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Place branding in strategic spatial planning

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Chapter 5: Theoretical framework of the study - place branding as strategic spatial planning instrument and its application to the case study based on regional actors perspective over a regional branding strategy for northern Portugal (NUTS II)

Chapter overview

The present chapter critically explores the actual or potential roles of place branding, specifically at the regional scale, as an instrument for the attainment of strategic spatial planning goals. It complements the arguments presented in previous chapters and builds the theoretical framework of the study. The chapter also discusses the relevance and effectiveness of place branding in supporting economic and social spatial realignment through civic and institutional participation and the shaping of clearly envisioned, agreed, social responsible and realistic futures. This chapter's theoretical exploration is developed by detailing relevant findings from a case study on the significance of a regional branding initiative, integrated in a wider planning strategy for northern Portugal. In conducting this exploratory research, primary data were gathered through sixteen in-depth interviews with key-regional actors. In addition, a detailed analysis of the current strategic spatial planning documents is also provided. Findings show the key-strategic domains in which the region excels. These domains could fuel a potential regional brand as a way to overcome deep-seated regional constraints and limitations. The strategic planning documents in force, however, have not yet been successful in dealing with place branding, for instance at the regional scale. By drawing the attention of scholars, practitioners and policy-makers towards place branding as an instrument of strategic spatial planning, the chapter sheds light on the challenges of branding regions, contributing, thus to frame this thesis and influence the discussions going forward.

5.1. Introduction

Some of the misalignments in place branding literature seem particularly evident at the regional scale. For instance, Ikuta *et al.* (2007) touched upon the significant lack of attention to regional branding. Pasquinelli and Teräs (2013) argue that place branding researchers could reflect more on regions that struggle in building a reputation and gaining visibility, while Zimmerbauer (2011) states that “regions on various spatial scales, are almost obliged to engage in promotion, as they are seen to be competing against each other nationally and increasingly also globally” (p. 256). Recently, Zenker and Jacobsen (2015) argue that “scholars have devoted considerable attention to the role of place branding at the city and country levels, but the regional level has thus far been largely neglected” (p. vii).

The theoretical assumption postulated in this chapter is grounded by taking the region of northern Portugal, a region devoid of autonomous government and supported in terms of regional development and cohesion by the North Regional Coordination and Development Commission (CCDRN), as a case study. To properly bridge the theoretical component of the chapter and the empirical work, two qualitative methods of data collection and analysis were employed. First, primary data were gathered through 16 in-depth, semi-structured interviews with key-regional actors and organizations with a stake (and expertise) in the region. I have requested them to comment

specifically upon a potential regional branding strategy integrated as an instrument in wider strategic spatial planning. Secondly, an analysis of the Regional Spatial Plan (PROT), the Northern Portugal Strategic Guidelines/Operational Programme 2014-2020 and the Northern Portugal Smart Specialization Strategy 2014-2020, both for the period coincident with the EU multiannual financial framework 2014 to 2020 and the regional promotion initiative “Be Smart. Go Norte”, created and operationalized by the CCDRN, is also provided. The purpose of this documental analysis is to obtain a profound understanding of how place branding has been approached (or not) in the current strategic spatial planning documents, prepared in line with Portugal 2020 strategy and to give spatial and sectoral guidance to the regional actors and organizations.

The reasons to undertake Portugal, specifically its northern region, as a case study are twofold. First, as this is an exploratory study, which attempts to link place branding and strategic spatial planning, it is imperative to understand those current and potential links within a spatial context. Secondly, this study is at the heart of a four-year research project aiming at debating regional branding initiative for northern Portugal by embracing a strategic spatial planning approach and employing a qualitative methodology. By employing a qualitative method of research, this chapter not only addresses the need to conduct additional empirical studies to enrich the analysis of the linkage between place branding and strategic spatial planning, as signalled by Oliveira (2015b), but also responds to the request by Kavaratzis (2012), Ashworth *et al.* (2015), Stubbs and Warnaby (2015) and Kavaratzis and Kalandides (2015) to open an effective dialogue with regional actors in place branding processes. In addition, Zenker and Jacobsen (2015), in a recent publication covering the topic of interregional place branding, argue that qualitative methods have the advantage over the quantitative ones, of open questions which allow researchers to explore unique regional qualities and assets.

In case of this study, and following the lack of studies on place branding undertaken Portugal and its regions as research areas of investigation (as reported by Oliveira, 2015b and in chapter 3), the application of qualitative interviews and documental analysis are particularly relevant to gain deep knowledge, not only over the region-specific constrains and limitations, but also over the unique region-qualities and assets (the content of a place brand) that are strategic in nature and could fuel a potential place brand for the region of northern Portugal.

The chapter proceeds as follows. First, it will clarify the authors’ understanding of strategic spatial planning and place branding to further debate the intertwining between the two concepts. Secondly, it discusses the key findings withdraw from the in-depth interviewing and the documental analysis. Finally, the implications and challenges of such an approach for scholarly and praxis debate on place branding and strategic spatial planning, specifically at the regional scale, are presented.

5.2. The intertwining relation between place branding and strategic spatial planning

Place branding, has not been successful in exploring the linkage with spatial planning strategies as I have extensively debated in chapter 1 and 2. Furthermore, Kavaratzis and Ashworth (2010) convincingly state that the non-spatial thinking of many observers and practitioners who work in the field of place branding has led to misunderstandings in terms of the spatial-economic and socio-spatial implications of place branding. With regard to the dialectical relation between place branding

and spatial planning, Van Assche and Lo (2011) argue that there remains an extensive ground to research existing and potential links between spatial planning and place branding. Andersson (2015) goes on and advocates that spatial processes affect place branding and understand this is important to conceptually comprehend place branding.

