They are people, cultures, historical heritage, physical assets, and opportunities. Places are ranked, rated, and evaluated today on every conceivable dimension”	Place identity Place products Place buyers Place selling
Kotler & Gertner (2002)	“Contemporary place branding is not simply a rational marketing activity: it is also a political act”	Managing the image Attracting tourists Attracting factories and companies
Rainisto (2003)	“Place branding is building the identity for the place, which is the active part of management in the process”	Planning group Vision and Strategic Analysis Place identity and Place image Public-private partnerships Political unity Global Marketplace and Local development Process coincidences Leadership
Kavaratzis (2004)	“Place branding is not only possible it is, and has been, practiced consciously or unconsciously for as long as cities have competed with each other for trade, populations, wealth, prestige or power”	Primary communication Secondary communication Tertiary communication
Anholt (2006)	“Cities have brand images which rise and fall very slowly, and this is a double-edged sword. On the one hand it means that cities in developing countries find that their new prosperity and opportunities can take an age to pass into widespread international awareness – but on the other hand it does mean that cities with positive brands are surprisingly immune even to catastrophic events”	The Presence The Place The Potential The Pulse The People The Prerequisites

Authors	Place Branding definition	Main Variables
Trueman & Cornelius (2006)	“Place branding is much more complex and relies to a much larger extent on engaging its various communities, particularly if it is an integral part of a large-scale regeneration project”	Presence Purpose Pace
Hankinson (2004)	“Place branding (...) inevitably becomes a coordinated process rather than a managed activity”	Core brand Primary services relationships Brand infrastructure relationships Media and communications relationships Consumer groups relationships
Hankinson (2010)	“Place branding is building the identity for the place, which is the active part of management in the process”	Strong, visionar leadership A brand-oriented organisational culture Departmental co-ordination and process alignment Consistent communications across a wide range of stakeholders Strong, compatible partnerships

As the previous place branding frameworks had strong similarities Kavaratzis (2009) merged those resemblances into eight categories as components of an integrated approach to city brands management: a) Vision and Strategy; b) Internal Culture; c) Local Communities; d) Synergies; e) Infrastructure; f) Cityscape and Gateways; g) Opportunities; and h) Communications.

Taking into account that the authors purpose is to analyse how the internal stakeholders relate to the place brand, two Portuguese cities were selected – Porto and São João da Madeira. The rationale for this decision is associated with the fact that these cities are industrialized. Porto is a metropolitan region with a population of 231,800 people, and it boasts of being one of Europe’s oldest cities, with its historical center receiving a World Heritage Site classification by UNESCO in 1996. The city is renowned worldwide for its Port Wine and has an impressive mix of ancient and modern structures, including institutions such as ‘Museu de Serralves’ or ‘Casa da Música’. In contrast, São João da Madeira is a small urban area with a population of 22,143 people, famous for its thriving industries such as footwear and hat making. The city’s old industrial buildings now house creative industry firms in a small yet environmentally friendly city.

These two cities are part of the same metropolitan area in Portugal, located less than 20 km apart, as evident in the image below.



Image 1. Metropolitan Area of Porto
(source: PORDATA, 2023)

Place branding is a hot topic nowadays but one can never neglect the importance of the stakeholders in the place branding management therefore the next subtopic defines the internal stakeholders.

1.2. Stakeholders

As Freeman et al. (2010) mention stakeholders are individuals or groups who can influence or be impacted by an organization's achievements in reaching its goals, according to Freeman (1984). Successful organizations must provide value to their stakeholders, which may include employees, suppliers, and others who are financially dependent on the organization, as well as those who impact or are impacted.

