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## Place branding in strategic spatial planning

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## Chapter 2: Conceptualising place branding in strategic spatial planning

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### Chapter overview

Places are facing major challenges at the environmental, financial and economic levels. These crucial issues demand structural changes and emphasise the need for robust strategic thinking and active instruments that shape and frame what a place is and what it aims to become. As traditional planning instruments become markedly less effective, spatial planners are required to develop new instruments that cope more effectively with the challenges they face in an unbalanced, dynamic and complex environment, while at the same time addressing the social, spatial and economic needs of a place. Place branding has been used to foster economic restructuring, social inclusion and cohesion, political engagement and participation, place identification, and the general well-being of citizens. This chapter aims to contribute to the academic debate on regional branding, in line with the main research objective of this thesis, by discussing why and how place branding can be used as an instrument in strategic spatial planning to support a structural change in places (in line with the main research question of this thesis). This chapter emphasises that place branding as a strategic spatial planning instrument could contribute to improvement of socio-spatial and spatial-economic conditions of places and reshape responses to contemporary challenges faced by places.

### 2.1 Introduction

The application of branding techniques and principles to cities, countries and (to a lesser extent) to regions has proven to be an “increasingly appealing topic for academic research” (Ashworth *et al.*, 2015, p. 1), as well as a popular practice. In addition, it has become a central part of the contemporary place management agenda (Boisen *et al.*, 2011; Kavatzis *et al.*, 2015). However, and despite the recent theoretical developments (among others, see Berg and Björner, 2014; Eshuis *et al.*, 2014; Sevin, 2014; Zenker and Rütter, 2014; Zenker, 2014; Giovanardi, 2015; Kavatzis, *et al.*, 2015; Kavatzis and Kalandides, 2015; Zavattaro, and Adams, 2015; Andersson, 2015; Hospers, 2015; Molainen, 2015 and Zenker and Jacobsen, 2015) and methodological contributions (Chan and Marafa, 2013; Gertner, 2011a, 2011b; Lucarelli and Berg, 2011), place branding still shows signs of being a fledgling field of research (Kavatzis, 2012) and “little theoretical refinement seems to have occurred” (Ashworth *et al.*, 2015, p. 2). Furthermore, the gap between academic commentators and those in public- or private-sector place management actually engaging in branding appears to be as wide and unbridgeable as ever (Ashworth, 2011a, 2011b).

Drawing on the work of Vicari Haddock (2010), Giovanardi (2015, p. 2) argues that place-branding research “cannot yet be considered to be a fully authoritative domain of knowledge as long as a number of empirical, methodological and theoretical challenges remain to be tackled”. Likewise, Kavatzis and Hatch (2013) argue that recent developments in place-branding inquiry remain substantially inconsistent explanations and perspectives, rather than providing a solid contribution to theory. Using the same line of reasoning, Lucarelli and Berg (2011) and Hanna and Rowley (2011) underline the dire need for theoretical clarifications of the research domain in the field of place branding. Other commentators (see, for example, Gertner, 2011b) have pointed out that the absence

of a universally accepted definition of place branding is the primary barrier to performing a meta-analysis of place-branding variables. In addition, Sevin touches upon the difficulties of categorizing the literature on place branding because “the theoretical background of place branding is based on several disciplines” (2014, p. 48) which makes that categorization a rather complex process.

These conceptual and theoretical misalignments are happening at a time when governments, policymakers, commercial and non-profit-oriented entities are all becoming confident that a “coherent, strong and attractive place brand will help promote economic development” (Boisen *et al.*, 2011, p. 136), and is likely to support spatial transformations (Ashworth, 2011a). However, as Boisen *et al.* (2011) argue, much place-branding effort has been concerned with translating traditional methods from marketing and corporate branding to towns, cities, regions and countries. As a counterpoint to this, Andersson (2014) concludes that “geographers use many different theoretical approaches to place branding, addressing wider societal, relational and territorial perspectives than provided by traditional branding literature” (p. 151). In line with Andersson’s work (2014, 2015), a few commentators have been more critical of the current discourse on place branding (see, for example, Kalandides, 2011a, 2011b; Warnaby and Medway, 2013), while some others wonder whether places should actually be branded (Ashworth, 2011a). Moreover, there is clearly a lack of consensus regarding the type of marketing and branding that applies to places (Skinner, 2008). This touches on a previous investigation by Hanna and Rowley (2008), which revealed that the focus of discussion for place branding has shifted from an almost exclusive concern with tourism to a wider business and marketing scope, and that the primary terms used in place branding are being derived from mainstream branding. Tourism was a dominant focus of place branding but it was never the only focus.

Place branding and management scholars, such as Kavaratzis and Ashworth (2010), state convincingly that the lack of understanding of the distinctiveness of places displayed by many observers and practitioners who work in the field of place branding has led to misunderstandings in terms of the social-spatial and spatial-economic implications of place branding. In addition, Kavaratzis and Kalandides (2015) claim that there is a lack of geographical/spatial understanding of the elements that constitute the place brand. Andersson (2015), following various publications by Pike (2009, 2011a, 2011b, 2013) and Ashworth *et al.* (2015), investigated the need for more spatially aware readings in place branding. Furthermore, and as argued above, the theoretical advancement of place branding has witnessed some misguidance and “is ripe for a rethinking in terms of its roots, theoretical underpinnings, practical application and expected outcomes” (Ashworth *et al.*, 2015, p. 2).

As I have argued in chapter 1, apart from the seminal work of Ashworth and Voogd (1988, 1990) — which pointed out a market-led approach to spatial (urban) planning as a promising path to explore, by highlighting the cases of two Dutch cities (Groningen and Hoogeveen) — the discussion on place marketing (and, more recently, on place branding) lacks intellectual grounding and positioning within the wider context of strategic spatial planning and spatial plan-making (chapters 3 and 5 also provide some evidence for this absence).

This chapter draws on place-branding theory in order to explain place branding as a strategic spatial planning instrument and to highlight the importance of robust strategic thinking in place-branding processes. The chapter makes such arguments with reference to the place-branding

literature (for instance, Anholt, 2007; Govers and Go, 2009; Moilanen and Rainisto, 2009; Hankinson, 2010; Kavaratzis and Ashworth 2010; Hanna and Rowley, 2011; Lucarelli and Berg, 2011; Van Assche and Lo, 2011) and strategic spatial planning literature (for instance, Friedmann, 1987, 2004; Healey, 1997a, 1997b; Hillier, 2002; Albrechts, 2004, 2006, 2010a, 2013, 2015a; Allmendinger, 2009). Furthermore, the literature on spatial design, such as Van Assche *et al.* (2012), in line with Dawson and Higgins (2009) and Rantisi and Leslie (2006), also supports this line of reasoning.