Following Ashworth *et al.* (2015) and Van Assche and Lo (2011) rationale, this section debates the intertwining relation between place branding and strategic spatial planning. First, it will define the strategic spatial planning approach, by highlighting its evolution in Portugal. Secondly, it also presents my approach to place branding, with particular emphasis at the regional scale. Finally, it withdraws the key theoretical definitions to further construct a theoretical model for branding regions which will be tested on the empirical part of the chapter.

5.3. Defining the strategic spatial planning approach and its evolution in Portugal

It has been widely debated that cities and regions, including the region of northern Portugal (see, for example, Oliveira, 2014a; 2015c), are faced by a complex range of challenges that can no longer be addressed and managed adequately with the traditional intellectual apparatus and mindset (Albrechts, 2015a, 2010c). As a consequence, spatial planning and spatial planners must reflect on the adequate approaches and instruments to cope with the challenges and improve the quality of life for all citizens (Oliveira, 2015b). Strategic spatial planning, a concept which genesis dates back to the 1970s and 1980s (see, for example, Hillier and Healey, 2010), takes an integrated approach to the development of a territory (Healey *et al.*, 1999), to be a means of overcoming the temporal and often spatial limitations and rigidities of traditional/statutory planning, basically concerned with the location, intensity, and harmonization of land development (Albrechts, 2010a). It has also been advocated as possible way of overcoming the limitations of “planning on paper” (Balducci *et al.*, 2011, p. 7), by confronting the contemporary social, spatial, and economic needs of cities and regions, and present a comprehensive vision of the future (envisioning), on the basis of shared and realistic values (Ogilvy, 2002).

Strategic spatial planning (as with place branding), is not an enchanted solution and does not flow smoothly from one phase to another. It is a dynamic process that demands a high degree of concentration on key socio-spatial constrains. According to Albrechts and Balducci (2013), the strategic approach in spatial planning seeks to resolve conflict, eliminate exclusion, and neutralize power relations; for that it must involve relevant regional actors/organizations and concrete activities of citizens and policy-makers. Strategic spatial planning is also relevant in pursuit of “spatial policy for a region in such a way that the components of that policy reinforce each other, also that they take account of the characteristics of the region” (Healey *et al.*, 1999, p. 338).

Strategic spatial planning is also “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). As a summary, and in line with Healey *et al.* (1999), Healey (2007; 2009), Balducci *et al.* (2011), Pasqui (2011), Albrechts (2010a; 2013; 2015a), and Albrechts and Balducci (2013), the strategic spatial planning approach is focused on:

- Identifying region-specific qualities, assets, and key regional strategic domains - social, cultural, productive, intellectual and physical;
- Addressing issues that really matter in the day-to-day life of communities;
- Enabling structural change in an transformative, integrative, creative, and innovative way;
- Involving/engaging with key regional actors, civic society, institutions and support the co-production of equal, just and fair spatial planning strategies;
- Envisioning agreed, hopefully better, and realistic futures in a more hybrid mode of democracy and multilevel governance that is open to diversity, equity, in which local and expert knowledge and values are combined towards an imagined alternative future.

The introduction of strategic spatial planning in several European countries (see, for several examples, Hillier and Healey, 2010; Cerreta *et al.*, 2010), has been envisaged as an opportunity for innovation in planning, beside the prevailing traditional planning practices (Castro and Nogueira, 2011). Strategic spatial planning in Portugal, however, is still in its “infancy stage” (Rosa Pires, 2005, p. 237) and is a relatively recent phenomenon (Castro and Nogueira, 2011), despite the early establishment of spatial planning institutions in the country as I have previously mentioned in this thesis. Moreover, spatial planning at the country (Portugal) and regional levels has been dominated by the blueprint approach and is largely focused on urban planning (Rosa Pires, 2005; Giannakourou, 2005), as well as land use planning (Ferrão and Mourato, 2011). In addition, there is little theoretical debate on the ideas and the mission of spatial planning in Portugal (Ferrão and Mourato, 2011; Baptista, 2012).

Despite the reality that the Portuguese spatial planning scholarship has been seldom developed, spatial planning policy and spatial plan making have evolved from a physical, normative and static view of regulation of land use - to a more strategic, comprehensive, and procedural vision of territorial development (Ferrão, 2010). With the “Europeanisation” of spatial planning in Portugal (see on this debate Mourato, 2011), the principles, visions and concepts adopted in the European Spatial Development Perspective (ESDP) and the implementation of strategic spatial planning ideas in European cities, such as in Barcelona in 1992, had influenced the spatial planning practice in Portugal, as argued by Ferrão and Mourato (2012).

As a matter of fact, the combination of these and others factors, such as the operationalization of the European Spatial Planning Observation Network (ESPON), have contributed for a more strategic nature of spatial plans, particularly at the regional scale (Ferrão and Mourato, 2012). Following the work by Oliveira (2015b) and the suggestions provided by some of the regional actors interviewed for the purpose of this study, the current strategic spatial planning documents at the regional level are later analysed and the links with place branding, a concept debated in the next section, explored.

5.4. Defining place branding through strategic spatial planning

The definition of place branding this chapter and Ph.D. thesis brings forward stands for a more strategic spatial planning oriented approach to the application of branding principles to cities and regions. Is a definition, that not only responds to Oliveira's (2015a; 2015d) call to bring a more geo-spatial thinking in place branding, but also attempts to support the search for ways in which place branding "could and should advance in order to become more effective, more efficient, more socially responsible and more grounded in theory" as Ashworth *et al.* (2015, p. 3) suggests.