In the field of place marketing, the challenge is to strengthen communities and places to adapt to changing market conditions, seize opportunities, and sustain their vitality. Four main target markets are typically considered (Kotler et al., 1993): visitors (business visitors, tourists, and travellers), residents and workers (professionals, skilled workers, wealthy individuals, investors, entrepreneurs, and unskilled workers), business and industry (heavy industry and entrepreneurs), and export markets (other localities within the domestic and international markets). In this context stakeholders can also be defined as customers, including inhabitants who view the city as a place to live, work, and access facilities like education and health care; companies who see the city as a place to do business and recruit employees; and tourists and other visitors who come for culture, education, and entertainment (Van den Berg & Braun, 1999). External stakeholders in this context may include shareholders, suppliers, distributors, government agencies,

Table 2. Different Target Groups for Place Marketing
(source: adapted from Zenker & Braun, 2010)

Visitors	Residents and Workers		Business and Industry	
	Internal	External	Internal	External
Business Tourists	Creative Class	Creative Class	Public Service	Investors
Leisure Tourists	Qualified Workforce	Qualified Workforce	Investors	Companies (sectors)
	Undergraduates	Undergraduates	Companies	

media, education, and arts (Hankinson, 2010), while others suggest that the core customers of residents, visitors, companies, and investors should be expanded to include commuters, students, export markets, and intermediaries (Braun, 2008). The target groups in modern marketing practice are increasingly specific and complex, and customers have different needs and demands depending on their perceptions of the place brand. Conflicts and synergies are inevitable between the needs and demands of different target groups (Zenker & Braun, 2010). Table 2 summarizes the previously mentioned.

Stubbs and Warnaby (2015, p. 105) suggest that stakeholders can be "reasonably engaged and involved" in a place branding strategy when they have sufficient information and understanding of the goals and vision that align with their own objectives. The authors identify various stakeholder groups related to place branding, including residents, politicians, governmental organizations, promotion agencies, infrastructure, and transport providers, cultural and sports organizations, businesses, academic organizations and schools, and religious organizations. The role of stakeholders goes even further with Zenker & Erfgen (2014, p. 231), that defend that residents should be given power to "let them do the work" of place branding.

Involving stakeholders in the place branding process can enhance the effectiveness of branding in the public sector. When stakeholders are engaged in branding, there is a clearer brand concept, and the city's ability to attract new residents, visitors, and businesses increases (Klijn et al., 2012). Different stakeholder groups have varying perceptions of the city brand (Merrilees et al., 2009) and seek to maximize their benefits, which can lead to conflicts with other groups (Buhalis, 2000). Brand co-creation and long-term success require the involvement of key internal stakeholder groups (Konecnik & Petek, 2012).

Another research in place branding has emphasized the importance of collaboration, participation, and stakeholder involvement in the branding process (Ilczuk, 2019). Braun's (2008) framework for identifying a city's customer target groups is also a flexible and useful tool for understanding stakeholder groups. Table 3 summarizes Braun's (2008) customer target groups for cities.

Table 3. Braun's customers target groups of a city (source: adapted from Braun, 2008)

Core customer groups		Secondary customer groups	
Visitors	Leisure visitors, business visitors and professional visitors (Beckmann & Zenker, 2012)	Students	Van der Berg & Russo, 2002; Braun (2008)
Companies	Civil service, companies (sectors) (Beckmann & Zenker, 2012)	Commuters	Kotler (2002), Rainisto (2003), Braun (2008)
Investors	Local and external (Beckmann & Zenker, 2012)	Intermediaries	Event promoters and organisers, real estate brokers (Braun, 2008)
Residents	Employees in the city, employees elsewhere and not employed (Braun, 2008) Skilled workforce and creative class (Beckmann & Zenker, 2012)	Export markets	Target markets of place marketers (Kotler, et al., 1993) Outside investments and export markets (Rainisto, 2003) Potential investors (Braun et al., 2003)

2. Research questions

The purpose of this research is to evaluate the perceptions of place brand management in two selected cities from the same metropolitan area, specifically examining how internal stakeholders are attracted to the place brand. The authors have developed four propositions to guide the research, which draw on insights from various frameworks, adopting the Kavaratzis (2009) framework for it is an integrational proposal that takes into account insights from the previously mentioned frameworks.

