



The role of Destination Management Organizations in co-creating local territory brand identity, a comparative analysis in Italy and Argentina

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ABSTRACT

The role of Destination Management Organizations in co-creating local territory brand identity, a comparative analysis in Italy and Argentina

This paper analyses how Destination Management Organizations (DMOs) contribute to the co-creation of a local territory brand identity. The aim of DMOs, which are organizational models for the management of tourist destinations apt to strengthen the services and resources of the various territorial identities, is to facilitate the collaboration and involvement of all actors in the area in order to increase the overall quality of tourism (Del Chiappa, Presenza, 2013; Coscarello, 2020).

In particular, this paper presents the findings of an on-going comparative study on how DMOs in Italy and Argentina are managing their promotion and branding creating process for marketing campaigns. Specifically, the purpose of this article is to: (i) investigate how DMOs choose the content to create the destination identity, (ii) identify the roles of the various stakeholders in the process of place branding, and (iii) analyse the content and communication strategies used to promote the territory.

This article contributes to the fast-growing place brand identity literature by exploring the role of DMOs in the co-creation of place-branding. It also intends to provide a better understanding of how effective the message is in contributing to their territorial brand identity. To the best of our knowledge, similar studies do not exist, therefore, it fills an important research gap.

The research shows that the challenge for destinations seems to be the creation of a system network that, involving the public and private sectors, can take care of destination development. This may be the only way to implement a collaborative relationship and partnership with local, regional and national institutions for destination enhancement.

KEYWORDS

Destination Management Organizations (DMOs)
Place-branding
Promotion
Italy
Argentina

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The role of Destination Management Organizations in co-creating local territory brand identity: a comparative analysis in Italy and Argentina²

Introduction

The Covid-19 pandemic has had a profound impact on all sectors of the global economy, including the tourism industry (Gössling, Scott Hall, 2020; Hall, Scott Gössling, 2020). The challenges that tourism destinations are currently facing emphasize the need to rethink tourism in order to boost competitiveness and build resilience by diversifying products and markets, and promoting domestic and regional tourism (UNWTO, 2020). New trends and models are being proposed taking into account the different stakeholders involved in this multifaceted phenomenon, namely public and private sectors, non-governmental and tourist associations and even the community at large. This scenario of collaboration between multiple stakeholders has become crucial for promoting and branding a place (e.g., a town, region or country) (Rodrigues Schmidt, 2021). Tourist destinations compete among themselves to attract tourists and inhabitants, especially in areas that were struggling even before the pandemic. To be more attractive, destinations need to stand out by promoting their identity (Moilanen, Rainisto, 2009). Therefore, place branding, a process based on the identity and positive image of a place, is a vital strategy within the field of the hospitality and tourism sector (Pedeliento, Kavaratzis, 2019).

To convey a clear and effective message to the various target groups, a place brand must have brand identity characteristics that differentiate the place from other destinations (Morgan, Pritchard, Pride, 2002). «A place needs to be differentiated through a unique brand identity if it wants to be, first, recognized as existing, secondly, perceived in the minds of place customers as possessing qualities superior to those of competitors and, thirdly, consumed in a manner commensurate with the objectives of the place» (Kasapi, Cela, 2017, p. 139). According to Anholt (2006), place branding can be particularly helpful for those places that employ outdated messages or images or that might have a bad reputation, or simply for places that are not well known; at the same time, place branding can also enhance, revitalize, improve, or contextualize perceived images. «The idea is that if all of this works effectively, then the appropriate target markets will be attracted to the place, and the place will develop a competitive (and thus economic) advantage over other places» (Skinner, 2021, p. 177).

In light of this, the purpose of this study is to explore how the actors in a territorial ecosystem interact and understand the process that contributes to the formation of a place's brand identity. In this article, we attempt to answer this important question by analysing the development of destination brand identity through the theoretical perspective of co-creative brand management. In particular, the objective is to understand the ways in which a plurality of actors (public and private) interact with each other also through spatial variables, and thus how the social process arises and how it develops, in order to favor a systemic and integrated tourist offer (destination). Moreover, the study aims at understanding the communication process employed on the websites in order to promote the Destination Management Organization (DMO).

The methodology adopted in this study is the mixed method approach. The collection and analysis of both qualitative and quantitative data will allow to explore diverse perspectives and un-

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2 Received: 10/7/2022. Revised: 22/11/2022. Accepted: 06/12/2022. Although the authors have collaborated in the research work and in writing the paper, they have individually devoted specific attention to the following sections: Coscarello M. – sections 2.2, 3, 4.1, 5; Ruffolo I. – sections 1, 2.1, 3, 4.2.

cover relationships that exist between the intricate layers of the multifaceted research question. In particular, two local case studies of participatory construction of the tourist destination (Place Brand Identity) in Argentina and Italy will be analyzed in an attempt to understand to what extent actors (public and private) can interact and develop a social process capable of fostering an aggregated tourism offer in a territorial context. Moreover, the analysis of the national websites of both countries (Italy and Argentina), was carried out to understand the differences and similarities in the content and communication strategies used to promote the territory. The paper begins with a brief illustration of the theoretical background to the study, followed by the methodology employed in this work. The core of the paper illustrates the results of the quantitative and qualitative analysis. The final section draws on tentative results of this on-going project and suggests further lines of research.