Some scholars (see, for example, Ashworth and Kavaratzis, 2010; Kavaratzis et al., 2015) have been discussing, and often questioning, the social responsibility of place branding initiatives. This because governments often encounter the "fascination" of branding places by clearly wasting public funds/tax payers' money on promotional strategies for their jurisdictional places. However, those place promotion strategies - *per se* - generate little impact upon communities and their well-being. In addition, place promotion has proven to be fruitless for changing global perceptions of a place, and does not attempt to make effective structural changes in order to improve the socio-spatial and spatial economic condition of places, nor does it contribute to the well-being of citizens or to the attainment of strategic spatial planning goals.

The approach to place branding made here tries to break the business and mainstream branding and marketing sphere which, according to Andersson (2015), Skinner (2008) and Hanna and Rowley (2008), stills dominates the place branding discourse by bringing a more spatial consciousness to the process. As place branding involves spatial-functional, organizational, and financial measures (Ashworth and Voogd, 1990), that are meant to make better places to live, work, study, invest or visit, as with strategic spatial planning, this approach to place branding aims to highlight the fact that the concept is not simply about communicating to the world that a certain place is "good" or "better" - rather, is more about pursuing better social and economic patterns and let the world know that authorities and organizations are trying to improve and structurally change the socio-spatial and spatial-economic condition ideally in a participatory or co-production process.

As strategic spatial planning is an active force in enabling change as well as a transformative practice (see Albrechts, 2010a, 2013) a more spatial planning oriented attitude defends that place branding and place brands, must be primarily oriented towards the support of local business, improve infrastructures and the physical condition of the territory, provide health and educational services, contribute to job creation as well as job maintenance and talent retention - rather than be focused mainly on attracting investment, tourists, and highly qualified workers. In addition, place branding as an instrument of the strategic spatial planning approach could be effective in empower actors to work together to achieve strategic goals, or co-produce collective visions about the future and how to get there.

The approach in debate in this chapter would be particularly challenging at the regional scale as according to Zenker and Jacobsen (2015) branding regions is more complex than branding cities and countries which requires mature strategic thinking (as argued in Oliveira, 2015e). The first aim of regional branding is to create a perception of one geographical entity in the minds of the target audiences. A difficult task, as regions are composed of a considerable number of cities and towns, a multiplicity of regional actors and diverse assets, attributes and qualities. In addition, some regions

have autonomous governments, while others depend on political and jurisdictional decisions of central governments, as the case of the mainland Portuguese regions. The second aim is to transfer positive associations from the single entities, as the different cities and towns - to the regional brand. This effort is often undertaken in order for single locations to compensate for their shortcomings and lack of human and financial resources and join forces to accomplish their greater goals. However, there remains the challenge of bringing all regional actors to joining forces, procedures and tools around a single regional story brand and regional brand. Effective spatial planning strategies in which place branding is integrated as an instrument could contribute to align ideas, interests, solve conflicts and bring legitimacy to the planning and branding processes.

An example of a regional branding initiative is useful here. As reported by Zenker and Jacobsen (2015), the city of Hamburg markets itself as a - region - to consumers in China and India. In branding Hamburg as a region, it effectively raises its size from two million to nearly five million inhabitants. And in this German region, both, the population size and territorial dimension, play an important role to communicate its status as an important trade partner for India and China, for instance. In addition, social constrains, such as of affordable housing and industrial space, in tandem with the absence of rural nature and “small town charm” of Hamburg urban area, have been compensated for by adding smaller regions, towns and rural areas around the city centre thus contribute to strengthen the Hamburg regional brand – while explores synergies with the city brand. Hence, small partners and places around the city would benefit from joining the regional branding initiative, since they can compensate for their lack of (international) visibility, awareness, complex infrastructure, and perceived connectivity.

The definition of regional branding postulated in this chapter also takes into account insights from the work of Van den Berg and Braun (1999), who have stressed the importance of “organizing capacity” in place branding, which is defined as, “the ability to enlist all actors involved and, with their help, to generate new ideas and to develop and implement a policy designed to respond to fundamental developments and create conditions for sustainable development” (p. 995); it is a definition that also draws on the idea of co-production brought to the strategic spatial planning debate by, among other, Albrechts (2013, 2015a) as a way to guarantee the use of local and expert knowledge and ensure that planning and branding processes are both responsive, well informed, just and fair.

Place brands are thought to have the capability of providing something for everybody, only when, and precisely because, they are created by everybody. In line with Van Dijk and Holstein (2007, p. 14), “branding turns the traditional planning world upside down, by taking the perspectives and experiences of residents as a starting point” to design a unique brand. In the same line of reasoning, Ashworth *et al.*, (2015) argues that “place brands are better thought of as narratives or place stories” (p. 5), thus regional brands must be steeped in community stories – participatory/co-produced place brands. Moreover, the opinions and perspectives from regional actors can “assist and complement theoretical development” (Ashworth *et al.*, 2015, p. 1) as well as “understanding who they are and the nature of their opinions about the place in question should be key determinants of any branding strategy” (Stubbs and Warnaby, 2015, p. 101). Bearing in mind the abovementioned

definition of place branding, a theoretical framework is drawn in Figure 5.1. as an attempt to summarize the intertwining between place branding and strategic spatial planning.