Propositions:

P1: There is a positive impact on the effectiveness of branding in the public sector provided by the stakeholder involvement (Maheshwari, et al., 2011; Klijn et al., 2012; Eshuis et al., 2014);

P2: Brand perceptions are different depending of the different (Merrilees et al., 2009; Fitchett, 2005; Friedman & Miles, 2002);

P3: Brand co-creation and its long-term success are very dependent of the involvement of the Internal stakeholders (Hankinson, 2007; Konecnik & Petek, 2012; Gyrd-Jones & Kornum, 2013; Vallaster & von Wallpach, 2013);

P4: Place branding managers consider the residents as the most important internal stakeholders to target. (Braun et al., 2010; Kavaratzis, 2012; Klijn et al., 2012; Zenker & Erfgen, 2014).

To gather information to support these propositions, the authors conducted a case study research and designed an interview protocol consisting of twenty questions (Table 6). They expect to find evidence supporting the importance of internal stakeholders in brand management strategies (Klijn et al., 2012), as well as the distinct perceptions held by different stakeholder groups regarding brand image (Merrilees et al., 2009). Additionally, they anticipate uncovering the critical role of residents (Kavaratzis, 2012) and the significance of stakeholder participation in brand co-creation (Hankinson, 2010). The next section of the paper outlines the methodology used in this research.

In the next section we outline the methodology used in this research.

3. Methodology

The goal of this case study is to evaluate the place brand attraction for internal stakeholders from two industrial cities from the same metropolitan area. 12 interviews were conducted to internal stakeholders, with a diverse age range and occupation. As one can see in Table 4, the sample is characterized by five CEO of small and large companies, one of which is a foreigner investor. Three of them are workers, one of which is living outside the city, and two are students.

The framework developed by Kavaratzis (2009) guided the propositions for the research question, as well as the interview protocol, with 20 questions. The coronavirus pandemic stressed the results, as many interviewees declined to accept a face-to-face interview. Many meetings were cancelled or postponed without

Table 4. The interviewees (source: Barros & Barros, 2022)

	Stake-Holder	Group	Interviewee
1	Firms	Statal Owned	Brand manager
2		Private Companies	CEO
3		Private Companies	CEO
4	Investors	Local Company	CEO
5	Residents	City's worker	Citizen
6		Near town's worker	Citizen
7		Unemployed	Citizen
8	Students	City's undergraduate	Citizen
9		Different town's undergraduate	Citizen
11	Commuters	Near town's worker	Citizen
12	Intermediaries	Promoter of events	CEO
13		Real Estate agent	CEO

further developments. Therefore, most of the interviews were conducted by the phone or assisted by the phone or through cloud video conference software's. According to Barros & Barros (2022) confusions were erased using email to clarify.

To address the research question and investigate the proposed hypotheses, a qualitative approach was employed, utilizing two case studies. An exploratory case study was conducted to assess perceptions of place brand management in the selected cities, following the case study protocol outlined by Yin (1994, 2018).

Table 5. The Case Study Protocol (source: adapted from Yin, 2018)

An overview of the case study	Mission and goals; case study questions, hypothesis, and propositions; theoretical framework, and literature research.
Data collection procedures	Data collection plan; expected preparation prior to fieldwork.
Protocol questions	The questions and the potential source of evidence for addressing each question.
Tentative outline for the case study report	Format for the data, use and presentation, and bibliographic information.

The authors chose to interview the stakeholders identified in Kavaratzis' (2009) framework because it provides an integrated approach to city brand management by combining insights from previous frameworks. Kavaratzis is widely recognized in the literature on place branding for this achievement. The stakeholders from Porto and São João da Madeira identified in Table 4 were selected as a sample of the internal influencers of the place brand based on Kavaratzis' framework.