1. Theoretical background

1.1 Place branding, identity and DMOs

Place branding can be defined as «the name, term, symbol or design, or combination of these, that seeks to identify the characteristics of the city and differentiate it from other cities» (Loreto, 2005, p. 6). As stated by Agüero *et al.* (2006), place branding strategy should include the effective communication of the city's essence in order to enhance the cultural, social and commerce values that the brand seeks to address.

When defining place branding, the concepts of identity and image are interconnected. Identity is defined by Calvento and Colombo (2009, p. 266) as «a set of perceptions and associations that immediately characterize spaces, and becomes the main vehicle of differentiation from others». In order to be able to fully promote the identity of a place, it is necessary to understand how the place is defined, know the elements that identify it and with whom it compares itself (López Carmona, 2004).

According to San Eugenio (2013, p. 190), «identity, in a context of emerging competitiveness between territories, turns out to be the most important element of recognition, differentiation and marketing in the communicative process of positioning cities, regions and countries». However, it is not easy to define an area's identity because it is a subjective and intangible concept. Therefore, it can be defined, in part, through images that should be understood «as the set of beliefs, ideas and impressions that a person has of his or her territory».

Place branding must aim at presenting a positive and appealing image of the place, and this means including particular elements in official messages while excluding others (Johansson, 2012). However, as Johansson explains, it is a complex activity to apply marketing-based branding to places since they are constituted by a multitude of identities and activities. In the place branding planning phase, strategic decisions need to be taken, for instance, taking into account all those responsible for the development of the brand, such as politicians, companies, associations and, primarily, the residents (Kemp, Childers, Williams, 2012). Therefore, it is crucial to co-create the brand among public and private sector, the society and other people interested in the process. Due to the complexity of branding in tourism and thanks to the characteristics of DMOs, the task of place branding of a destination is usually allocated to a DMO (Hanna Rowley, 2008). Indeed, as emphasized by Ind, Iglesias and Schultz (2013, p. 5) «this process [destination branding] brings consumers, managers, and employees together to participate in brand development». In particular, in order to create a sustainable and unique brand to the destination, it is important that the public sector, private sector and local governing authorities collaborate with the place's key stakeholders, that is inhabitants and visitors (Maheshwari, Bamber, 2011).

Indeed, Rodrigues and Schmidt (2021) suggest that a participatory approach to place branding encourages stakeholders to play an active role in the overall place branding process, an approach which is still under-researched. In fact, there are still very few examples of this type of collaboration among stakeholders in co-creating the destination brand identity (Gyrd-Jones, Kornum, 2013; Kavaratzis, Hatch, 2013).

Furthermore, an important feature of the creation of the destination brand identity is the language employed to communicate the brand; indeed, tourists choose the tourist destination advertised if persuasive strategies are successfully employed on tourism websites (Manca, 2016). However, communicating an entire territory is not an easy task, first of all, due to the variety of resources, attractions and opportunities it offers and also because of the set of stakeholders who live and work in the territory. The process is even more complex because communication has to deal with the perceptions (including prior perceptions) of the destination's various stakeholders, primarily the end users to whom it is addressed, namely tourists. Even though tourism communication is generally analyzed with reference to the final users, i.e., the tourists, its effectiveness is rooted in the internal context of the destination (Marzano, Scott, 2009).

The performance of the website can be evaluated using different models. One model is the Attention, Interest, Desire, Action (AIDA) model, which has been widely accepted and adopted among marketing scholars and practitioners in traditional as well as online marketing. According to Garber and Dotson (2002), the AIDA model can prove that increased attention for certain destinations is likely to lead to a certain interest, which might give birth to a desire that may eventually result in a certain action. Therefore, the attention for a place will lead to actions and this is why both public and private stakeholders support efforts of place promotion.

Literature on place branding (Rodrigues Schmidt, 2021; Hankinson, 2004) identifies three key components of place brand identity, which are central to identity development, that is *physics*, *practices* and *personality* (Tab. 1). Table 1 summarises the components of place brand identity as outlined by Rodrigues and Schmidt (2021) and Hankinson (2004).

Table 1. Components of place brand identity

Components of place brand identity		
Components	Features	Examples
Physics	Materiality aspects and physical assets (Kalandides, 2011; Lindstedt, 2011). Tangible attributes (e.g., artefacts) and symbols that stand as both visual representations and the essence of place brand identity	Cultural and sport facilities, hotels, restaurants, nightclubs, transport infrastructures, historic plaques, decorations and sculptures (Florek, Insch Gnoth, 2006; Hanna Rowley, 2011), as well as temporary retail formats that may contribute to urban renewal (Kalandides <i>et al.</i> , 2016).
Practices	Practices that result from competition and cooperation between stakeholders (Martínez, 2016). Activities, behaviours, decisions and rituals (Kalandides, 2011; Florek, Insch Gnoth, 2006)	The place practices include events and rituals such as street parties, ceremonies, parades and artistic performances (Hankinson, 2004; Hanna Rowley, 2011).
Personality	Character of locals, the tourists' profile and the character of the environment (Hankinson, 2004). Symbolic and experiential attributes.	Symbolic attributes: the character of the local residents; the profile of typical visitors (eg age, income, interests and values); descriptors of the quality of service provided by service contact personnel). Experiential attributes: how the destination will make visitors feel (eg relaxed, excited or fascinated); descriptors of the destination's feel (e.g. the city experience, vibrant or peaceful); the character of the built environment (eg historic, modern, green and spacious); Descriptors related to security and safety (Hankinson, 2004).

Adapted from Rodrigues and Schmidt, 2021, p. 22-23 and Hankinson, 2004, p. 116.