This chapter highlights the fact that place branding is not about “propaganda” or communicating to the world the judgement that a certain place is good, but more about planning for a better place and letting the world know that authorities and organizations are trying to improve it structurally and strategically. The first episodes of place marketing and (later on) place branding belonged to the stage of place promotion or place boosterism, as described in the many historical cases in Gold and Ward (1994). This chapter contributes to the theory and practice of place branding in strategic spatial planning by discussing why and how these two domains can be applied together in support of structural change, development and the reshaping of responses to contemporary economic and social challenges faced by places.

## **2.2 Theoretical framework in the light of two strands of reasoning**

The intellectual challenge of “branding” is that people think they know what it means because we confront brands daily in the shopping mall, in the supermarket and in a variety of media channels. The word appears frequently in both common and academic discourses (Ashworth, 2012). According to Ashworth and Voogd (1994, p. 39), “there is nothing new about places being promoted by those likely to profit from their development”. Moreover, embracing marketing techniques alongside other techniques within place-management planning was largely a reaction to a crisis of confidence within the planning field itself, particularly in the 1980s in the US and the UK (Kavaratzis and Ashworth, 2010).

The early stage of place-branding research argued that it should be considered a strategic process and not only a promotional activity (Ashworth and Voogd, 1990, 1994; Kotler *et al.*, 1993, 1999; Nykiel and Jascolt, 2008; Van den Berg and Braun, 1999; Warnaby *et al.*, 2005). For instance, Kavaratzis (2010) and Govers (2013) underline that place branding is far from being a simple place-promotional exercise. Place branding is “centred on the creation of a favourable image or the change of a negative or indifferent image of the place” (Ashworth and Kavaratzis, 2010, p. 237).

Following Braun’s (2008) reasoning, the place-branding literature over recent years has focused more on long-term visions and strategic approaches, as opposed to the implementation of hit-and-run actions or tactical exercises. Moreover, Hankinson (2010) explains place branding as a long-term strategic activity. Vicari Haddock (2010) suggests that place branding often combines long-term visions, of fostering quality of life and place development, with short-term economic goals. Often, short-term interventions are perceived as dangerous place propaganda, where taxpayers’ money is repeatedly wasted. Therefore, a smart combination of long-term strategies with short-term actions is likely to impact the future of places more effectively. Strategies are expected to minimize complexity and to promote consistent behaviour (Mintzberg *et al.*, 1998; Wiechmann, 2007). As Kavaratzis and

Ashworth (2010) emphasize, both theory and practice embrace place branding as a means to meet operational and strategic goals of places.

In looking back at the evolution of place branding as a discipline, it is important to underline the conscious application of marketing approaches by public-planning authorities as a philosophy of place management (Ashworth and Voogd, 1990; Kavaratzis, 2004). The authors Van Assche and Lo (2011) commented that the wider concept of spatial planning and its relation to place identity locates place branding within contemporary discussion by, for example, Konečnik and Go (2008), Anholt (2007, 2010), Ashworth and Kavaratzis (2010) and Hildreth (2010). Lamour argues that spatial-planning policy at the “metropolitan level” is one of the tools selected to make urban regions more attractive and that “territorial marketing has become a key strategy for spatial management” (2014, p. 19).

To decipher the “place” of place branding within spatial planning, it is necessary to reflect on the evolution of concepts such as city marketing, and its relationship with urban planning (Barke, 1999; Hankinson, 2010; Kavaratzis and Ashworth, 2010). In the 1990s, the concept of city marketing was explored under the philosophy of urban management (Ashworth and Voogd, 1990). Nine years later, Kotler *et al.* (1999) mentioned the concept of place marketing as a place-planning procedure concerning the satisfaction of the needs of target markets. The authors Deffner and Metaxas do not make a direct reference to place branding but refer to place and city marketing instead. Their approach underlines the links between place and city marketing and urban planning, and they highlight the “connection between place marketing and spatial development as an innovative approach to planning” (2006, p. 6). Later, Metaxas (2009) also argues for understanding place marketing as a strategic planning process. Following recent developments and empirical studies, Metaxas ([2010]2012) argues for place marketing as a basic factor in strategic planning policies for urban economic development.

Likewise, Deffner and Liouris (2005) explore the relationship between city marketing procedures, city planning, participatory planning and urban regeneration. In the same line of reasoning, Deffner and Metaxas (2010) research the interconnections between marketing and planning by trying to answer the question: Does marketing planning constitute strategic planning? They take as their case study the elaboration of the marketing plan of Nea Ionia, Greece (developed under the European Union project “Cultural Heritage, Local Identity and Place Marketing for Sustainable Development”) by reviewing and discussing the main relevant arguments of planning, highlighting the significance of place (city) marketing procedures to the high degree of competitiveness achieved by the city (Metaxas, 2010/2012). According to Pike (2009, p. 622) “brands and branding are geographical because they are inescapably intertwined in spatial associations and connotations”. However, it is important to note that not all brands are geographical and not all of them have spatial aspects. Furthermore, space and place as territories can be part of geographical entanglements of brands and branding (Pike, 2009).

The authors Van Assche and Lo (2011) note that “omitting a branding perspective in planning efforts is bound to increase their economic risks” (p. 118). However, their perspective might be criticized on the grounds that it does not mention the spatial scale of the potential economic risks that may arise from the absence of a place-branding approach in planning. The authors also omit

from their research questions such as: By whom are the rules made, or who “dictates” them? Are the interventions guided by the planners through strategic spatial plans or by the “experts” in charge of implementing the place-branding process? Both in theory and in practice, this chapter understands place branding as an instrument for spatial strategists and spatial planners, while also noting the alternative possibility that strategic spatial planning might be used in place-branding initiatives. For instance, the researchers Deffner and Metaxas (2006), underline that spatial planning alone is not strong enough to address spatial challenges; to attract businesses, investors, tourists or new residents or to create a sense of place and civic pride in its existing residents. At the same time, place branding cannot be a substitute for spatial planning. Place branding can only complement spatial planning by working simultaneously as an instrument or tool.

