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Place Branding

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Geographies of affect: In search of the emotional dimension of place branding

Abstract

Emotion is becoming one of the most important assets for the development of a strategy of place branding, with the primary aim of projecting competitive spatial identities through the use of brands. Despite this, few studies have focused on defining the role played by emotion in the affective connection that is established between people and places in the context of a place branding initiative. Consequently, the main goal of this article is to define a possible emotional dimension of place branding, by performing a meta-analysis and employing the contributions of emotional geography, environmental psychology and non-representational theory.

Keywords

Place branding, emotional geography, environmental psychology, non-representational theory, sense of place.

1. Introduction

In geography, the so-called ‘emotional turn’ has generated two basic trends in the study of the relationship between emotions and places. On the one hand, attention is given to the study of the spatialities of emotion, in order to be able to draw up a ‘spatio-emotional hermeneutics,’ given that “emotions are understandable –‘sensible’– only in the context of particular places” (Davidson & Milligan, 2004, p. 524). However, for the specific purposes of this work we are interested in focusing on the study of the second main approach to emotional geography: the analysis of the emotionality of space, understanding emotion as an element of the constitution and particularisation of places, in which the relational variable, i.e., the interaction between subjects and spaces, has an undeniable part to play. In this respect, Davidson *et al.* (2007, p. 3) hold that “an emotional geography, then, attempts to understand emotion –experientially and conceptually– in terms of its socio-*spatial* mediation and

articulation rather than as entirely interiorised subjective mental states.” This line of work has focused basically on studying emotions located in space, and exploring the representational possibilities of the affectivity of place.

For its part, place branding is, according to Govers and Go (2009, p. 32), “the creation of a strategic brand identity based on a place’s main active value (identity) with the aim of subsequently placing it on the market by optimising the main passive value (image).” It is currently consolidating itself as one of the strategies with most repercussion in the projection of singular spatial identities, where the variable ‘emotion’ plays a critical role in the attempt to establish an emotional connection between people and places (Kavaratzis, 2005; Kavaratzis & Hatch, 2013). The practice of place branding should be based on three fundamental instances: place identity, place image and the consumer experience in the place (Govers & Go, 2009, p. 32). Emotional geography seeks to explain this issue from a non-deterministic point of view, i.e., through the emotional influence of spatial contexts and ecologies of place, its particular configurations and structural relationships (Thrift, 1999).

Many authors point out that the place branding literature has dealt essentially with the analysis of either the main case studies or specific research areas (Govers & Go, 2009; Moilanen & Rainisto, 2009; Ashworth & Kavaratzis, 2009; Anholt, 2010; San Eugenio, 2012). However, other aspects, related to space-induced emotionalisation through strategic place branding campaigns or to individual and/or group interaction / experience with places or their images, have been notably neglected. This has impeded the improvement of the management of human interaction in expressive environments, that is, the management of the feelings and/or emotions implicit in any place branding strategy (Govers & Go, 2009, p. 134). Furthermore, in the opinion of several authors (Anholt, 2010; Kavaratzis & Hatch, 2013; Campelo, 2015), nowadays the strategy of place branding constitutes one of the most important economies of space, especially with regard to the exploitation and subsequent management of the geographical intangible (Johansson & Cornebise, 2010). It also represents a natural evolution of the previous techniques of place promotion and place marketing, as will be explained in later sections of this article (van Ham, 2008; Hankinson, 2010).

The relevance of studying emotion as a variable of a global place branding strategy is justified if we observe the way in which the emotion implicit in a place is used for commercial purposes to attract not only tourists but also companies, talent and investment. The goal pursued is to delimit a new working context in which the emotion of spaces, in some cases channelled through marketing, branding and communication processes, becomes a crucial element for decision making (Gobé, 2009). Thus, the transformation of locations into consumer spaces induces the emergence of the emotional factor inherent in spatialisation (Aronoff, 2006; Colm-Hogan, 2010). Therefore, the pleasure associated with these places is derived from the consumption of goods and services that in one way or another represent those places. Through the consumption of goods and services, the place becomes something experiential.