A metaanalysis conducted by Lucarelli (2011) on place-city branding shows that there is a worldwide geographical coverage in the literature, implying that the phenomenon is studied worldwide. Nevertheless, the majority of articles deal with cities in the western world, focusing their analysis on one city only (107 studies). Thus, the cities studied are by no means evenly spread around the world.

Among the 252 studies dealing with different type of cities in several nations, 90 address cities, in the UK (60), the USA (20) and Canada (8), thus accounting for 35% of the total amount of city studies. Even more striking is the fact that 156 (61%) of the studies deal with European cities, while only five deal with cities in Africa and three with cities in South America. In particular, 2 in Brazil (Rio de Janeiro) e 1 in Argentina (Buenos Aires). Therefore, the aim of this work is to contribute to new scientific knowledge through the comparative analysis of a European and a Latin American city, given the very few studies in the literature (Vuignier, 2016).

1.2 Destination management / marketing organization (DMOs)

According to the World Tourism Organization (WTO) (2019, p. 16), a DMO «is the leading organizational entity which may encompass the various authorities, stakeholders and professionals and facilitates tourism sector partnerships towards a collective destination vision». DMOs can have various governance structures, they may vary from a single public authority to a public/private partnership model with the aim of initiating and managing activities such as implementation of tourism policies, strategic planning, product development, promotion. In Reinhold and Beritelli's 2022 study, an overview of the history of DMOs is illustrated. According to Pike and Page (2014), DMOs date back to a series of private, local organizations, first emerging in Europe in the second half of the 19th century. They were often part of national administrative bodies, unlike local and regional organizations.

Although there are no official statistics regarding the numbers of DMO, Pike and Page (2014) estimate that their worldwide number exceeds 10 000. «These organizations take many different forms, and their overlapping geographical responsibilities are characterized by cooperation – that is, they simultaneously cooperate and compete» (Beritelli *et al.*, 2015, p. 25).

DMOs can function at various levels: (i) at national level, taking care of the management and marketing of national tourism; developing in some cases beyond national borders; (ii) at regional/state/level, having responsibilities of the management and marketing of tourism in specific geographic/historic areas, defined for that purpose; (iii) at local level, being in charge of the development and promotion of tourism in areas limited to a city/town (Negrușă, Coros, 2016).

As for their governance structures, Wang (2011) identifies four types of structures that are typical of DMOs, taking into consideration governance type, activities, geographic scope and destination type, from the public and private point of view: (i) publicly controlled government agencies which are subject to municipal policies; (ii) non-profit organizations funded by public money, equipped with mandates and global budgets; (iii) public–private partnerships with mixed public–private funding and interest representation; (iv) fully private associations which are dependent on membership contributions and on revenues from business activities. The first three types of structure are community-based and call for stakeholder collaboration. The last type resembles more of corporate-type destinations (Flagestad Hope, 2001), where DMOs are sometimes referred to as destination management companies (DMCs), which focus more local tour-operating (*ibid.*).

Various studies (Volgger, Pechlaner, 2014; Varghese, Paul, 2014; Coscarello, 2020) emphasize the important role that DMOs play in the success of tourism destinations and in land development. In particular, in a study on the review of the literature conducted by Varghese and Paul

(2014, p. 72), the authors claim that «DMOs are necessary for the long-term sustainability of the destination». Moreover, Volgger and Pechlaner (2014, p. 72) affirm that «in order to understand how to increase the competitiveness of a destination, it seems to be crucial to scrutinize what determinates a DMO's success».

The main functions of the DMO are examined by various authors; for instance, Presenza, Sheehan and Ritchie (2005) provide different views of DMOs as a Destination Marketing Organization and Destination Management Organization. In particular, when attempting to explain the marketing and management roles of DMOs, the authors divide the roles into three categories, namely, External Destination Marketing (EDM), Internal Development Role (IDD) and Overall Destination Management (ODM) explaining their specific activities.

More recent studies have focused on the various roles and activities of a DMO. For instance, for Dredge (2016) DMOs are policy tools that serve tourism industry interests by organizing and coordinating tourism activity at the destination and by building industry capacity. According to this perspective, DMOs are responsible for increasing visitor spend and attracting business development to the area. Bornhorst, Ritchie and Sheehan (2010) highlight their leadership and advocacy roles, while Pechlaner, Volgger and Herntrei (2012) emphasize their coordination, communication, and networking functions.

Recent research shows that there is a very important change taking place with respect to the trend of tourism flows as well as how the perspective of travel is created, so we are in the presence of a co-production of tourism demand, contextualized over time (Beritelli, 2020). Moreover, numerous research studies show how Web 2.0 and social media (e.g., Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, YouTube, and TripAdvisor) are helping to change the market conditions of DMOs. In particular, such virtual communities are participating in the construction of destination content, context, and co-creation (Oliveira Panyik, 2015). What is becoming important is the process of producing the tourism product, an aspect on which this paper puts emphasis on.