Convenience methods were utilized to gather data, based on the roles of the interviewees and their availability to participate in the research. Both face-to-face and remote semi-structured interviews were conducted. A pre-designed protocol was used to guide the interviews (see Table 6).

Table 6. Interview protocol (source: the authors)

Categories Kavaratzis (2009)	Questions
Vision and Strategy	What are the main objectives for the city? What are the most communicated messages by the city? Is there any kind of defined positioning to the city? Who is responsible for the development and application of the vision?
Internal Culture	How is the organisational culture transmitted within the organisation? What are the main values, ideas and concepts transmitted? Who is responsible for this task?

Categories Kavaratzis (2009)	Questions
Local Communities	Which are the main local communities (companies or institutions) in the city? Which one (or which ones) best represent the city's values? How do they interact with the city and its stakeholders?
Synergies	What kind of partnerships exist to promote the city's objectives? What type of partnerships would most benefit the city?
Infrastructure	What key infrastructures and facilities does the city have? Which key infrastructures are still missing in the city?
Cityscape and Gateways	What is the most representative urban landscape of the city? How do you characterize the entrance doors to the city? How are solved the cases that provoke bad city's images?
Opportunities	What opportunities aimed at citizens (urban life, good support services, culture, etc.) and companies (public, financial, work services, etc.) exist in the city?
Communications	What message is sent to each of the target audiences? What are the main concerns in that communication?

In the next section the main results are presented.

4. Research and Findings

The study indicates that both city brand managers acknowledge the significance of stakeholder involvement in the process of branding a place. The brand manager of Porto emphasizes that all their efforts are directed towards the city and all stakeholders, especially the business community, including start-ups. On the other hand, the brand manager of São João da Madeira highlights the city's associative power, including fire stations, schools, and NGOs, and stresses the importance of industries of shoes and hats. Most interviewees agree that the communication from the place brand managers is related to the vision of the city and consider the city hall responsible for promoting city values and vision. The study also reveals that stakeholders who are more involved with the city have a more positive image of their brand and contribute more effectively to the effectiveness of branding. According to most interviewees, communication from the place brand managers is closely linked to the vision of the city. One interviewee notes that the authorities are responsible for preserving the city and ensuring the well-being of its citizens, while another agrees and emphasizes that the city's sense of security is a key symbol. Stakeholders who are more involved with the city tend to have a more favorable view of its brand and offer more positive feedback. Additionally, they are more

effective at promoting the brand, as they openly endorse and advocate for their city. Investors and businesspeople with direct connections to the City Hall exhibit a better understanding of the city's values and proposals, with clearer goals in mind. Conversely, businesspeople who were interviewed but had no contact with the City Hall seemed to lack knowledge about most of the questions posed by the authors.

The authors conclude that stakeholder involvement has a positive impact on the branding process, therefore accepting Proposition 1.

The place brand manager of Porto presents the city as both business-friendly and socially responsible, with a focus on supporting those in need. They emphasized that Porto has policies in place to attract investment and talent, as cities can attract individuals based on their organization and quality of life. Conversely, São João da Madeira's place brand manager highlights the city's strong industrial heritage and innovative industries as its main attributes, which have resulted in wealth, comfort, services, and facilities for its residents. From the interviews conducted, the authors observed that different stakeholders have varying perceptions of these images. While two interviewees laud São João da Madeira's focus on innovation and entrepreneurship, two others criticize Porto for having a limited vision and lack of content, although one of them acknowledges the city's efforts towards environmental sustainability. Therefore, despite the presence of a clear vision and messaging strategy, there are distinct perceptions among stakeholders depending on their degree of involvement or agreement with the policies being pursued. The interviewees also identified different characteristics that define each city, with each naming what they deemed most relevant. Thus, the authors can conclude that Proposition 2 can be accepted, as different stakeholders hold distinct perceptions of the brand image.