Similar to the ideas posed by Deffner and Metaxas (2006), this chapter argues for the use of place branding as part of strategic spatial planning. Furthermore, this chapter underlines the “place” of place branding in spatial planning within the idea of collaborative planning (see Healey, 1997a, 2003), consensus planning (see Woltjer, 2004) and communicative planning that brings together the shaping of wills, creation of identity and consensus building (Kavaratzis and Ashworth, 2008). In addition to these factors, the chapter includes the idea of participatory spatial planning (Van Assche and Lo, 2011). As Hillier (2002), Throgmorton (1996) and Innes and Booher (1999) suggest, spatial planning is the key to better coordination and integration of spatial policies. When a place’s key actors/stakeholders engage in an inclusive and participatory process that involves the community’s values, needs and assets, they can respond to social and economic ailments within a spatial context.

Despite the existence of some academic research on the links between place branding and spatial planning (albeit not addressing strategic spatial planning, specifically), Van Assche and Lo stress that “much terrain is yet to be uncovered by scientists in the investigation of the existing and potential linkages between spatial planning and place branding” (2011, p. 124). In addition, Pike (2009) argues that the spatial entanglements of brands and branding have received little attention and limited coverage in geography, and are unevenly recognized in other forms of social science research.

The following section will attempt to develop a theoretical framework that establishes a linkage between place branding and strategic spatial planning. To do so, I will adopt two strands:

- (1) **Primary strand of reasoning** — place branding as a strategic spatial planning instrument (that is, strategic spatial planning as a value creator and ruler of the place-branding exercise), but also a possible alternative strand (2):
- (2) **Alternative strand of reasoning** — strategic spatial planning could be used as an instrument within place branding (that is, place branding “dictates” the rules for strategic spatial planning).

The second strand must be interpreted as a counterpoint to the primary strand.

### 2.3. What is place branding?

Places work hard to attract investors, consumers, tourists and entrepreneurs, as well as residents and other talented and creative people (see Kotler *et al.*, 1999; Florida, 2002; Anholt, 2007). Countries, cities and regions also aim to attract sporting and cultural events (see Kolb, 2006; Andranovich, 2001), and strive for the attention and recognition of international media and governments (Anholt, 2007). In a nutshell, places aim to contribute to development of their own communities and to gain and/or maintain a competitive advantage in the globalized world. Competition among places occurs since alternative territories can offer similar facilities and possibilities for investing, living and visiting (Kotler *et al.*, 1999; Kavatzis and Ashworth, 2010). Places also compete to achieve structural changes to become better places to live, to work or to visit (Rainisto, 2003; Ashworth and Kavatzis, 2010; Hankinson, 2010), as well as implementing measures for renewing their images (Ntounis *et al.*, 2014). Hence, in order to enhance the distinctive features, assets, place-specific qualities and facilities, places have long made use of branding techniques (Anholt, 2002; Kavatzis, 2005; Hankinson, 2010; Kavatzis and Ashworth, 2010).

Place branding, has successfully been used as a part of policies aimed at nurturing economic restructuring, community participation, political engagement, increases in tourism revenues (Ashworth, 2011a) and support strategic change in places, for example, through reimagining, repositioning, restructuring and rescaling processes (Ashworth, 2005). Place branding aims to make a country, a region, a city or a tourism destination stand out in the complex and changing marketplace, enhance the place's reputation and image to the outside and inside worlds alike and contribute to social and economic development.

Place branding is a field of study for spatial planners, geographers, ethnographers and marketers, among others. They may want to assert the existence and individuality of the place to internal and external publics, in order to differentiate it from competitors that are more generic and thus add value (Ashworth, 2005). Place branding is also identified as a marketing-led strategy of economic development (Greenberg, 2008; Pasquinelli, 2010) that suits the operational and strategic goals of places (Kavatzis and Ashworth, 2010). Building on the ideas of Ashworth and Kavatzis (2010) and Ashworth (2011a), place branding is a highly flexible instrument for managing places, not least as a form of communication.

Place branding offers collaborative links between previously fairly disparate activities and departments within place authorities operating on different spatial scales, from the national to the city level, as well as bridging the different forms of ethos, working practices and approaches of public-service providers and business entities. By redefining the identification of people with places, communities and social groups, place branding represents a relationship between governments and those they govern, as well as a relationship between people and places. Place branding can be applied, regardless of scale or circumstances, as part of the solution to a wide range of often unyielding and entrenched issues, such as regional economic disparity, multiple economic and social deprivations and exclusion, urban poverty, physical dereliction and even the governance or globalization of culture (Ashworth, 2011a). Place branding is also an adaptable response over time, as spatial circumstances change and places become more complex.

This chapter formulates a place-branding definition in the vein of Ashworth's (2011a) ideas, which underline that only a few of the other instruments that are usually deployed in managing places have such a wide range of possible applications, such as flexibility in spatial contexts or responsiveness to change, as has place branding. However, place branding was only recently added to the toolbox of strategic planners and place managers (Ashworth, 2011a).

Following the research of Ashworth and Voogd (1990), Kotler *et al.* (1993), Healey (1997a, 1997b), Kunzmann (2000), Albrechts (2004, 2010a, 2013), Allmendinger and Haughton (2010), Ashworth and Kavaratzis (2010), Hankinson (2010) and Van Assche and Lo (2011), place branding as a strategic spatial planning instrument could support a consistently new direction for places to prepare better responses to macroeconomic unevenness, general economic and social imbalances and unemployment.

#### **2.4. What is strategic spatial planning?**

It is only recently that spatial planning was rediscovered as a strategic process (Wiechmann, 2007). The debate on spatial planning theory has underlined the challenges and complexity of spatial transformations by applying a paradigm based on the principles of classic rationality, which originates in positivism. The practice of strategic spatial planning, which gained popularity at the beginning of the 1990s, seemed to offer a way out of the shallows in which traditional spatial planning has sunk (Balducci *et al.*, 2011). In addition, the “turn to strategy” in spatial planning discourse is a response to the shortcomings of an incremental planning style by projects (Healey, 2007, p. 183). In addition, formulating and implementing “strategy”, a fuzzy term for Wiechmann (2007), is nowadays one of the most challenging tasks of spatial (urban and regional) governance. In order to embrace the complexity of spatial developments, strategic spatial planning was positioned at the critical junction between the need for a comprehensive vision of the future and the impossibility of predicting possible distorting factors.