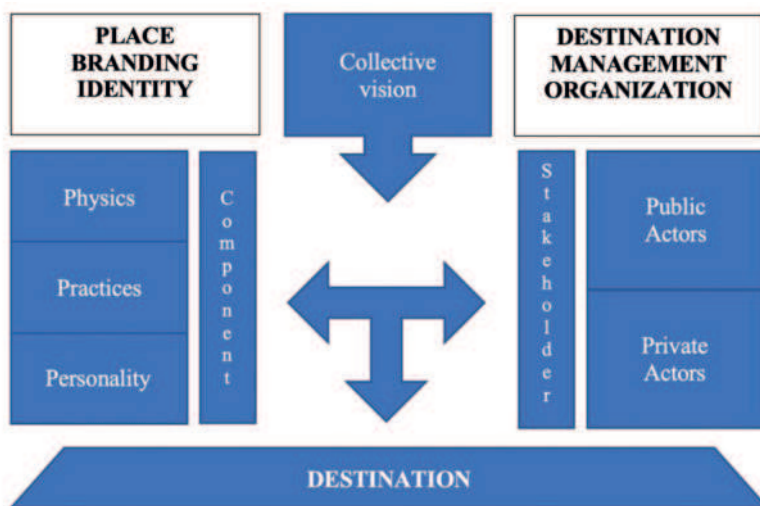
Thus, DMOs propose technological solutions for database cooperation and communication between destination portals and between them and the regional/national portal and other portals (Coscarello, 2020). According to Beritelli's research (2020), the choice of destinations seems to depend on social contingencies and relationships, personal relationships with places and/or attractions or specific offerings. Therefore, it is crucial to understand the variables that contribute to the creation of new flows.

The complexity of destination management is increasing. Keywords in this context are progressive digitization, increasing internationalization, and demographic change. In the future, DMOs can help substantially to deal with this complexity if they resist merely starting from simple standard solutions to simple problems and indulging in the cargo cult and instead critically and constructively question their role and activities in the «system destination» on a consistent basis.

There is not much research that considers the role of DMOs specifically in the co-creation of place-branding. In fact, in many studies only the role of private actors and public actors is considered, but there has not yet to be much analysis of the capacity of DMOs to relate to the three main components of place branding identified by Rodrigues and Schmidt (2021) and Hankinson (2004).

Moreover, the effectiveness of the message in contributing to their territorial brand identity has not been analysed enough. In Figure 1, a new theoretical approach to the study of Place Brand is proposed by the authors.

Fig. 1. A new vision of Destination between Place branding Identity and DMO.



Source: Own elaboration.

In this sense, while there are many studies that recognise that DMOs play a fundamental role in the exchange of information between stakeholders (Reinhold, Beritelli, 2022), recent studies are exploring how elements of DMOs' design thinking can be used to creatively solve problems in the tourism and destination development sectors (Thomas, McNeice, 2021), contributing to the co-construction of Place Brand Identity.

The following section presents the methodology adopted to carry out this study.

2. Methodology

This research focuses on the role that DMOs play in co-creating (producing) place branding, according to one of the three perspectives based on research interests (producing, consuming and criticizing city branding) identified by Lucarelli and Berg (2011).

The research question underlying the survey is the following: *how do the actors in a territorial ecosystem interact and what is the process that contributes to the formation of a place's brand identity?* The overall aim is to understand the ways in which a plurality of actors (public and private) interact with each other also through spatial variables, and thus how the social process arises and how it develops, in order to favor a systemic and integrated tourist offer (destination). Moreover, the study aims at understanding the communication process employed on the web-sites in order to promote the DMO.

More specifically, the objectives of the research project are to: (i) investigate the role of local actors in a comparative perspective (two communities, one in Argentina and the other in Italy), for the construction of place brand identity, in terms of tradition, culture and local customs (ii) explore the role that institutional actors play in the construction of a tourist destination; (iii) understand to what extent effective communication can contribute to territorial brand identity. In fact, it is relevant to specify which elements can enable the various actors involved in the dynamics of change in the territory, to identify the fundamental steps needed to create the cultural and structural conditions for the development of a tourist destination (Place brand identity). In this regard, experiences in two different countries, Italy and Argentina, have been identified.

Considering that most studies concern comparisons between Western countries (Lucarelli Berg, 2011), this contribution aims to propose the initial results of an innovative study, which is still in progress. The case studies analyzed concern two local/regional experiences in Argentina and Italy with an in-depth study of the national marketing promotion sites of Argentina and Italy.

From a methodological point of view, the analysis of the Place branding Identity and DMO experiences was carried out by resorting to primary and secondary sources and to the analysis of the literature, as well as by conducting interviews with the protagonists of the experiences. The interpretation is carried out in the light of a path of analysis and research conducted by both authors in recent years (Coscarello, 2020; Sivini, Coscarello, 2022; Ruffolo, Ziccarelli, 2022).

The research was conducted employing the Grounded Theory approach (Guidicini, 2007), with an inductive method in a first phase, followed by the deductive method. In particular, an analysis of the environment was conducted with a socio-anthropological approach. This approach is the most suitable for framing and understanding a social context considered in its relative unity and autonomy, in order to describe thoroughly the various interactions. Thanks to this method, it is possible to examine the environment and the community, grasping as an essential moment those anthropological features that underlie the community under examination. In this way, the focus is on the 'local culture', the stratification of historical facts, and the characteristics of experience that make the community under examination a profoundly different reality from its neighboring contexts.

Data were collected through: interviews, life stories, participatory analysis and direct information collection. The fieldwork in Argentina took place from April to October 2022, in Italy from August 2021 to March 2022. In particular, a total of 22 semi-structured interviews were conducted, specifically ten in Argentina and twelve in Italy, which led to the understanding of the main organizational characteristics, the territorial contexts and the role of the key actors who can help promote these experiences.