The interviewees from São João da Madeira express a strong sense of pride in their city's innovative industries and prestigious reputation. Similarly, those from Porto acknowledge the importance of tourism to their city. However, all interviewees identify various internal stakeholder groups that embody the vision of each city. These groups include companies, businessmen, local associations, educational institutions, churches, museums, and sports clubs, among others. The positive attitude towards these internal stakeholder groups is consistent with Proposition 3, which emphasizes the significance of such groups in brand co-creation and long-term success. Therefore, the authors accept Proposition 3.

Upon content analysis of the speeches of the city brand managers (Bardin, 2016), it is apparent that they do have a concern for the residents of their cities. However, it is unclear whether residents are the most important target market for these cities, as brand managers tend to focus more on attracting investment, creating job opportunities, and promoting education to meet the demands of the labour market. The environment is also an important aspect for both cities, with green spaces

and sustainability being a priority. In Porto, there is a focus on attracting and retaining young talent while providing an affordable cost of living. In contrast, São João da Madeira emphasizes its industrial heritage while incorporating innovation and modernity, with an eye towards environmental sustainability. Despite their differing approaches, both cities share a strong personality and a futuristic outlook. However, the COVID-19 pandemic has had a negative impact on Porto's tourism industry, resulting in the implementation of a nightly tax on tourists since 2018.

The emphasis of São João da Madeira on technological start-ups and education appears to be in line with its industrial background, but only time will tell if it will be successful. After analysing all aspects, it can be concluded that there are indications that the decisions are aligned with the needs of the residents, but none of the city brand managers explicitly stated that the residents are their main concern. The brand manager of Porto stated that "municipal citizens" are the primary target, which includes "all those that live, work and are in the city". On the other hand, the brand manager of São João da Madeira stated that "we work for the people, and everything we do is just instrumental", and that they aim to increase the value of both the territory and the population. The city invests in good educational, leisure, and sports services for the people. Based on these statements, there are not enough cues to accept Proposition 4. This could be because brand managers do not distinguish between internal stakeholders, or because residents have less weight therefore, they are neglected by city's authorities (Berrada, 2018).

The research has also uncovered some unexpected signals indicating that city managers may be overemphasizing political propaganda, which cause a certain amount of repulsion in the citizens less engaged with the city brand. Although the authors were not expecting to find such cues, they consider necessary to highlight this fact for it must be deep explored in future research.

Conclusions

This exploratory qualitative study aims to understand the attraction of place branding towards internal stakeholders. Kavaratzis framework (2009, 2012) guided this research that was developed using a case study methodology by means of interviews (multiple case study, infrequent in this field of research therefore innovative). Taking this into consideration there are some limitations to consider when analysing the results for they may not be generalizable. There are also some limitations taking into account the selection of the participants (convenience) and the pandemic context. Therefore, further investigation is encouraged as the results provide important cues for the policy makers to adapt the necessary measures to fulfil the cities' interests.

Three of the four proposed propositions were accepted and one was considered not to have enough cues to be accepted. This research contributed to the enrichment

of the understanding the attraction of place branding towards the internal stakeholders. The role of the internal stakeholders is widely recognized and there are cues that the city brand managers seem to be addressing their main policies considering those that live, work, study and invest in their cities.

The interviewed stakeholders that revealed positive brand images, also revealed that their quality of life is higher than those with a more negative approach to the local brand. On the same pace, the more the place brand impacts positively on the internal stakeholders, the more they engage with the city brand and the local institutions.

The research findings provide a promising basis for further investigation and offer valuable insights for policymakers seeking to implement effective policy measures that align with their cities' interests. The study recognizes the crucial role played by internal stakeholders. City brand managers are prioritizing policies that cater to the needs of those who reside, work, study, and invest in their respective cities.

This study's significance lies in its use of a multiple case study, a method seldom utilized in this research domain. However, the limited number of interviews conducted has undoubtedly impacted the results. Therefore, it is imperative to pursue and supplement this study with a more comprehensive set of interviews.