5.5. Theoretical framework of the study: place branding as strategic spatial planning instrument an analysis at the regional scale

The theoretical framework of this study translates the approach to place branding debated in the previous sections, specifically at the regional scale (Figure 5.1.). Is a framework composed of 2 layers around its centre. The first layer highlights six key components in which a region must focus while designing a regional branding strategy and the second layer highlights what would be achieved if that regional branding initiative is operationalised as strategic spatial planning instrument (the blue colour links the centre and the second layer of the framework). A regional branding strategy integrated as an instrument in strategic spatial planning must begin by:

(i) A focus on a region's qualities, strategic domains, assets and attributes - Albrechts and Balducci (2013) underline that strategic spatial planning focuses on place-specific qualities and assets;

(ii) A focus on addressing regional economic, social and political constraints - Balducci *et al.* (2011) argues that strategic spatial planning is capable of generating images, frames, addressing spatial issues, and helping to change public agendas;

(iii) A focus on enabling and communicating structural change - Albrechts (2013) argues that strategic spatial planning is able to support strategic change (for example, from a traditional industrial region to a more technologically-oriented one) and could be effective in changing the spatial agenda and thus socially and economically improving places.

(iv) A focus on involving/engaging key regional actors and civic society - In line with Habermas (1993), strategic planning is able to generate "strategic conviction" - which means key-actors coming together to develop content and strategies for the management of spatial change. Spatial planners would play a role as catalysts and initiators of that spatial change (Albrechts, 1999). According to Eshuis *et al.*, 2014, place branding requires civic and institutional engagement and Kavaratzis (2012) argues that participation in regional branding initiatives legitimizes the regional brands and deeply influences their meaning;

(v) A focus on envisioning shared, better, and realistic futures - Ashworth *et al.* (2015) argued that "place brands provide strategic guidance for place development" and can be "used as an instrument for envisioning an aspirational imagined future" (p. 4), which seems to play well with the focus on what ought to be debated in strategic spatial planning, brought, for example, by Healey (2006b), Balducci *et al.*, (2011), Albrechts and Balducci, (2013), Albrechts (2015a);

(vi) A focus on reinforcement of sense of belonging and regional feelings - According to Clifton (2011) and Zimmerbauer (2011), regional brands are also thought to boost sense of belonging, as

well as strengthen regional feelings of pride and commitment to the region if the regional branding initiative involve/engage with civic society and regional actors/institutions.

The second layer of the framework demonstrates that a regional brand that strive for synergies with strategic spatial planning and focused in those six vectors - would be effective in supporting economic and social spatial realignment and the shaping of clearly envisioned agreed and realistic futures. In addition, would also be able in fostering investment attraction, increase tourism revenues, support local business, attract and maintain talent people and inhabitants, support job creation and its maintenance (the dashed line informs that interactions between the sectors/vectors can occur). As abovementioned, the theoretical exploration of this framework is conducted by taking northern Portugal as case study.

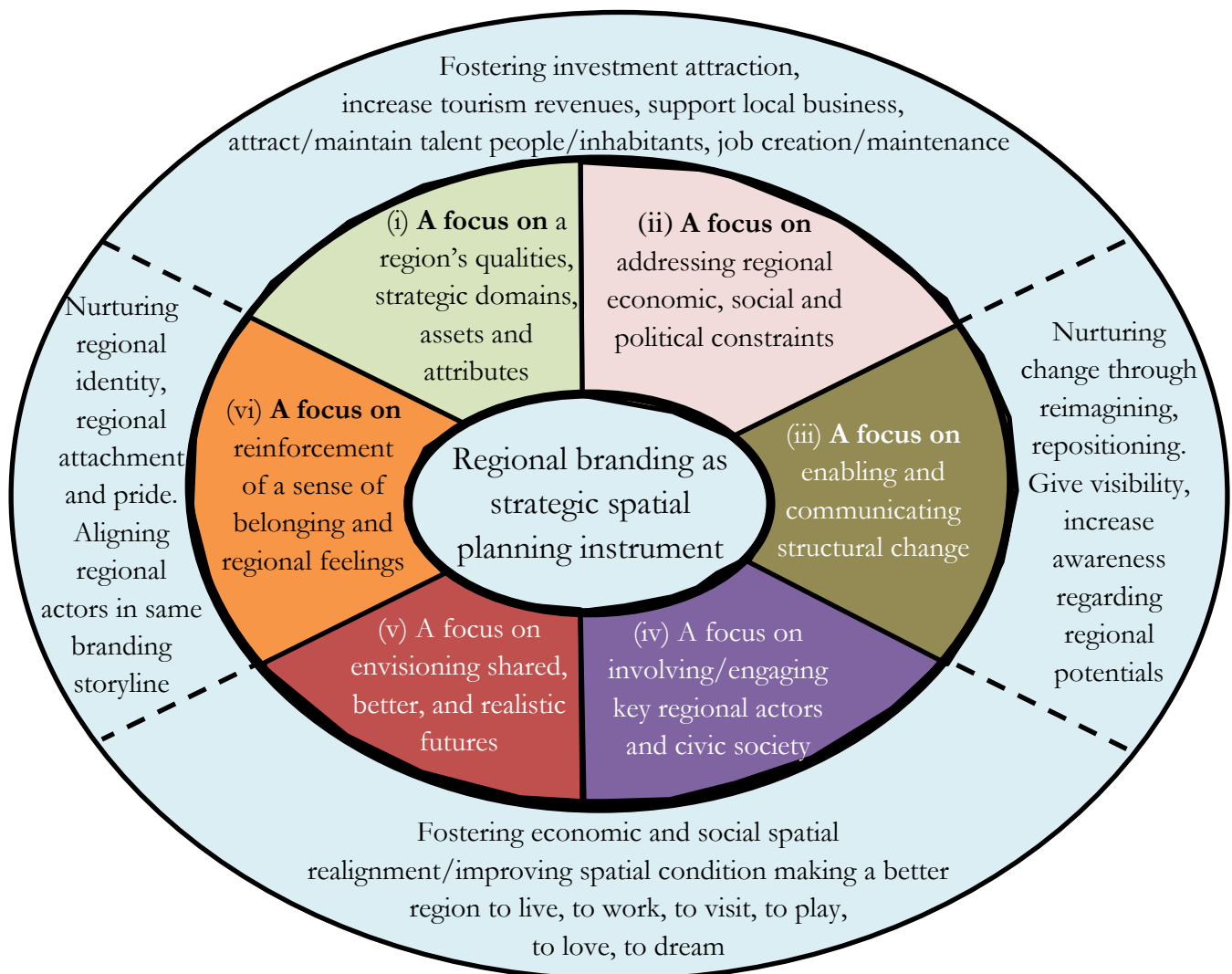


Figure 5.1. The theoretical framework of the study. *Source:* own elaboration.