In Argentina, the following people were interviewed: (i) two officials from the Ministry of Tourism and Sport; (ii) two participants in national sustainable and community tourism networks; (iii) the Director of the Tourism Incubator of the University of Quilmes' Social Incubation Program; (iv) the Coordinator of the Tourism Incubator of the University of Quilmes' Social Incubation Program, who also carries out extension activities with the realities involved in the survey; (v) two tourism operators; (vi) two tourism agencies. As for Italy, the following were interviewed: (i) three national and international experts, in particular, an expert in consulting and training in digital marketing for the hospitality sector, a lecturer in tourism marketing and a full professor of Economics and Business Management; (ii) the President of a business network (DMO); (iii) five tour operators; (iv) an officer of the Calabria Region, Tourism sector; (v) two tourism agencies. Interviews were conducted in person and online and lasted an average of 40 minutes. A total of nine men and thirteen women were interviewed. As with socio-anthropological environmental research, the object of analysis is the community as a socio-spatial entity. In the semi-structured interview outline, the following points were addressed: (i) the main organizational characteristics; (ii) the territorial contexts; (iii) the role of the key actors (public and private) who can help promote these experiences.

In addition, 35 informal interviews were carried out (20 in Italy and 15 in Argentina) through the technique of life stories with inhabitants of the localities involved in the case studies, economic operators, and tourists present in the places. Through a cross-referenced approach on several people's stories referring to a certain historical moment, it was possible to reconstruct the essential aspects, characters and conditions of the community in the last 10 years. The subjects involved were 19 men and 16 women of different ages, ranging from 15 to 65. These informal interviews lasted between one and two hours.

The outline followed had as its main themes, (i) the reconstruction of the physical components (i.e. things that were there then and are no longer there today, the transformations that have taken place, roads, houses, etc.) and practical components (festivals, friendships, discussions,

traditions, social relations, significant events in the current places); (ii) the reconstruction of the changes in the area over the last 10 years (delimitation of the area); and (iii) an in-depth study of the underlying values of the local area community and the relationship with the institutions. The research material was useful for the reconstruction of the 'socio-spatial' environment with respect to a precise historical moment in the past.

As for the linguistic analysis, the analysis of the Italian (www.italia.it) and Argentinian (argentina.tur.ar) national websites, promoted by the two ministries, was aimed at analyzing the content and communication strategies used to promote the territory and destination. The two websites chosen are examples of DMOs and therefore fit perfectly into the literature of experiences of Place Branding Identity and DMOs. In particular, the linguistic content of the websites was analyzed employing the methodological approach of Corpus Linguistics and the AIDA model. «Corpus Linguistics is based on bodies of text as the domain of study and as the source of evidence for linguistic description and argumentation» (Kennedy, 2014, p. 7); specifically, Corpus Linguistics is a methodology that uses computer software to analyse the language both qualitatively and quantitatively (McEnery, Xiao Tono, 2006). In particular, this study uses Sketch Engine, which is an online text analysis tool that works with large samples of language, called text corpora, to identify what is typical and frequent in a language and understand how language works. The AIDA model is principally used in marketing communication to persuade people to buy the product (in the case of tourism, to choose the tourist destination); in order to reach this goal, it is important to arouse Attention, then engage the Interest of the receiver, then create in the receiver a Desire for the product or service, and then provoke Action in the receiver.

The exploratory character of the presented survey lies in the fact that no other studies were found comparing the experiences of Place Branding Identity and DMOs in Italy and Argentina.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1 *Place branding identity and DMO in Argentina and Italy*

This section will present the results of the field research, through the processing of the interviews conducted (life stories, semi-structured), and through a period of participant observation, thanks to which it was possible to reconstruct the socio-spatial context of the two territories. In Italy, the "Destinazione Sila" network of enterprises, which operates in Calabria, Southern Italy, has been identified,³. In Argentina, the case study concerns the Cooperative "Pipinas Viva"⁴. This experience was born in a small town in the province of Buenos Aires, at the northern end of Samborombón Bay, about 160 km from the capital.

In Italy, the interviewees pointed out the peculiar characteristics of the Sila Plateau territory «as large as the territory where we operate is bounded by the area of one of the largest natural parks bordering the Sila plateau, we recognize ourselves in these territories» (Int. IT_19). The territory is the main place where events are held that help create the bond between local actors and foster a tourist offer, indeed «for many years a series of events have been held that are important for tourists, we all collaborate in the realization, for example we participate in the 'Mushroom Festival' where thousands of tourists arrive, usually the hotels in the area are all full at that time [...] by now it is a historical event» (Int. IT_16). Other initiatives, launched only more recently, help strengthen the bond between commercial operators, as stated by an interviewee: «I was the founder of Fattorie Aperte in Sila, it is an event born a few years ago and today it aggregates twenty-eight companies, it is an itinerary in which tourists can choose where to go and what activities they prefer, here there are many opportunities that arise from our traditions, from our peasant culture» (Int. IT_11).

3 An in-depth examination of this network is presented in Coscarello (2020), and for more information www.destinazione-sila.it.

4 For more information www.pipinas.com

In Argentina, a story emerged from a conflicted relationship with institutions, as told by an interviewee who lived through that period «the territorial area of Pipinas was linked to a party, Magdalena, which actively participated in the struggle for southern autonomy. Through this mobilization, the municipality of Punta Indio was created with clear goals, namely to have autonomy based on tourism and food sovereignty» (Int. AR_15). Local people are clear about the importance of natural resources and the need for their preservation: «We are in the area of the 'Parque Costero del Sud,' it is a biosphere reserve, for us the protection of these places is important» (Int. AR_3).