This chapter does not aim to describe the historical roots of strategy nor outline the history of strategic spatial planning thought. However, it is important to note that the strategic planning that originated in the 1950s was tied to the need for rapidly changing and growing corporations to manage their futures when the future itself seemed to be increasingly uncertain (Kaufman and Jacobs, 1987). Albrechts (2004) also debates the evolution of strategic planning by referring to the developments in the United States and Europe. In the early 1970s, government leaders in the United States became increasingly interested in strategic planning as a result of twisting changes related to “energy crises, demographic shifts, changing values, volatile economy” (Albrechts, 2004, p. 746).

Strategic spatial planning in Europe dated back to the 1920s and 1930s, when it was used by public and private actors alike (Mastop, 1998). The first episodes of strategic spatial planning literature attempts to state that strategic spatial planning is not a single concept, procedure or tool but a set of concepts, procedures and tools that must be tailored carefully to different situations (Quinn, 1980; Healey, 1997a, 1997b; Kunzmann, 2000; Albrechts, 2004, 2010a, 2013). Strategic spatial planning is selective and oriented to issues that really matter. Strategic spatial planning is, thus, perceived as a way to overcome the limitations of traditional spatial planning instruments and envision, in an innovative and creative way, better futures for places. Spatial strategy making implies



the combination of long-term decisions with short term actions. In addition, much of the process lies in making the tough decisions about what is most important for the goal of producing fair, equitable structural responses to problems, challenges, aspirations and diversity (Albrechts, 2004).

Strategic spatial planning could support a progressive change at various economic and social levels. Strategic initiatives are focused on the understanding of the holistic situation, the definition of realistic goals, the orientation of available strengths and the persistence of action until significant results have been achieved (Albrechts, 2004). Strategic spatial planning provides a critical interpretation of the structural challenges and problems and allows place actors/stakeholders to think creatively about possible responses. As Albrechts clarifies, strategic spatial planning is “a transformative and integrative public sector, co-productive, socio-spatial process through which visions or frames of reference, the justification for coherent actions and the means for implementation are produced. These shape, frame and reframe what a place is and what it might become” (Albrechts, 2013, p. 52). Strategic spatial planning, as opposed to strategic corporate planning, is an intrinsically political activity (Friedmann, 2004) but has been used by public and private actors alike. Pasqui (2011) states that strategic spatial planning processes are mostly political in nature, as they work on a strictly political matter, which is the definition, the renewal and the change of the spatial agenda. Hence, strategic spatial planning can be a response to challenges at economic and social level, and work as an active force for enabling change in places. In addition, it can be a force for creating, steering and envisioning a range of better futures for a place on the basis of a democratic planning process that contemplates diversity, equity and structural change (Ogilvy, 2002; Albrechts, 2013). According to Albrechts (2013), strategic spatial planning is able to support a strategic change, changing the spatial agenda and thus socially and economically improving places, strategically making them more robust and resilient, by using different instruments, for instance, place branding.

## **2.5. The conceptual intertwining between place branding and strategic spatial planning**

Recent work of Van Assche and Lo (2011) states that place branding includes a wide range of issues and approximates research in governance and participatory planning. Governance relates here to a variety of guidance mechanisms, not necessarily restricted to public authorities, whereby social, spatial processes are consciously directed in situations of interdependence (Jessop, 1997). Although the literature on place competitiveness and entrepreneurial place (city) branding has devoted some attention to governance (Harvey, 1989; Jessop, 1997; Eshuis and Edward, 2013; Mateo and Seisdedos, 2010), the link between place branding and strategic spatial planning remains loose both theoretically and in practical terms for researchers.

With regard to the links between place branding and spatial planning, Van Assche and Lo (2011, p. 124) assert that “the synergies are there, and deserve further exploration” and highlight that a structural linkage between “place branding and spatial planning seems necessary and even urgent” if researchers in place branding want to avoid the discipline as “exclusionary neoliberal endeavour” (Van Assche and Lo, 2011, p. 124). However, spatial planning should be understood as a democratic process, operating in the context of multi-stakeholder governance, scientific expertise and plan making (Allmendinger, 2009; Van Assche *et al.*, 2012). In addition, it can be procedural or

substantive, design-oriented or rule-driven, and dominated by a constellation of political, economic and legal spatial actors (Van Assche *et al.*, 2012). Spatial planning and strategic spatial planning are often perceived as tautological concepts; however, the evolution of strategic spatial planning clarifies that not all planning is strategic. What is more, strategic spatial planning is as much about process as it is about institutional design (Albrechts, 2004). The two terms “strategic” and “planning” also bring to mind an attempt to rethink ways of dealing with spatial issues and the planning relationship between the present and the future (Healey, 2007) in a more innovative and transformative way (Albrechts, 2013). In this line of thinking, Balducci and Fedeli (2011) critically reflect on the opportunities for innovation generated by a strategic approach to spatial planning as opposed to rigid and hierarchical forms of spatial planning.

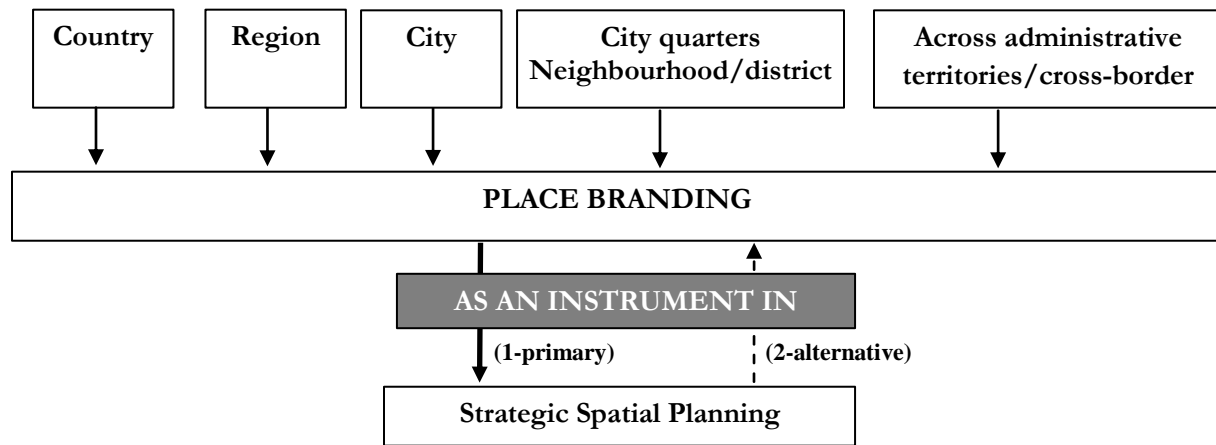
Despite theoretical developments in place branding (see Lucarelli and Berg, 2011; Kavaratzis, 2012; Zenker and Rütter, 2014), the practice itself demonstrates significant misconceptions as I aim to demonstrate further in this thesis. This chapter envisages place branding as a strategic spatial planning instrument (1). That perspective will guide the following discussion, being aware of the two possible strands of debate:

- (1) **Primary strand of reasoning:** place branding as a strategic spatial planning instrument;
- (2) **Alternative strand of reasoning:** strategic spatial planning as an instrument in a place branding process (see Figure 2.1.).

Thus, what sustains the argument of taking place branding in strategic spatial planning (1 or primary strand of reasoning postulated in this thesis)?

Albrechts (2013) interprets strategic spatial planning as able to support a strategic change and thus socially and economically improve places by using different instruments. Some European countries use detailed planning instruments, such as regulatory zoning instruments, building control instruments and implementation instruments. However, place branding as a strategic spatial planning instrument is not explored in the strategic spatial planning literature or place branding literature. Therefore, this chapter aims to establish the links based on possible connections, even metaphorical or more theoretical, and also to contribute to the practice of place branding.

I acknowledge that there are also interactions between the multiple spatial scales in terms of strategic planning and place branding. There are, for example, interactions between a regional brand and a city brand. The case of Hamburg regional branding process is provided in chapter 5. In some cases this interactions may shadow each other making it difficult to keep distinction. Other cases multi scale cooperation, including across borders (see chapter 7 and Oliveira, 2015c, 2015e) can be established.



**Figure 2.1.** Visual conceptualization of the two strands of reasoning (1) and (2) considered in this Ph.D. thesis. *Source:* own elaboration.

Strategic spatial planning focuses on key issue areas (Quinn, 1980) and takes a critical view of the community’s environment to determine its strengths and weaknesses in the context of opportunities and threats (Kaufman and Jacobs, 1987). Furthermore, strategic spatial planning also studies the external trends, forces (Poister and Streib, 1999) and resources available (Quinn, 1980), and identifies and engages the main place stakeholders (Bryson and Roering, 1988; Granados-Cabezas, 1995) and communities (Balducci *et al.*, 2011). There is a need for active participation of place actors, either in strategic spatial planning initiatives as well as in place branding. In place branding, stakeholders legitimise place brands and deeply influence their meaning (see about stakeholders’ involvement in place branding Kavaratzis, 2012). Hence, this engagement serves as a strategic link between place branding and strategic spatial planning (see Figure 2.2.).

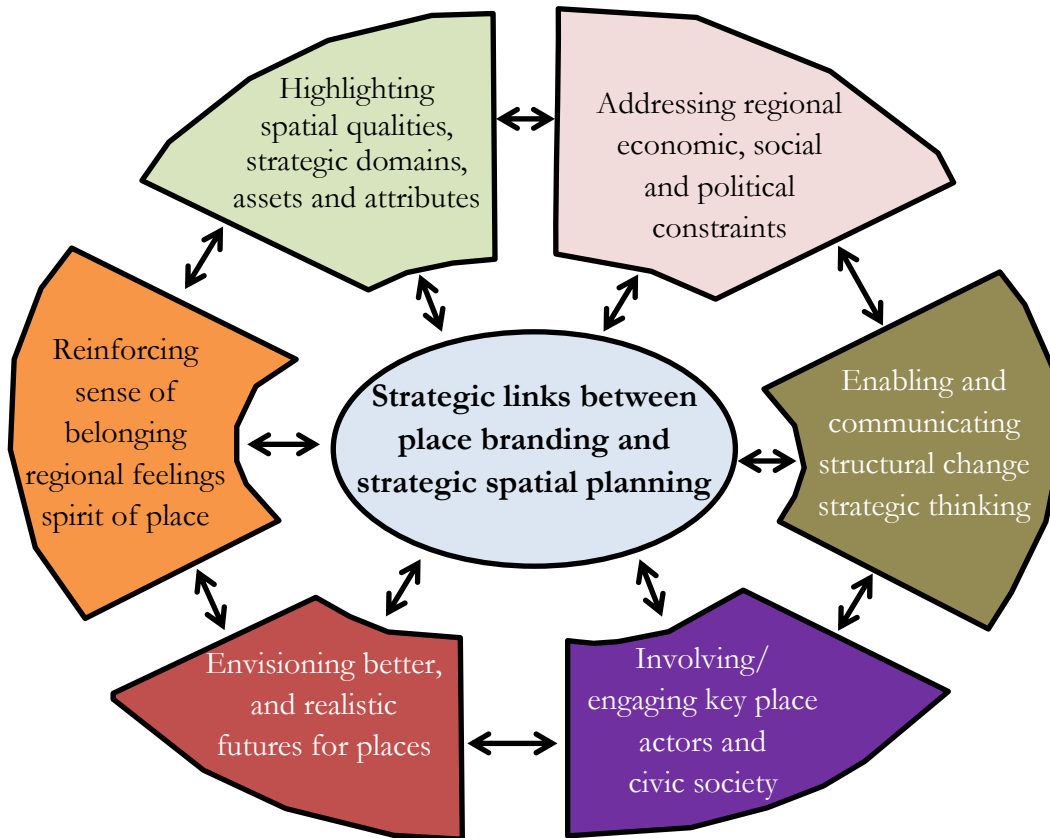
Strategic spatial planning allows for multilevel governance and for a diverse involvement of public, economic and civil entities, and it develops the most realistic, long-term vision and strategies for a place (Healey, 1997a, b; Kunzmann, 2000; Albrechts, 2004). As Hankinson (2007) argues, an efficient place branding process should be developed upon a strong vision, consistent communications across a wide range of stakeholders, and strong and compatible networks. The process of place branding is usually carried out by a “partnership between the public and private sector stakeholders who are involved in the place product delivery” (Hankinson, 2010, p. 19). The authors Hankinson (2007, 2010) and Rainisto (2003) underpin the need for a shared vision among place actors, public and private entities as well as communities, for the future of places that will guide all efforts and for a clear strategy to realise that vision. This kind of vision and strategic analysis also link place branding and strategic spatial planning (see also Figure 2.2.).