5.6. In-depth interviews with key regional actors* of northern Portugal

This chapter details the results of in-depth, open-ended, semi-structured interviews conducted with 16 key regional actors and organizations involved in regional planning and development of northern Portugal, as well as in regional strategic spatial plan and policy-making:

- IN 1 - North Regional Coordination and Development Commission (regional planning expert);
- IN 2 - North Regional Coordination and Development Commission (policy advisor);
- IN 3 - Regional Entity of Tourism of Porto and Northern Portugal;
- IN 4 - Regional Development Agency of the Ave Valley;
- IN 5 - European Grouping of Territorial Cooperation Galicia-northern Portugal;
- IN 6 - Health Cluster Portugal;
- IN 7 - Textile and Clothing Association of Portugal;
- IN 8 - University of Minho (Vice-rector for Knowledge Enhancement);
- IN 9 - Department of Economics, School of Economics and Management, University of Minho (Professor of Economics);
- IN 10 - Department of Economics, School of Economics and Management, University of Minho (Professor of Economics);
- IN 11 - Department of Civil Engineering, School of Engineering, University of Minho (Professor of Urban and Regional Planning);
- IN 12 - Geography Department, Social Sciences Institute, University of Minho (Professor of Geography);
- IN 13 - Quaternaire Portugal - Corporate society working on Strategic Spatial Planning;
- IN 14 - A member of the business community (transport agency);
- IN 15 - A member of the civic society;
- IN 16 - PortugalFoods;

(*see also Introduction chapter and appendix C for the full list of details of key regional actors of northern Portugal interviewed).

The literature in both fields clarifies the dire need to engage and carefully consider those to whom a spatial planning strategy (Cerreta *et al.*, 2010) and a regional branding strategy (Kavaratzis *et al.*, 2015) must serve - the territory and those interacting with it.

The selection of the respondents started as a process of “convenience sampling” (Neuman, 2011, p. 267) as a result of knowledge gained in previous studies in which northern Portugal was also taken as a case study (see Oliveira, 2011) and continued as a snowball sampling. Interviews were carried out at the interviewees’ workplaces from March 2014 to February 2015, with two conducted online, and lasted around one hour. They were all carried out in Portuguese, digitally recorded, and were subsequently fully transcribed with the key-parts translated into English by the author. The interviewees (IN) were asked to respond the following set of questions aimed at give empirical significance to the theoretical framework presented in Figure 5.1.:

- (1) Identify and justify the existing regional qualities, strategic domains, assets, attractions and attributes, which correspond to the “light green” sector **(i)**;
- (2) Identify the current regional economic, social and political constraints and limitations, and the nature of those key issues, which correspond to the “pink” sector **(ii)**;
- (3) To comment upon if a regional branding initiative integrated as an instrument in strategic regional planning would be able to support strategic change, which correspond to the “dark green” sector **(iii)**;
- (4) To comment upon the key regional actors, experts and organizations that must be involved (in addition to themselves) in a potential regional branding initiative, which correspond to the “purple” sector **(iv)**;
- (5) To comment upon if a regional branding initiative integrated as an instrument in strategic regional planning would support the envisioning of better futures for the region, which correspond to the “red” sector **(v)**;
- (6) To comment upon if a regional branding initiative would reinforce the sense of belonging and the regional feelings, which correspond to the “orange” sector **(vi)**;

The analysis of the feedback provided by the interviewees was completed with the documental analysis of the abovementioned strategic spatial plans (a; b; c) and promotional initiative (d). Instead of detailing the perspectives of the regional actors who agreed to collaborate in the study, the authors have engaged here with the key opinions and common points between them. Whenever possible, links to the aforementioned literature and to the theoretical framework are here provided.

Regarding the Regional qualities, strategic domains, assets, attractions and attribute I have synthetized the interviewees’ opinion in Figure 5.2.:

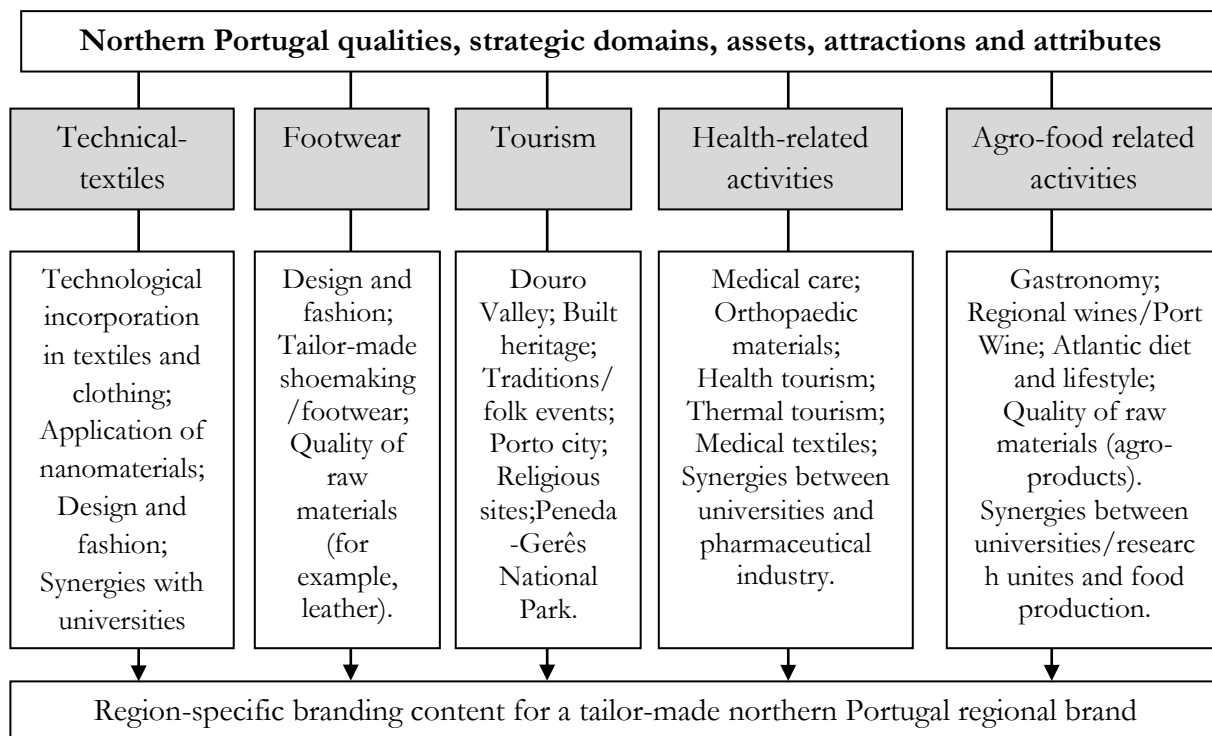


Figure 5.2. Summarizing the research findings on the key strategic domains for northern Portugal. *Source:* own design based exclusively on interviewees' opinions (IN 1-16).

Technical-textiles (for example, the application or the incorporation of nanomaterials in new products and focus on the quality of design and follow up with fashion trends), footwear (for example, by investing in tailor-made footwear and follow up with market demands), tourism (northern Portugal has multiple assets that can be optimised as tourism products, however, this has to be accomplished with careful integration with the community needs and values), health-related activities (for example, investing in linking the know-how on textile and clothing with research and development on health sciences), and agro-food (for example, promoting a healthy lifestyle through regional gastronomy and wines) related activities were identified as the key strategic domains that could fuel a potential regional branding strategy. To gain better understanding of the current socio-economic scenario of northern Portugal, the strategic opinions and domains and the approach to regional branding (if any) the current strategic regional planning documents are further analysed.

Regarding regional economic, social and political constraints and limitations the interviewees have commented that despite recent cyclical recovery, a series of deep-rooted regional economic, social and political constraints and limitations prevails in northern Portugal, as in other Portuguese regions (IN 1, 2, 9, 15). The current regional economic, social and political constraints and limitations are structural in their nature (IN 4, 11, 12, 16).

In economic and social terms - the globalization of the economy and trade, the depreciation of exports (IN 10, 15), together with pressing economic and social challenges linger against the backdrop of fiscal austerity (following the government's efforts to bring the budget deficit back in

line with the EU Stability Pact) have dramatically impacted the regional economic scenario, various interviewees argued (IN 3, 5, 6). The region has been suffering with the impacts of the economic and financial crises and current register high unemployment rate, lower purchasing power and depopulation, states IN 2, 7, 8, 10, 11, 12. Northern Portugal currently has the lowest local/municipal purchasing power of the country, argues IN 9, and only the municipalities of Braga and the Metropolitan Area of Porto/Área Metropolitana do Porto stands above the national average. According to Statistics Portugal (INE, 2013b), 7 out of 10 municipalities with the lowest purchasing power per capita were located in northern Portugal (70 per cent). Structural challenges are also related to the specialization of the labour force (IN 9, 15). The low-skilled workforce (IN 12) associated with traditional industry (for example textile, clothing, and footwear) characterize the image of northern Portugal (IN 1, 4, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16).

In political terms - the adoption of a centralized approach to government and public administration, quintessentially top-down in terms of spatial planning, had blocked the application of the subsidiarity principle to regions, stated the interviewee 15. CCDRN, interviewed twice for the purpose of this study, one interview more technically-oriented (IN 1) and a second one politically-oriented (IN 2), has been losing its political intervention capacity and has difficulties in attracting investment for northern Portugal (IN 2, 10, 11). This has been justified as other institutions often set off and lead investment attraction initiatives”, argues the interviewee number 2, such as the AICEP (Portugal Global - Trade and Investment Agency) and IAPMEI (Agency for Competitiveness and Innovation). These together with a heavy bureaucracy for example in terms of investment implementation of infra-structure development, a weak judiciary system, fiscal instability, and weak or non-existent decision-making capacity and leadership at the regional level, have been identified as the key political/public administrative constrains (IN 13, 9, 10, 15).

The interviewees hold favourable opinions regarding a potential regional branding initiative integrated as an instrument in strategic regional planning by arguing that it could be an effective path to bring regional actors together. In addition, a regional brand could align municipal interests and place promotional initiatives at the municipal and inter-municipal levels. As a regional strategy would be the roller or would dictate the spatial strategies would open way for a shared regional branding strategy. CCDRN, universities, inter-municipal communities and municipalities must be involved in any regional branding process. The private sector from the identified strategic domains (Figure 5.2.) must also share their ideas towards a northern Portugal brand.