In both case studies analyzed, it was crucial for those who were among the initiators of the initiatives to be able to create networks of relationships based on local identity. In Italy, for instance, the Destinazione Sila network focused on creating a network between local tourism businesses and all territorial stakeholders to define a common path to overcome localism and individualism, to create an area tourism brand, and to build new tourism products capable of enhancing the peculiarities of the area. As one of the promoters of the network explains, «we were only three operators when we started this project, but from the start it was essential to expand to others, [...] the plateau territory is large but we all have the same identity and values, we believe in a revitalization of this territory» (Int. IT_18). In the context of an inland area, where it is often difficult to cooperate, a participatory vision emerged from the very beginning, «from the very first meetings and gatherings among operators, it was clear that only through collaboration among us we can offer better services to the tourists coming to Sila» (Int. IT_15). In fact, in the implementation strategy of the Destinazione Sila project, a «path of construction of the identity system [...], a system that is conceived and designed through the involvement of all the actors of the network» (Int. IT_16) was planned, as the network's President states. With the creation of the business network, the project aims to both improve the travel experience of those who want to visit those specific territories, and build an identity system, as envisaged with the path «Culture of hospitality: new behavioral and relationship styles,» initiated within the network, for the benefit of the operators involved to help overcome internal difficulties, coordination, shared management, towards the establishment of a community-type destination. The importance of the local community participation was highlighted also from the Argentine experience, as one of the interviewees underlines, «the area has changed a lot over the past few years, but we always believed that we could organize a tourism offer together, starting with our traditions» (Int. AR_12). Opportunities to create jobs and enhance local characteristics were realized with the creation of the 'Pipinas Viva' cooperative. As one of the protagonists of this experience recounts, «during the political and social conflict for the recognition of autonomy, we thought of creating the cooperative in 2004, specifically to develop the community tourism project» (Int. AR_11). This path involved the entire local community, which was also going through a phase of economic and social crisis, which did not prevent us from starting again from local resources for the creation of a participatory process. From the very beginning, thought was given to making the most of the resources present to carry out the project, «we thought of working with our own strengths to recover the existing sports field and the old village hotel, in addition, we started selling local products such as homemade pasta, meats, cheeses and jams, sweets and craft beer, started selling at the fair, which allowed us to live through this activity» (Int. AR_7).

The relationship with institutions also played a key role for both experiences, although there were two different initial situations, collaborative for the Italian experience, and confrontational for the Argentine experience. In Italy, since the beginning of the experience, there has always been collaboration between operators and local stakeholders. The establishment of the Destinazione Sila network was followed by collaboration with other local actors, such as the local development agency, other networks that were among the promoters of the establishment of the region's first Tourist District. The director of the Local Action Group states that «generating collaboration among local actors is one of our main goals. Helping to create network between private operators and local institutions is one of our priorities» (Int. IT_2). This level of collabo-

ration has generated positive results, many operators satisfied with the path started, which has created a significant network in the area, as one of the protagonists of the promotion of the Tourism District explains «aggregating the tourism offer, making local actors communicate and work together was difficult but we succeeded, there are many administrative aspects that seem complex, but when you reach the goal there is a great satisfaction» (Int. IT_12).

In the Argentine case, following the initial confrontational moment with the establishment of the cooperative, relations with institutions changed. The creation through a community project of the Hotel over the years generated other projects and activities that are the attractions that have become a landmark in the country and even internationally. There are, in fact, popular festivals (Dance and Song Meeting; Pipinas Marathon; Anniversary of the City Creole Festival - Traditionalist Centre of Pipinas), the Open-Air Museum: (MAPI) which is a community-based project (Marozzi, 2006).

Through the initiation of shared planning, a strong collaboration with local institutions was opened. As one member of the cooperative says, «we cooperative members drafted and presented a project to the municipality of Punta Indio, which in the meantime was creating the Directorate of Tourism, and this project was approved, basically they granted us the opportunity to be able to work in the Hotel that we recovered» (Int. AR_14).

Over the years, collaborative relations have been established with other tourist experiences (Barker and La Niña Station), which have helped promote a dialogue with the state on public policy, to find solutions for the small towns that expanded with the railway or the large factory, and that have entered an economic and social crisis with the cessation of activities.

The ability to create collaborative relationships with institutions has continued, in fact as a number of local residents and activists affirm: «a provincial program called 'Pueblos Turísticos' was written in 2008. Today this project involves thirty-five municipalities, and above all it demonstrates that with collaboration it is possible to generate tourism development projects in an area» (Int. AR_10).

The differences between the two experiences analyzed are found in relation to collaborative capacity especially with national institutions, particularly with the case of DMOs. In Italy, despite the involvement of local administrations in the Sila District, stable and long-term planning with the national and regional level is difficult. As one regional official interviewed explained, "it happens that each region has to make a tourism plan every three years, which is sometimes the opposite of what is planned at the national level» (Int. IT_02).

The Italian legislative situation seems to be the cause of the main problems related to the promotion of tourism at an international level, as emerges in a State Tourism Report (2017), released by the Ministry of Tourism, indeed the governance of Italian tourism is instead characterized by excessive fragmentation, regulatory, organizational and managerial uncertainty that has resulted in conflicts between powers and considerable institutional instability, with negative repercussions in terms of the country's competitiveness and attractiveness for foreign tourists and investors.