Disclosure statement

Authors have not any competing financial, professional, or personal interests from other parties.

References

- Anholt, S. (2003). Branding Places and Nations. In R. Clifton & J. Simmons (Eds.), *Brands and Branding* (pp. 213–226). The Economist and Profile Books. http://www.culturaldiplomacy.org/academy/pdf/research/books/nation_branding/Brands_And_Branding_-_Rita_Clifton_And_John_Simmons.pdf
- Anholt, S. (2006). The Anholt-GMI city brands index: How the world sees the world's cities. *Place Branding*, 18–31.
- Anholt, S. (2010). *Places. Identity, Image and Reputation*. Palgrave Macmillan.
- Bardin, L. (2016). *Análise de Conteúdo* (3rd ed.) Almedina Brasil. <https://madmunifacs.files.wordpress.com/2016/08/anc3a1lise-de-contec3bado-laurence-bardin.pdf>
- Barros, L. B., & Barros, T. (2022). How do internal stakeholders relate with the place brand: the case of Porto and São João da Madeira. In A. M. Barreto, J. Freire, & N. Correia de Brito (Eds.), *Place Branding* (pp. 83–100). ICNOVA. <https://colecaoicnova.fcs.unl.pt/index.php/icnova/article/view/96/109>
- Beckmann, S. C., & Zenker, S. (2012). Place Branding: a multiple stakeholder perspective. In *41st European Marketing Academy Conference, Lisbon, Portugal* (pp. 22–25).
- Berrada, M. (2018). Towards a holistic place branding model: A conceptual model proposal. *Chinese Business Review*, 17(5), 223–237. <https://doi.org/10.17265/1537-1506/2018.05.002>
- Blackett, T. (2003). What is a brand? In R. Clifton & J. Simmons (Eds.), *Brands and Branding* (pp. 13–25). The Economist and Profile Books.
- Braun, E. (2008). *City Marketing: Towards an integrated approach*. Erasmus Research Institute of Management (ERIM).
- Buhalis, D. (2000). Marketing the competitive destination of the future. *Tourism Management*, 21, 97–116. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0261-5177\(99\)00095-3](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0261-5177(99)00095-3)
- Freeman, R. E. (1984). *Strategic Management: A stakeholder approach*. Pitman Publishing.
- Freeman, R. E., Harrison, J. S., Wicks, A. C., Parmar, B. L., & de Colle, S. (2010). *Stakeholder Theory. The state of the art*. Cambridge University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511815768>
- Hankinson, G. (2004). Relational network brands: Towards a conceptual model of place brands. *Journal of Vacation Marketing*, 10(2), 109–121. <https://doi.org/10.1177/135676670401000202>
- Hankinson, G. (2007). The management of destination brands: Five guiding principles based on recent developments in corporate branding theory. *Journal of Brand Management*, 14(14) 240–254. <https://doi.org/10.1057/palgrave.bm.2550065>
- Hankinson, G. (2010). Place branding theory: a cross-domain literature review from a marketing perspective. In *The management of destination brands: Five guiding principles based on recent developments in corporate branding theory* (pp. 15–35). Edward Elgar Publishing Limited.
- Hankinson, G. (2015). Rethinking the place branding construct. In Kavaratzis, M., Warnaby, G., Ashworth, G. (Eds.), *Rethinking place branding* (pp. 13–31). Springer. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-12424-7_2
- Hereźniak, M., & Anders-Morawska, J. (2021). Public value-driven place branding. The way forward? *Place Branding and Public Diplomacy*, 17, 65–77. <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41254-020-00185-0>
- Iłczuk, K. (2019, June). Collaboration in the city branding process – a bibliometric analysis of scientific literature. In *2019 IEEE Technology & Engineering Management Conference (TEMSCOM)* (pp. 1–5). IEEE. <https://doi.org/10.1109/TEMSCON.2019.8813704>
- Kavaratzis, M. (2004). From city marketing to city branding: Towards a theoretical framework for developing city brands. *Place Branding*, 1(1), 58–73. <https://doi.org/10.1057/palgrave.pb.5990005>
- Kavaratzis, M. (2009). Cities and their brands: Lessons from corporate branding. *Place Branding and Public Diplomacy*, 5(1) 26–37. <https://doi.org/10.1057/pb.2008.3>
- Kavaratzis, M. (2012). From “necessary evil” to necessity: stakeholders' involvement in place branding. *Journal of Place Management and Development*, 5(1), 7–19. <https://doi.org/10.1108/17538331211209013>
- Keller, K. L. (2003). Brand Synthesis: The Multidimensionality of Brand Knowledge. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 29(4), 595–600. <https://doi.org/10.1086/346254>
- Klijn, E.-H., Eshuis, J., & Braun, E. (2012). The influence of stakeholder involvement on the effectiveness of place branding. *Public Management Review*, 14(4), 499–519. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14719037.2011.649972>
- Konecnik, M., & Petek, N. (2012). The importance of diverse stakeholders in place branding: the case of “I feel Slovenia”. *Anatolia*, 23(1), 49–60. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13032917.2011.653631>