Northern Portugal is only supported in terms of regional planning, development and cohesion by the CCDRN and recently by the inter-municipal communities. CCDRN is charged to execute, at the level of the NUTS II-Northern region, the policies of regional and urban development, environment, territorial management, nature and biodiversity conservation, sustainable use of natural resources, urban requalification, regional strategic planning. In line with these tasks, CCDRN is also responsible for the elaboration and correct implementation of the:

- (a) Regional Spatial Plan (PROT) (see CCDRN, 2009);
- (b) Northern Portugal Strategic Guidelines/Operational Programme 2014-2020 (see CCDRN, 2014d);

- (c) Northern Portugal Smart Specialization Strategy 2014-2020 (see CCDRN, 2014f);
- (d) And, among others regional promotional initiatives, is also responsible for the initiative “Be Smart. Go Norte” (or in English – “Be Smart. Go Northern Portugal”) (see CCDRN, 2015b).

Despite the self-claimed strategic nature of the above mentioned documents, I acknowledge that these strategic planning documents do not follow strictly what Albrechts (2010a, 2010c), Albrechts and Balducci (2013) and Healey *et al.* (1999), Healey (2007, 2009) consider as strategic spatial plans. However as they are the only documents in force at present, I have decided proceeding with the analysis as I did in chapter 3 of this thesis. The details of the data collection are further presented.

5.7. Analysis of the current strategic regional planning documents

The Regional Spatial Plan (CCDRN, 2009) defines the organizational model of the territory of northern Portugal, by establishing the structure of the urban systems, infrastructure networks and equipment of regional interest. In addition, it defines the objectives and principles to be considered in the location of activities and large public investment, regional policy on the environment, and the guidelines and directives for the spatial regional territory. It is a strategic document that defines the basis for regional development, such as the options to support regional cohesion, competitiveness and sustainability of the natural resources and landscape (p. 2). Despite that the document does not refer directly to regional branding there are references to the:

- Protection of regional products, and the territories where they are produced (p. 16);
- Protection of Port Wine as a world-class product brand (p. 16);
- Developing a regional agenda for the tourism sector, thus enhancing and give visibility to the region as tourist destination by relying on the destination brand – “Porto and The North” (p. 202);

This is an important strategic document for the region and one can argue that it is an important starting point for the integration of a regional branding strategy as an instrument in regional planning. A regional brand, could, thus give visibility to the spatial interventions programmed in the document and communicate, in a consistent and effective way, the region strategic domains to the region and beyond. Moreover, the planning document could be used to align all regional actors in the same regional brand story line. Having said these is important to acknowledge that each municipality can elaborate their own city brands – as the document identities the Municipal Master Plans as the instrument to support place marketing (p. 150). Following Zenker and Jacobsen (2015) argument – a regional brand does not have to eliminate city brands but it could work as an umbrella brand and give to them a regional meaning.

In the Northern Portugal Strategic Guidelines/Operational Programme 2014-2020 – regional branding and regional marketing are absent concepts. The document acknowledged the “Incapacity of the region to retain visitors and the absence of a regional promotional strategy” as one of the

weak points of the region (p. 27). The document also identifies the key strategic domains and regional qualities in which northern Portugal excel (which goes in line with those signalled in Figure 5.3). Despite that tourism is identified as one of the key domains there are no references, strangely, to the flagship destination brand – “Porto and The North - The essence of Portugal.” The document, being strategic at the regional level, offers a profound analysis that could effectively support the integration of a regional branding strategy as an instrument to support the visionary realignments fostering economic restructuring, social inclusion and cohesion, political engagement and participation, the reinforcement of regional identification, and the general long-term well-being of the citizens.

The Northern Portugal Smart Specialization Strategy 2014-2020 (CCDRN, 2014f), a document that offers a thorough analysis to enhance regional competitiveness and positioning, only seldom refers to regional promotion. The document acknowledges the need to reinforce the marketing strategies to boost tourism products and services worldwide (p. 114), only.

The regional promotional initiative - “Be Smart. Go Norte” (or in English - Be Smart. Go Northern Portugal) seems to have emerged to support the Smart Specialization Strategy 2014-20, however, that document does not refer this potential regional branding attempt. This initiative, aims to position the region as a “smart region” – a region that offers “smart business” as well as “smart people”, mirroring the investments in research and development in the past years, this combined with a “smart lifestyle”. Altogether makes northern Portugal a “smart location”, to invest, to visit, to study and to live (see CCDRN, 2015b). Arguable, there is nothing wrong with this aims, however, it seems another promotional campaign yet disarticulated with the abovementioned documents. This is in line with the work by Oliveira (2015b) who argues that there is in Portugal and its regions a “cacophony of taglines (sometimes mutually exclusive) and place promotion approaches without coherent integration and alignment between the different tiers of government” (p. 40).

5.8. Theoretical framework applied to the case study on northern Portugal

Applying the theoretical propositions to the presented case study is possible to argue that northern Portugal holds its region-specific qualities/key-strategic domains. One can also conclude, in line with the key remarks of previous chapters and other statistical indicators explored in chapter 6, that the region is currently facing social and economic imbalances and other territorial struggles that a regional brand could contribute to solve. The theoretical framework (Figure 5.1.) was tested based on the key findings of the case study. In the centre of the framework – Northern Portugal regional branding strategy integrated as an instrument in strategic regional planning – surrounded by six sectors/vectors (Figure 5.3.).