Even taking into account the obvious emotional implications of the deployment of a place branding strategy, this has been a practically unexplored aspect in the ample literature that deals with the link between brands and places¹ (Govers & Go, 2009; Baker, 2012). Neither has geography tackled the emotional implications implicit in a place branding strategy, although there are a few studies that link geography with place branding (Pike, 2009). Nevertheless, there is a significant gap in studies on the relationship between emotion and place branding, which is surprising if we bear in mind that one of the fundamental pillars on which place branding rests is the creation of a story that awakens an emotion or affection towards a place (place emotional storytelling). Thus, we can consider the technique of place branding as a present-day spatial-affective economy (Ahmed, 2004), insofar as “brands capture and project the emotion of places” (Gobé, 2009). Furthermore, in the words of Baker (2012), “one of the most overlooked, yet most powerful component in the branding of places is the role of

¹ Referring to the sphere of place promotion, Bennett (2013, p. 1) states: “Emotion is everywhere in place promotion.”

emotional benefits.” In fact, the term ‘emotional’ refers to the way in which a brand establishes deeper, more lasting relationships with people (Gobé, 2009).

This article, which is intended as a continuation of the research initiated by Bennett (2013) in the field of emotion in place promotion, will propose introspection towards the emotional dimension of place branding. Consequently, the main aim of this work is to identify two approaches (one cognitive and the other non-cognitive) to conducting research into the emotional dimension of place branding. To this end, we will detail some of the contributions from environmental psychology, cultural geography, emotional geography and non-representational theory.

The chosen methodology was that of meta-analysis (Lipsey and Wilson, 2001), understood as a process of systematic and organised review of the literature. In the opinion of Borenstein *et al.* (2009), meta-analysis allows greater understanding and breadth of the phenomena under study; it affords a less biased view than a simple literature review, as it incorporates the vision of more than one author; and lastly, it is a more transparent and replicable process. In this respect, meta-analysis provides an organised literature review for the purpose of answering specific research questions. Our review of the literature –conducted by means of meta-analysis– was founded on hermeneutics; that is, with the basic idea of analysing, interpreting and relating contributions from different thematic areas (geography and psychology, among others), in order to arrive at an intersection of “knowledge” that allows us to define a path for analysing the emotional component of any place branding strategy.

The article starts with an introduction that seeks to pinpoint the interests of the present work, which lie essentially at the intersection of emotion with place branding. Then we present the terms *image*, *brand*, *identity* and *authenticity*, which are crucial for the development of the proposal set forth here. Next we give a very brief account of the evolution of the persuasive-emotional strategies that have been projected onto places over the last 25 years, from yesterday’s promotion to today’s place branding. At this point we outline some key contributions from environmental psychology, with the aim of exploring a possible emotional dimension for place brands. The next section of the article examines in depth the emotional variable of place brands, considering their possibilities as a present-day spatial economy of an emotional nature. The article concludes with the pertinent conclusions.

2. The starting point: image, brand, identity and authenticity

Image should be understood as the sum of the beliefs, ideas and impressions that a person has of a place, according to Crompton (1979) and Kotler, Haider and Rein (1993). In the same way, the image of a place is conceived as a mental and social construction, on the basis of the knowledge, impressions and values that accumulate on a geographical area.

In turn, Riezebos (2003) considers that the brand is a network of knowledge elements that are installed in the memory over the long term. The core that gives meaning to that network lies in the name assigned to the brand, which is linked to other knowledge and meanings. Indeed, the brand becomes a multidimensional construct with a position midway between the functional and emotional values of an organisation and/or place –the addition of ‘place’ here is ours– and consumers’ psychosocial needs (De Chernatony & Dall’Olmo Riley, 1998). From the consumers’ point of view, one of the most relevant brand-related concepts is that of brand image. For Dobni & Zinkhan (1990) (cited by De Chernatony & Dall’Olmo Riley, 1998), brand image is a phenomenon of a subjective and perceptual nature, formed by means of a reasoned or emotional interpretation of the brand by the consumer. In this new millennium, the power of brands is no longer justified by what they are, but rather by what they are supposed to be. In this way, in the 21st century, numerous powerful corporations have put seduction, brands and branding at the centre of their world (Olins, 2003).

Another critical point is to delimit what is authentic and what is unauthentic, what is the original and what is the copy, in the postmodern society of today (Nogué & Albet, 2007). Tourism is an excellent laboratory for experimentation in this regard (Eco, 1986; Wang, 1999; MacCannell, 1999; Urry, 2004). Wang (1999) refers to the search for a symbolic authenticity, resulting from a social construction, to the detriment of an objective authenticity, understood as the most faithful representation possible of existing reality. Therefore, authenticity is not determined by its degree of correspondence with reality, but by an authentic perception of the signs and symbols consumed by users. This implies a deconstruction of authenticity, which means conceiving manifest inauthenticity, the explicit pastiche, with total naturalness. We are talking, then, of a 'theatrical authenticity' (Wang, 1999) or 'staged authenticity' (MacCannell, 1999). Urry (2004) holds that the tourist's gaze is willing to incorporate induced and staged 'authenticities' consciously for the sake of his or her consumption and enjoyment. Camprubí (2009) states that authenticity lies halfway between identity (the way we are) and tourist image (the way we are seen).