Strategic spatial planning takes into account the uncertainties of a place and competing values within that place (Quinn, 1980). It draws plan-making structures and develops content (Mintzberg *et al.*, 1998) images and decision frameworks (Faludi and Van der Valk, 1994). Place branding “can be

the means both for achieving competitive advantage in order to increase inward investment and tourism, but also the means for achieving community development, reinforcing local identity and identification of the citizens” with their place (Kavaratzis and Ashworth, 2010, p. 7). In the line of the arguments of Van Assche and Djanibekov (2012), place branding and spatial planning personify forms of policy integration, and both work as a process to address economic, social and structural challenges. In addition, they can improve spatial qualities, highlight assets and protect the place landscape. From the ideas of Allmendinger and Haughton (2010), following the developments of spatial planning in the United Kingdom, there emerges another possible connection between place branding and strategic spatial planning, in particular when they argue the need for a more flexible and strategic system of planning with objectives that require quicker decisions on proposals, promote economic competitiveness, tackle environmental issues and prioritise previously used land. Place branding shares the common goals of economic competitiveness with the desire to improve quality of life.

The literature intensively touches upon place branding as a process where the rationale must be clear in terms of the nature of the brand that the place wants to become, as well as with whom and why to use branding techniques. It is also important to identify how a place brand can create the mental, psychological and emotional ties to the place. In addition, one must pinpoint the functional, physical attributes that the place needs to create, improve, emphasise or even avoid in a place branding strategy (Ashworth and Kavaratzis, 2010). The line of reasoning here is based on the work of Mintzberg (1994), Ashworth and Kavaratzis (2010), Balducci *et al.* (2011) and Pasqui (2011) to strategically conceptualise place branding as an instrument in strategic spatial planning and develop place branding as process within broader strategic thinking. Place branding through (strategic) spatial planning may lead to a more harmonised place brand steeped in community stories. Furthermore, adding a spatial dimension for place branding initiatives may counterpoise the criticisms that malign the practice as a mode of neo-liberal governance where local politics is pandering to corporate interests and profit making; as opposed to the application of tailored and context sensitive approaches more close to local needs.

A spatial dimension in place branding attempts to take a more realistic view over spatial realities, where identities, assets, qualities and landscape are paramount for spatial development. Although, it is also necessary to empower communities, engage with place actors and improve mechanisms of cooperation as well as embracing a controlled decentralisation of the decision-making process in place branding. Furthermore, flexibility and adaptability to circumstances facilitated through more dynamic styles of spatial planning and place governance could be an advantage when designing place branding strategies.



**Figure 2.2.** Strategic links between place branding and strategic spatial planning. Note: this figure is in line with Figure 1.6. (chapter 1). Figures 1.6. and this one 1.2. are the backbone of the theoretical framework of this study (see Figure 5.1., chapter 5). *Source:* own elaboration.

## 2.6. Discussing the two strands of reasoning: strategically thinking place branding

Spatial planners are concerned with improving the quality of places. Thus, linking the development of place territories to “major infrastructure investments, thereby reducing spatial injustices; promoting economic opportunities; limiting threats to environmental balances; and working out which aspects of the past to conserve” (Healey, 2009, p. 439). It is important to acknowledge here that from the above list of intentions, spatial planning may select only some of those intentions (strategic spatial planning is selective, this according to Albrechts) while other intentions may be ignored. For that there exist some planning instruments, such as regulatory plans, spatial development strategies and comprehensive plans. However, the complexity of places and the challenges they are facing demand new strategies and creative planning instruments. As place branding has become an increasingly common strategy to seek an advantage in the contemporary competitive environment, an integral part of economic development initiatives (Kavaratzis, 2010) and is also linked to endogenous economic development (Pasquinelli, 2010), it could be one of the new instruments spatial planners are calling for.

Nevertheless, only if place branding is understood as a wider strategic choice for places – which includes a definition of a strategy, involvement and a forward push to motivate all place stakeholders into the branding process and vision – then place branding could be a useful tool for the economic and social development of places (see Ashworth and Kavaratzis, 2010). In both fields of research, strategic spatial planning and place branding, defining a clear vision for a place is fundamental. A vision for the place, a broad strategy able to clarify what the place is and what it aims to become in the long term, together with an exhaustive definition of who will be involved in the process, the financial and human resources, the projects and the creative communication are the “recipe” for successful place branding initiatives (Ashworth and Kavaratzis, 2010). The questions of “why” and “how” to do it remain unexplored. Places need a strategic change to respond to challenges and state the direction of social, economic and equal development (the “why”). Place branding through strategic thinking and in strategic spatial planning could actively engage with place actors and communities, improve place qualities, enhance assets and identity, shed some light on the genius loci (that is, spirit of place) and better communicate with potential investors, tourists, workers, inhabitants and with other place actors (the “how”).

Bearing in mind all the aforementioned synergies, the argument is that place branding as a strategic spatial planning instrument could help place actors better prepare their responses to changes at the economic and political level by “zooming in” on places’ needs, assets and values. As Albrechts (2010a) argues, a strategic planning approach should be implemented according to the social and cultural values of the place to “which a particular place or society is historically committed” (Albrechts, 2010b, p. 1115). Integrating place branding in strategic spatial planning initiatives could support a structural change, such as image reorientation, repositioning and moving forward to a higher level of social and economic development. Strategic spatial planning also aims to engage communities and develop efforts for their own well-being. As Ashworth and Kavaratzis (2010) state, local communities play a significant role in assuring the success of place branding initiatives. Furthermore, Therkelsen *et al.* (2010) noted that there is a chance to use place branding as a community-building tool, but that this demands more effort and responsibility than contemporary local authorities seem to be willing to put into it. If people feel part of the place branding process, they are more likely to embrace the values of the place as a whole.