The key-strategic domains (i) as well as the current socio-economic and political constrains (ii) are identified and linked to the possibility of the regional brand would support investment attraction, regional strategies to support local business thus support job creation, by linking key strategic domains with the demand needs. To face the drawback of weak lobbying capacity and communicative power to implement structural change (iii) a regional brand would support the communication of ongoing structural changes and would give visibility and notoriety to the region (internally and externally). Regarding the key regional actors, experts and organizations that must be

involved in a potential regional branding initiative the interviews identified CCDRN as having the means to lead a potential regional branding strategy. However, the Regional Entity of Tourism of Porto and Northern Portugal as well as the universities and research units of the region must be integrated in the design of a potential regional branding strategy (iv) and synergies with research centres explored.

To harmonize different interests through civic and institution participation, as well as a perfect coordination with the inter-municipal communities and the 86 municipalities, is needed so a regional brand for northern Portugal would be able to support a strategic change, thus create an agreed vision for the future of the region (v). The effects of the current socio-economic scenario seem to have impacted the confidence of the inhabitants in the region's future, the interviews argued (vi). At this level, a regional branding initiative would boost regional identity by focusing in regional unique qualities (tangible and intangible elements).

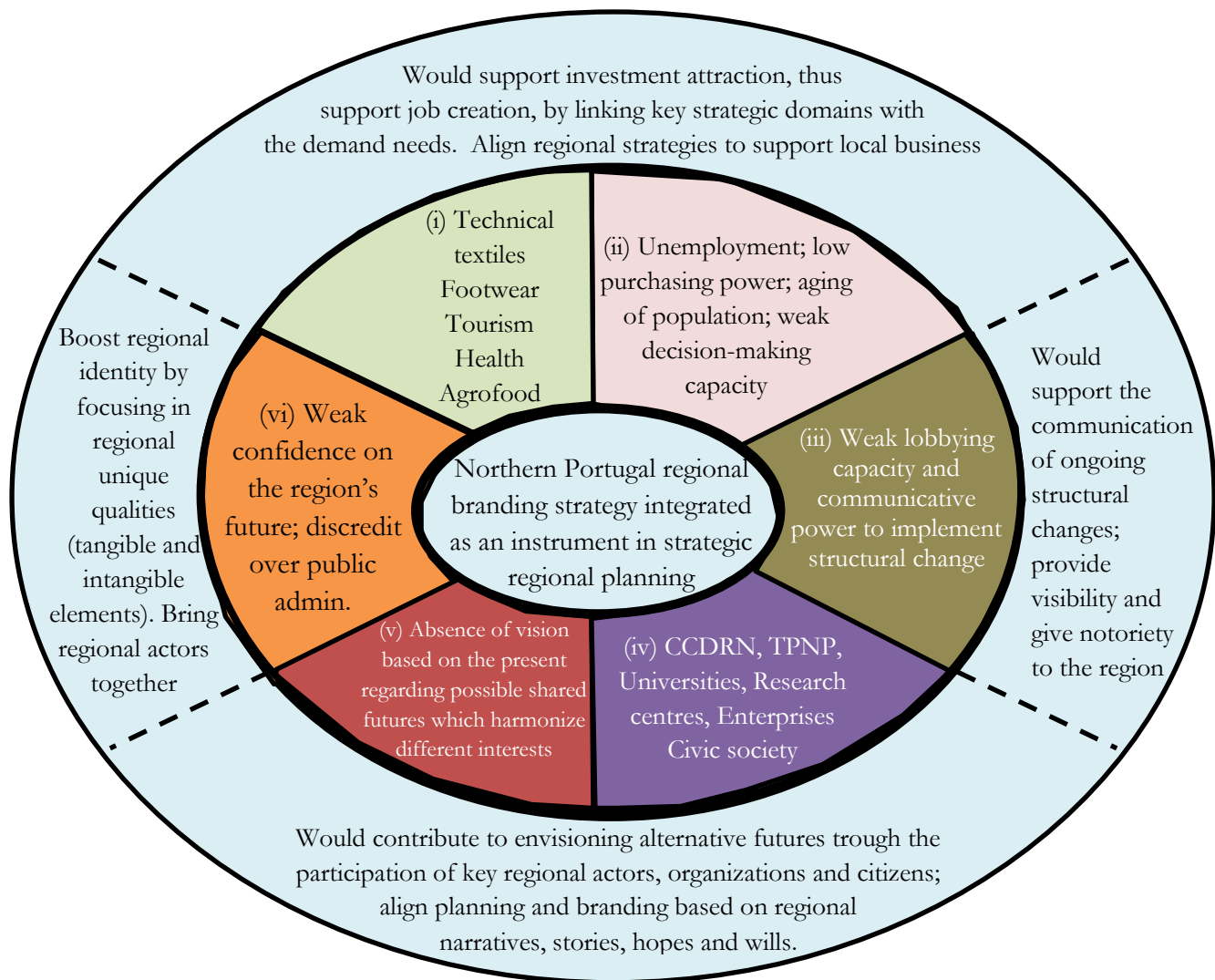


Figure 5.3. Theoretical framework of the study applied to the empirical case.

Source: own design based on Figure 5.1.

This conclusion aims at pointing the ways in which branding, as a strategic planning instrument (as a means), could improve the socio-spatial and spatial-economic conditions (the end). The above discussion is put forward here in the hope that it might steer an interest in the alignment of a potential place branding strategy, independently of the scale of application, and wider spatial planning strategies, and lead to further searches for additional links. This search might lay the foundations of a radical approach towards place branding and strategic spatial planning theory and practice. The purpose of next chapter (chapter 6) is to explore a potential regional branding strategy for the northern part of Portugal, emphasizing one of the key-strategic domains identified in this chapter - tourism.