In this regard, Knudsen and Waade (2010) locate the crossroads between place and emotion in the context of authenticity. Specifically, they use the term 'performative authenticity' to refer to a reinvented authenticity, understood as a channel of intense experience, or to an economy of signs and feelings built halfway between the contribution of social constructivism and phenomenology "in which meanings and feelings of self and place are both constructed and lived through the sensuous body" (Knudsen & Waade, 2010, p. 1). In this way, in line with Thrift (2008), authenticity would no longer consist in objectively determining the qualities of objects and places, but in experiencing places through the body, performance, management and media. Authenticity becomes a feeling that can be achieved.

This 'reinvention' of authenticity takes place, in many cases, through the transformation of places into brands, making it possible to live a new affectivity of place, conceived as a typology of thought, connecting bodies to the world (Thrift, 2008). So, again following Thrift (2004) and Knudsen and Waade (2010), the mediatised nature of places (in this case through place branding strategies) would enable the body to appropriate and live places sensually, thus increasing the sensation of authenticity in the observer.

Having defined, then, the concepts of image, brand, identity and authenticity, let us now go on to take a look at how the range of promotion, marketing and now branding strategies launched on places have evolved.

3. The evolution of emotional strategies applied to places: from place promotion to place branding

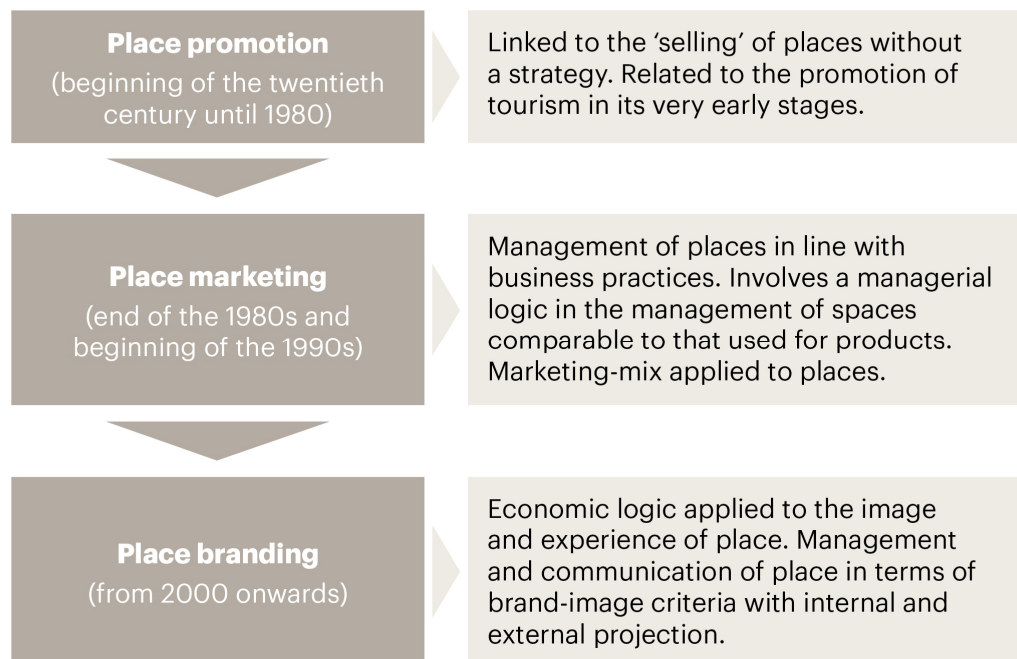
Place promotion typically consists in applying a communication technique intended solely and exclusively for the simplistic commercialisation of the singularity associated with a particular space. For this reason, the terms 'place promotion' and 'place selling' have many affinities, on a shared foundation of sale of space, as used for the last 150 years (Ashworth & Voogd, 1994). Place promotion can be defined, according to Gold and Ward (1994), as the conscious use of communication and marketing to convey selective images, or specific geographical locations or areas, to a particular audience.

Historically, this technique has been linked to public management, and in this regard, tourist promotion has been at the forefront of place promotion, which is usually identified with the use of stereotypes and clichés, i.e., an unplanned use of communication and practically no implications regarding management. Gold and Ward (1994) trace the origins of place promotion to just after the crisis undergone by industry in the second half of the 20th century. In this context, the services sector and, even more so, the emergence of a new industry linked to leisure and free time –capitalised on by tourist activity– represents a market area amply exploited by post-industrial societies (Rainisto, 2003).