The local context in Argentina seems to find support at a provincial level, as can be seen directly with local communities, but also through a national project that aims to involve the entire country. The Ministry of Tourism and Sport is launching a project that seems to be able to contribute to tourism promotion, also in light of the recent crisis linked to the Covid-19 pandemic.

In fact, the 'La Ruta Natural' project, born in the midst of the 2020 pandemic by the Argentine Ministry of Tourism and Sport and approved by Resolución No. 3/2021, seems to be heading in this direction. At the basis of this project is a careful analysis of the territory's needs, a clear awareness of the need to enhance the natural territory and, therefore, promote naturalistic destinations for which the country is known worldwide, but at the same time contribute to enhancing domestic as well as international tourism. The objective of working to identify possible solutions through tourism enhancement is clearly explained by a Ministry official interviewed: «During the pandemic we thought and worked a lot on this project, with the aim of finding

the tools to help overcome the severe economic crisis we are going through. There were many meetings, obviously online, to identify a national strategy and try to involve all the actors in the area» (Int. AR_7).

The project is a national development and promotion strategy that proposes an organization of the tourist offer throughout the territory. It is a federal program that takes nature tourism, one of the fastest growing segments globally and a tourism product in which Argentina has a unique advantage, as the vector axis of territorial development planning. La Ruta natural proposes to optimize the quality and safety of destinations, promote efficient governance, improve the environmental management of tourism, facilitate tourism, develop infrastructure, professionalize the sector through support and assistance to product-related suppliers, and other actions aimed at accompanying the productive development of regional economies to ensure the generation of increasingly competitive destinations and products, in order to promote and stimulate the reconversion of the sector's matrix and make a strategic contribution to the country's economic reactivation. On the basis of the analysis of the diagnosis of all the Natural Routes, cooperative strategies were designed with the other actors in the area, which are grouped into the following axes: (i) Infrastructure for tourist use; (ii) Private investment opportunities; (iii) Quality and training; (iv) National and international promotion; (v) Hierarchization of portals for access to the Natural Routes: host cities.

The proposed strategy sees the involvement of all actors in a territory. Underlying this is a territorial approach that, as explained by Clavé and Reverté (2005) concept of region, Natural Routes can be said to organize territories large enough to design comprehensive strategies and, at the same time, homogeneous enough to provide a general vision of the territorial planning pursued. The identified routes, being defined by natural environments, propose cooperative strategies that transcend the political-administrative boundaries of provinces and municipalities. These natural territories, in turn, expand the possibility of articulating national strategies with an integrated regional tourism proposal.

3.2 Content and communication strategies used to promote the territory.

Tourists and visitors change their behaviour by choosing the tourist destination advertised if persuasive strategies are successfully employed on tourism websites (Manca, 2016). The last step of analysis proposed in this article aims to describe and compare the promotional language used by Italian and Argentinian cultures in order to advertise and promote their respective countries as holiday destinations. In particular, the study will focus on the use of adjectives in a domain-specific discourse which is tourism discourse. As stated by various scholars (Dann, 1996; Gotti, 2006; Capelli, 2008; Durán-Muñoz, 2012; Manca, 2016), one of the most notable features of this discourse is the use of appealing and innovative words to attract potential tourists. Adjectives play a central role in promoting tourist destinations and services, and contributing to «persuading, luring, wooing and seducing» (Dann, 1996, p. 2) the reader and potential tourists.

In order to do that, the linguistic content of the websites www.italia.it and www.argentina.tur.ar was analysed and the investigation was conducted on the 300 most frequent adjectives present on the website⁵.

Following Manca's method of analysis (2016), the adjectives identified in the corpus can be classified into different semantic fields. Semantic analysis can contribute to disclosing the

5 The first 15 most frequent adjectives contained in the two corpora are in Italy: 1. ultimo; 2. italiano; 3. splendido; 4. grande; 5. antico; 6. relativo; 7. interessante; 8. speciale; 9. storico; 10. valido; 11. autentico; 12. migliore; 13. piccolo; 14. alto; 15. ricco.

In Argentina: 1. argentino; 2. bueno; 3. útil; 4. grande; 5. santo; 6. nacional; 7. político; 8. porteño; 9. natural; 10. clásico; 11. turístico; 12. cultural; 13. importante; 14. ideal; 15. gastronómico.

relationships between subjects or categories, creating a more conceptual study rather than a merely syntactic one. Moreover, semantic analysis allows a deeper understanding of the meanings of the words and the message in general (Jabreel, Huertas, Moreno, 2015). The semantic fields adapted by Manca are: General Location; Time; Uniqueness; Size; Beauty; Popularity; Activity; Culture and heritage; Environment; Colour.

Both websites contain a message that presents the main features of promotional language, such as the use of specific adjectives to emphasize the high quality of the destination (Saorín 2001), superlative language and words to refer to idyllic places (Saorín 2001; Calvi 2006; Pierini 2007) or cultural connotations (Gotti, 2006).

In particular, the most frequent semantic fields present in the Argentinian corpus are General Location with adjectives such as *nacional* (national), *local* (local), *provincial* (provincial), *litoral* (coastal), *austral* (southern) and are used to illustrate the first three steps of the AIDA Model, that is Attention, Interest and Desire. Another frequent field found on www.argentina.tur.ar is Beauty adjectives, such as *spectacular* (spectacular), *excepcional* (exceptional), *majestuoso* (majestic) and *fabuloso* (fabulous) which are used in the Desire step, as well as the Environment adjectives, that is to say *natural* (natural), *glaciar* (icy), *ecologico* (ecological). Colour adjectives are also widely used by the Argentinian text writers both metaphorically and literally in an attempt to provide the reader with some *local colour*, for instance *blanco* (white), *azul* (blue), *rosado* (pink).