As mentioned by Ashworth and Kavaratzis (2010), the immediate desire of practitioners is often to use branding as a fast, cheap, effective and “dreamlike solution” applied to the place weaknesses and their everyday challenges. However, this approach is unlikely to work by itself. It should be integrated in a wider strategy or as an instrument in strategic planning. However, in which cases should place branding be taken as a strategic spatial planning instrument? And in which cases should it be taken in the other way around, that is strategic spatial planning in place branding (the alternative strand of reasoning)?

Table 2.1. is an attempt to provide the necessary theoretical clarifications, with empirical evidence, in terms of when place branding can be taken as strategic spatial planning instrument (primary strand of reasoning) and the cases where the opposite seems more strategically effective for the place (alternative strand of reasoning), either across administrative territories, a country, a region or a city. This chapter emphasises that the “optimal approach” independent of the spatial scale, if

such could ever exist, is place branding through spatial planning to support strategic spatial planning initiatives. However, when deciding on the application of a primary or alternative strand it depends if the “place” has already a place brand or not, and how strong that place brand is.

Place branding as a strategic spatial planning instrument could attempt to develop synergies by structuring place identities and by highlighting place assets putting them together in a unique spatial planning initiative. Those assets are fundamental to enhancing place image and place reputation. In addition, a place branding strategy needs to be embodied through the aims, communication, values, design and the general culture of the place’s stakeholders and communities (Zenker and Braun, 2010). Place branding centres on people’s perceptions and images, putting them at the heart of orchestrated activities, which are designed to shape the place and its future. Managing the place brand becomes an attempt to influence and treat those mental maps in a way that is deemed favourable to the present circumstances and future needs of the place (Kavaratzis and Ashworth, 2005). Therefore, it is important to establish an appropriate institutional framework for the creation of a cooperative network that can take the branding process forward. When places become aware of their complexity and the competitive and uncertain environment around them, the planning and design of successful spatial strategies is paramount. Therefore, the deployment of innovative strategic spatial planning instruments, in which place branding could emerge, increases in importance and meaning.

**Table 2.1.** Explicating the two strands of reasoning (primary and alternative).

<b>Spatial scale</b>	<b>Primary strand</b>	<b>Alternative strand</b>
Across administrative territories / Inter-regional/ Cross-border regions / Country / Region/ City / Neighbourhood / City quarters/districts	<b>Place Branding (PB) as a Strategic Spatial Planning (SSP) instrument</b>	<b>Strategic Spatial Planning (SSP) as an instrument in Place Branding (PB)</b>
	<b>PB    IN    SPP</b>	<b>SPP    IN    PB</b>
<b>Place with place branding/ place brand (weak or strong)</b>	If the place has already a place brand and if that place brand is weak, place branding as an instrument IN strategic spatial planning will enhance the place assets, engage stakeholders, as well as communities, in the process, and better support the existent place brand. Place branding through SPP works as value creation for the place and the brand. Barcelona	A place with a strong brand, and strong image, allows for strong planning interventions. Place branding dictates the guidelines for the practice of strategic spatial planning (for example, through strategic projects). Tuscany, in Italy has a strong place brand, with a strong image, and this makes it easier to maintain certain features in the Tuscan landscape. Tuscany can be regarded as a major success

	<p>started the branding process after the design of a strong strategic spatial (urban) plan. The place brand was weak but enhanced when integrated IN strategic plans that follow the 1988 primary plan (see Pareja-Eastway, Chapain and Mugnano, 2013). In Northern Minnesota successful planning strategies improved the quality of the place brand (see Van Assche and Lo, 2011).</p>	<p>of place branding, with connections to spatial planning. Since Renaissance, Tuscan political and intellectual elites strive to create an image of Tuscany as a place of arts and economic and social vitality (see Van Assche and Lo, 2011). The Tuscany brand, despite some criticism because of underplaying some sectors, such as industry, can be given here as an example of vitality essentially because of the stable and unique place branding storyline.</p>
<p><b>Place without place branding/ place brand</b></p>	<p>Place branding as an instrument IN strategic spatial planning for places without an ongoing place branding exercise or rebranding process are more likely to achieve success, given the facts stated above, if PB works as SPP instrument. It will be effective in processes of reimagining, repositioning and rescaling. It will attempt to enact structural change and smartly connect physical interventions in the territory with place identity, strategic domains and assets (tangible and intangible).</p>	<p>If places without an ongoing place branding exercise adopt the proposed alternative strand, the place branding exercise is highly risky. It could just start and finish as a place promotional exercise and is unlikely to improve place qualities or contribute to economic and social development. A place brand will also dictate the rules and the financial means in a less sustainable way.</p>
<p><b>Key remark The optimal approach</b></p>	<p>The primary strand of reasoning - place branding IN strategic spatial planning as an instrument - is the optimal approach towards a place branding initiative integrated within strategic spatial planning practices.</p>	



## 2.7. Conclusions

This chapter has assembled a contribution to the place branding debate by elucidating the practice as a strategic spatial planning instrument to better support structural change in places facing major challenges, such as the rising cost of energy, the financial crisis and the subsequent economic crisis, the globalisation of culture, the economy just to enumerate some changes (see Albrechts, 2013, 2010a for more challenges faced by places).

The literature in strategic spatial planning mentioned the mobilisation around the definition of a vision or image for places, where such images are much more than simply a return to the language of strategic urban design or a form of urban marketing (Healey *et al.*, 1999). Place images and visions are used “politically and socially to construct a territorial logic, to share ownership of strategic development ideas, promote territorial cohesion among place stakeholders, and the marketing purpose of positioning the territory externally” (Healey *et al.*, 1999, p. 347). Moreover, strategic spatial planning is defined as “self-conscious collective efforts to reimagine a city, an urban region or a wider territory and to translate the result into priorities for area investment, conservation measures, strategic infrastructure investments and principles of land use regulation” (Healey, 2004, p. 46).

Broadening and deepening the investigation to include international cases would lay the ground for a strategic implementation of place branding as well as a stronger justification of the two strands of reasoning. However, there are only a few studies that link place branding to spatial planning. When investigating three regions, Tuscany, Italy, Missouri and Northern Minnesota, USA, Van Assche and Lo (2011) mentioned that a strong place brand allows for strong planning interventions (the case of Tuscany). In this case, the alternative strand of reasoning could be more effective. In this case place branding will “dictate” the rules in strategic spatial planning and design interventions. As the place brand creates value and gives stability to the place image, spatial planning interventions will be positioned at a lower level or intervention. The place brand works as commander. With the case of Northern Minnesota, the environment landscape was successfully planned for nature and tourism, and the weak Northern Minnesota brand was rebranded through a spatial planning process. This case shows how the primary strand can be effective. However, in this case a new place identity was the background for both spatial planning/spatial design and place branding. A reimagining process through planning reinforced the identity. Stakeholders saw it as more of a value creation instrument than as a means for value destruction. With Missouri, there were fewer place assets, making the brand itself harder to capitalise upon in a strong anti-planning environment (Van Assche and Lo, 2011).