The application of marketing strategies to places is considered by many authors (Kotler & Gertner, 2002; Rainisto, 2003; Avraham & Ketter, 2008) to be a direct consequence of globalisation. It serves to relaunch the image and positioning of countries, cities and regions in a context of strong competition on a global scale, in which management of the projected and perceived image is of paramount importance. Competition between places to attract tourists, infrastructure or talent, among other attributes, equates space with a product that needs a customer-oriented strategy in order to attain market share (Ownbey, 2017). Indeed, Ashworth & Voogd (1994) hold that the transition from place promotion to place marketing occurs due to the simple fact that the administration of the place obeys new economic –and therefore market– logics. In this respect, in an increasingly competitive territorial context there is a conscious commitment to marketing, not as a possible solution to spatial planning problems but as a philosophy for place management (Kotler & Gertner, 2002).

The transition from place marketing to place branding occurs, according to Anholt (2010), due to the need to emphasise the brand as a device for differentiation and positioning in certain places, integrated within an overall marketing process. In effect, in the author's opinion, the management of places (countries, regions, cities, etc.) with brand criteria –originating essentially from the corporate sphere– becomes a metaphor for understanding in what way places can compete more effectively in modern times. For Kavatzis and Ashworth (2005), the shift from place marketing to place branding occurs when corporate branding logics begin to apply to the management and communication of place. In this case, place marketing can be a starting point for the study of place branding.

Figure 1. Relational evolution of place emotion strategies. Source: compiled by the authors based on San Eugenio *et al.* (2012).



In addition, in the field of place branding emphasis is placed on the emotional component (Kavatzis & Hatch, 2013), understanding emotion as a crucial element for channelling human experience of places, “as a point of engaging with the world of emotions” (Wood &

Smith, 2004). Place branding, in this context, becomes an element of the spatiality of feelings. In this way, we can consider the technique of branding applied to geographical areas as a form of negotiation of feelings (embodied subjectivities), in the context of a particular representation of places. This is very similar to the concept of ‘performance’ (Thrift, 2000) and therefore also close to non-representational geography, or to a manifest statement of the affectivity of place. Thus, we can consider the technique of place branding as a place performance, the main aim of which is to maximise the emotional relationship between self and places, and to clearly manifest the “emotionally dynamic spatiality of contemporary social life,” in the words of Davidson and Bondi (2004).

In any event, it is necessary to distance oneself from corporate and/or commercial logics with regard to the application of place branding strategies, as dealing with people and places requires much more complex management than that found in the market sphere, which is far more controllable and segmentable (Govers & Go, 2009; Anholt, 2010).

4. Cultural and emotional geography and place branding: a tentative approach

Nash (2010, p. 654) holds that cultural geography has been strongly influenced in recent years by two main elements: “on the one hand, developing a new theoretical vocabulary of performance and, on the other, exploring the imaginative and material geographies of cultural performativity and embodiment.” This involves the transition from a cultural geography focused more on the material and symbolic towards a new approach that is more interested in analysing practices and images, the economics and politics of places, cultural practices, discourses and products. In the words of Nash (2010, p. 654): “I want to consider here what is to be gained from the metaphorical and substantive turn from ‘text’ and representations, to performance and practices.”

On the whole, cultural geography initiates a stage of ‘cross-disciplinary traffic’, to quote Nash (2010), which entails, among other new developments, incorporating the concept of performativity. For Butler (1997), performativity “is an attempt to find a more embodied way of rethinking the relationships between determining social structures and personal agency.” In this way, the concept of performativity and bodily practices establishes a direct link with non-representational theory, which in the opinion of Thrift (1997, p. 26–27) “is not a project concerned with representation and meaning, but with the performative ‘presentations,’ ‘showings’ and manifestations of everyday life.” Therefore, the emphasis is on practices that cannot be explained, words that cannot be grasped, something that transcends the merely cognitive.

In any event, the shift of place branding towards the ‘new’ cultural geography, with a post-cognitive focus, would occur on the basis of the definition that Thrift (1996, p. 10) offers in connection with non-representational theory: “non-representational theory is concerned with the ways in which subjects know the world without knowing it, the ‘inarticulate understanding’ or ‘practical intelligibility’ of an ‘unformulated practical grasp of the world.’”

For its vision, conception and sensory experience ‘of’ and ‘with’ places, we understand the current strategy of place branding as a performative proposal that involves an embodiment of people with places. This provides a microgeography that addresses the cognitive (physical emotion with places, explained in terms of environmental psychology) but also the post-cognitive (with the affect implied in the sensory exploration of a particular place, based on performativity and non-representational theory). This is how place branding in many cases entails the deconstruction of the traditional representations of places and comes to address an interesting intersection between representation, living and sensory experience with places. Place branding therefore becomes an alternative and contemporary cultural practice, midway between representation, discourse, the material and the immaterial, and undeniably beyond the mere representation of places.