The most frequent semantic category of the Italian corpus is Time, with examples such as *antico* (ancient), *storico* (historical), *romano* (roman), *medievale* (medieval) and *archeologico* (archaeologic), which represent the two steps of Attention and Interest of the AIDA model. Another category which has a high frequency of occurrences on the www.italia.it website are Popularity adjectives, such as *grande* (great), *importante* (important), *famoso* (famous), which are used «both to describe the status of the destination (Attention and Interest) and to persuade readers that the attractions and the destinations advertised are a must-see (Desire)» (Manca, 2016, p. 92). A frequent semantic field in the Italian corpus is Uniqueness, the results seem to show that travel writers are saying that these places worth visiting due to the fact that they are *autentico* (authentic), *incontaminato* (unspoilt), *insolito* and *unico* (unique). These adjectives convey their need for places 'off the beaten track', which can confer authenticity, recalling the Desire step.

Both corpora contain all those positive terms which seem to transmit both a sense of euphoria for the services the website is promoting and a sense of distinctiveness and authenticity. This finding is supported by the presence of adjectives such as *unique* and *local* as well as to the high frequency of the intensifiers *top* and *great*. The Argentinian website appears to make use of copious persuasive language, in an attempt to position the tourism destination in the mind of the tourist primarily through its resources, attractions and unique selling points. The Italian corpus appears to be more informative than persuasive, although there are strong examples of promotional language. Both websites employ diverse communication resources for successful branding. Moreover, the use of thematic language and cultural terms reinforces the diversification of each destination, promoting uniqueness, and enhancing its image. As a consequence, an effective branding strategy leads to the increase of tourism demand and, eventually, economic growth, which is crucial for the tourism industry. Although this small-scale study is not sufficient to generalize results, the findings seem to show that in both cases a strong and evident identity uniqueness is lacking in the promotion of the locations. Moreover, the results of the study show that DMOs, despite using a greater variety of adjectives, do not communicate emotional values, which show that the locations do not have a clearly established brand communication and differentiation strategy.

Conclusion

The aim of the study illustrated in this paper was to understand to what extent the actors in a territorial ecosystem that contribute to the formation of a place's brand identity. In particular, the objective was to understand how the social process arises and how it develops, in order to favor a systemic and integrated tourist offer (destination). The study also aimed at understanding the communication process employed on the websites in order to promote the Destination Management Organization (DMO). To the best of our knowledge, it seems that there are no other studies that compare the experiences of Place Branding Identity and DMOs in Italy and Argentina, therefore this study can make a significant contribution to the literature by filling in this gap.

Two surveys were conducted in Italy and Argentina in order to understand to what extent actors (public and private) can interact in a territorial context. As other research has already shown, local actors manage, through collaborative processes, to interact and develop a social process, capable of fostering a aggregated tourism offer.

In Italy, an institutional and participatory process was initiated with local governments, which led to the establishment of the first Tourist District in the region, based on a sharing of values and identity. In Argentina, an entire community reappropriated tourism resources and was able to enhance the valorization of an entire territory. The establishment of a cooperative made it possible to renovate a Hotel and create a community capable of welcoming tourists who share the destination with residents. Numerous other attractions have been realized over the years, and the experience has been able to involve other areas and even the provincial administration, which has initiated a community program with other neighboring municipalities.

In both cases, the role of the territory emerges as a medium of social interaction, as the outcome of a process between social and spatial variables. In particular, the destination is the result of a cooperative relationship, that is, the space is the object and at the same time the active subject of a process of co-production between public and private actors who only through a collective vision can succeed in building a destination capable of offering a systemic and integrated tourism offer. Although the two countries have similar legislation that gives a decision-making role on tourism to the regions/provinces, two different results are found in the research from the perspective of the National Board. From the analysis of the interviews conducted and the study of the national websites that have the function of promo-marketing, it seems that in Argentina, through the implementation of a study and analysis activity, a project capable of promoting both international and domestic tourism has been initiated throughout the territory through the conception of seventeen tourist destinations that explore the entire country. Although the project sponsored by the Argentinian Ministry is still ongoing, this experience of only two years seems to demonstrate the importance of planning tools, organizational leadership through the participation of government agencies, the private and business sector, and the local community, marketing promotion and branding skills.

National destination planning and management still seems difficult in Italy. However, the role that these national promotion-marketing bodies have is important in supporting local destinations and the co-construction of Place Branding Identity.

Even through the interpretation on the symbolic and linguistic aspects, to the forms by which the territory has been represented and invested with meaning construction, the importance of collaboration between national entities and local realities emerges. The aspects of promo-marketing are for the components of Place Brand Identity and in particular for personality (symbolic and experiential attributes).

The research shows that the challenge for destinations seems to be the creation of a system network that, involving the public and private sectors, can take care of destination development. This may be the only way to implement a collaborative relationship and partnership with local, regional and national institutions for destination enhancement.

Nevertheless, there are some limitations to the paper, for instance, the language analysis concerns only the national case studies, and not the local ones. Moreover, a more in-depth investigation needs to be carried out. Therefore, further research could include the identification and comparison of other Italian and Argentinian experiences. The role of DMOs in the co-construction of Place branding seems relevant, and focus groups could be conducted with the presence of public and private actors to understand how opportunities for collaboration can be further strengthened.

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