In a recent work, the authors Pareja-Eastway *et al.* (2013) evaluate the branding process across 13 European cities. The case of Barcelona, which started in 1988 with a strategic plan, involved a process of spatial transformation and reorganization. Spatial planning and spatial design were combined, and with the consensus of a variety of actors, long-term strategic planning highly influenced the final outcome of the whole branding exercise. The Barcelona City Council was able, both before the Olympic Games in 1992 and after, to implement assertive strategy making in the urban realm, which reinforced the image of the city as a place for business, tourism, cultural and sportive activities. In addition, the city was branded as an attractive place to live. The city brand has been smartly anchored in strategic urban planning and civic engagement (Pareja-Eastway *et al.*, 2013).

Bearing in mind the evolution of Barcelona's place branding process, the primary strand of reasoning, as proposed in this theoretical framework, enhances the quality of the place. In addition, it is able to introduce structural changes, including physical planning, landscape design and the resilient creation and maintenance of urban fabric and assets.

Balducci *et al.* (2011) devoted attention to Milan and City of Cities Strategic Project, organized by the Provincia di Milano. Among a plethora of objectives, the Strategic Project aimed to build a new place narrative by moving away from the most pervasive of the rhetoric embedded in public discourse (the images associated to Milan, such as Milan the city of fashion, or Milan the city of design). The desire was to describe the contemporary reality of Milan, shedding light not just on structural elements and issues, but also on the city's opportunities, strengths, threats and willingness to accept a strategic change of the urban agenda (Balducci *et al.*, 2011). In this case, the primary strand is likely to be more effective as well.

The primary strand of reasoning – place branding as a strategic spatial planning instrument – is able to replace the traditional planning instruments, and it could be taken in that way when a place has no place brand or is about to initiate a place branding process (or re-branding following the weakness of the place image or brand). Strategic spatial planning interventions that strive for synergies with tailored place branding strategies, with an effective context-sensitive approach to identify unique community values and assets, are likely to craft a more persuasive branding storyline. This, as opposite to universal solutions or actions inspired by pseudo-scientific models that only lead to uniformity or more of the same (“one-size-fits-all” approach). A valuable place brand encourages community cooperation, coordination, long-term strategies (as opposed to task-oriented strategies) and sustainable use of the landscape, while inspiring comprehensive planning (Van Assche and Lo, 2011).

As Ashworth (2005) also asserts, the new spatial planning instruments include ideas of politicisation and spatial planning as a form of two-way communication between those who plan and those who are planned. These instruments would include place branding as it is a form of communication, able to create links of collaboration among place actors, public/private entities and citizens (Ashworth, 2011a). Place branding and strategic spatial planning both aim to engage people with the place, enhancing image and identity. They are both practically oriented to the challenges that really matter. Context is everything, and engagement with communities and place actors, in support of co-creation of the brand, is the way forward. In that regard, place brands have the capability of providing something for everybody, only because and only when everybody creates them. Place branding through strategic spatial planning enhances the needed connectedness among multiple place stakeholders and communities. Place branding will play an important role in communicating a place's structural changes, encouraging strategic visions, providing integration among a range of sectorial and multi-spatial level plans (for example, national, regional and local). In order to supply the reader with some empirical evidence on the theoretical contribution of this chapter, I underline the work of Allan (2012) on the idea of “Experience Masterplanning” developed in 2011 to the *East Renfrewshire Council*, a district unitary authority South-west of the city of Glasgow in the West of Scotland. In my viewpoint, this initiative works as an example on the integration between what a place aims to become: “East Renfrewshire aims to be a place to grow”, with a branding strategy: “a

place to grow up in”, “a place to develop as a person”, “a place to grow a family”, “a place to grow a business”, “a place to invest in” and “a place to visit” – through a spatial planning intervention in the council area.

Designing a place branding process by linking place branding and strategic spatial planning, in a context of permanent changes, uncertainty and desired transformation, is a challenge in itself and requires continuous research, even at the academic level. A place branding initiative supported by consistent image building, vision, robust strategic thinking and a clear definition of the goals and place objectives, will help stakeholders develop unique and distinct identities. In addition, by establishing a clear and competitive position, highlighting place assets, and bringing together divergent voices into the same branding storyline, stakeholders can develop shared visions for future spatial development.

This chapter takes a necessary step towards a more consistent knowledge and discourse on potential theoretical linkage between place branding and strategic spatial planning. However, this chapter has some limitations. Acknowledging that it is mainly conceptual, it covers most relevant literature on place branding and strategic spatial planning with references to governance and spatial design. However, the chapter lacks empirical data as well as a detailed case study. Therefore, primary research will be necessary to support the framework proposed here. Such research will hopefully clarify the two strands of reasoning for applying place branding and strategic spatial planning together. Furthermore, additional research should attempt to enhance the connections among spatial planning, spatial design and the imaginative power of strategic spatial planning. In addition, this field would benefit from a deeper understanding of the evolution of place governance and how it influences place branding and strategic spatial planning options. The important thing is to keep the conversation going and to design creative strategies to deal with today’s spatial challenges. The next chapters - integrated in part B: empirical research - place branding in strategic spatial planning with special reference to northern Portugal - attempt to bridge some of the limitations that have emerged from this chapter.

The next chapter (chapter 3) critically explores the actual or potential roles of place branding as an instrument for the attainment of strategic spatial planning goals through its integration in spatial plan and policy-making. By guiding the attention of academics, practitioners and policymakers towards a strategic spatially oriented approach to place branding, the chapter aims to reinforce the main objective of this thesis by bringing an alternative view to the scholarly and professional debate on place branding.

**PART B:**

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**EMPIRICAL RESEARCH - PLACE BRANDING IN  
STRATEGIC SPATIAL PLANNING WITH  
SPECIAL REFERENCE TO  
NORTHERN PORTUGAL**