- Kotler, P., & Gertner, D. (2002). Country as a brand, product, and beyond: A place marketing and brand management perspective. *Journal of Brand Management*, 9(4/5), 249–261. <https://doi.org/10.1057/palgrave.bm.2540076>
- Kotler, P., Haider, D. H., & Rein, I. (1993). *Marketing Places: Attracting Investment, Industry, and Tourism to Cities, States, and Nations*. The Free Press.
- Merrilees, B., Miller, S., & Herington, C. (2009). Antecedents of resident's city brand attitudes. *Journal of Business Research*, 62(3), 362–367. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2008.05.011>
- Middleton, A. C. (2011). City Branding and Inward Investment. In K. Dinnie (Ed.), *City Branding: Theory and Cases* (pp. 15–26). Palgrave MacMillan. https://doi.org/10.1057/9780230294790_3
- Rainisto, S. K. (2003). *Success factors of place marketing: a study of place marketing practices in Northern Europe and the United States*. Helsinki University of Technology, Institute of Strategy and International Business.
- Stubbs, J., & Warnaby, G. (2015). Working with stakeholders: Rethinking place branding from a practice perspective. In M. Kavaratzis, G. Warnaby, & Ashworth, G. (Eds.) *Rethinking Place Branding: Comprehensive Brand Development for Cities and Regions* (pp. 101–118). Springer. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-12424-7_8
- Trueman, M., & Cornelius, N. (2006). *Hanging Baskets Or Basket Cases? Managing the Complexity of City Brands and Regeneration*. University of Bradford, School of Management.
- Van den Berg, L., & Braun, E. (1999). Urban competitiveness, marketing and the need for organising capacity. *Urban Studies*, 36(5–6), 987–999. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0042098993312>
- Yin, R. K. (1994). *Case Study Research* (2nd ed.) Sage Publications.
- Yin, R. K. (2018). *Case Study Research and Applications – Design and Methods* (6th ed.). Sage Publications.
- Zenker, S., & Braun, E. (2010, June). The place brand centre – a conceptual approach for the brand management of places. In *39th European Marketing Academy Conference, Copenhagen, Denmark* (pp. 1–8).
- Zenker, S., & Braun, E. (2015). Rethinking the measurement of place brands. In M. Kavaratzis, G. Warnaby, & G. Ashworth (Eds.), *Rethinking place branding* (pp. 211–223). Springer. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-12424-7_14
- Zenker, S., & Erfgen, C. (2014). Let them do the work: a participatory place branding approach. *Journal of Place Management and Development*, 7(3), 225–234. <https://doi.org/10.1108/JPMD-06-2013-0016>