Thus the 'new' cultural geography is particularly interested in the so-called 'geography of performance', laden with images, symbols and icons prepared for their subsequent interpretation, at the expense of a previous stage of cultural geography more interested in description (Lorimer, 2007). The taste for the visual and the aesthetic from the perspective of cultural geography is reinforced by Scott (2014), who refers to the emergence of a new 'cognitive-cultural capital' that follows post-Fordism and is characterised by creative representations of space. It is seen as a direct response to the preeminence of a contemporary capitalism that prioritises a new economy based on symbolic identities managed by brands (Scott, 2014).

Equally, we understand a possible geographical dimension of place branding, from the reading afforded by the 'new' cultural geography, in terms of the interest generated by a renovated approach to place, beyond the traditional romantic gaze and in the framework of the traditional tension between reality and representation. In the opinion of Hansen and Machin (2013), it is essential to analyse contexts (communicative, historical and cultural) and processes (production, content and consumption) in order to understand present-day visual consumption of the environment.

Today's management of the imaginaries of places, the interaction between perception and imagination and the production of spatial meanings, among others, bring us to the concept of 'geographicity of symbol' (Backaus, 2009). This is akin to what Rose (1999) and Wylie (2007) call 'geography of performance', i.e., the generation of socio-cultural cognitive formations.

Backaus (2009) considers that emphasis on the study of performances, understood as contributions of expression in the world, can represent an important trend in cultural geography, closely related to a geography of the imagination. Thus, the transformation of aspects attributable to nature into consumable cultural products through innovative branding techniques is to be seen in the framework of interest of cultural geography, and in particular, the cultural consumption of geographical spaces, into which a specific meaning is imbued (Porter, 2013; Kavartzis & Kalandides, 2015).

5. Decrypting the intersection between place branding and emotion: the contribution of environmental psychology

The 'emotional turn' in geography has adopted, in some cases, the idea of 'affectivity', which indicates a particular interest in the intersubjective aspect of emotional experiences and the fields of affectivity they create (Thien, 2005; Pile, 2010). This concept stresses the "how of emotion" (Thien, 2005, p. 450). It is with this in mind, with the aim of determining "how emotion is produced" in the field of place branding, that we will analyse the cognitive, affective and conative variants resulting from the individual experience of places, based on the subject-environment relationship. In short, we want to determine in what way the emotional connection with places is generated from the point of view of individual direct experience of geographical space. For this reason, with regard to perceived space, we shall adopt the explanatory model developed by Halfacree² (2006, 2007) called the 'three-fold model of space', designed to differentiate materiality, representation and imagination in the relationship that the individual establishes with geographical space. Thus, we will use contributions from environmental psychology to propose a possible emotional dimension of place branding, since interdisciplinarity and even transdisciplinarity in the study of the intersection between space and emotion have proved to be effective. This is shown, for example, in the connection established between geography and psychotherapy by Bondi

² The model developed by Halfacree (2006, 2007) is inspired by Lefebvre's work *The Production of Space* (1991). The author refers to three models for dealing with space: spatial practices (actions, flows and interactions with space); representations of space (formal, objective and geometric conception of space); and lastly, spaces of representation (directly lived space).

(2005). According to Valera (2018), “environmental psychology” is concerned with analysing the relationship between the aspects of physical space and spatial behaviour, as well as studying how people adapt to environmental variables. Equally, this branch of psychology is also interested in the ways in which citizens access environmental knowledge.

As mentioned above, the approach taken by Halfacree (2006, 2007) is of interest especially for its ‘representational space’ model. This model puts forward a possible reading and interpretation of spaces directly lived by individuals, and also of the symbolism, images and meanings associated with this physical experience of places. It is linked, then, with perceived space, the vernacular places symbolically appropriated by their users (Halfacree, 2006, p. 51). We are interested, therefore, in considering places from the perspective of their users’ consumption.

With the aim of determining the emotional experience of place and its cognitive and phenomenological implications, and in order to specify the meanings that users attribute to their lived spaces, several authors (Gustafson, 2001; Jorgensen & Stedman, 2006; Lewicka, 2008; Soini *et al.*, 2012) propose an introspection towards the construction of sense of place on the basis of five main aspects: place identity, place attachment, place dependency, place memory and place satisfaction. They are all regularly shown to contribute to a consumer’s relationship with place. Let us see their meanings and implications below.

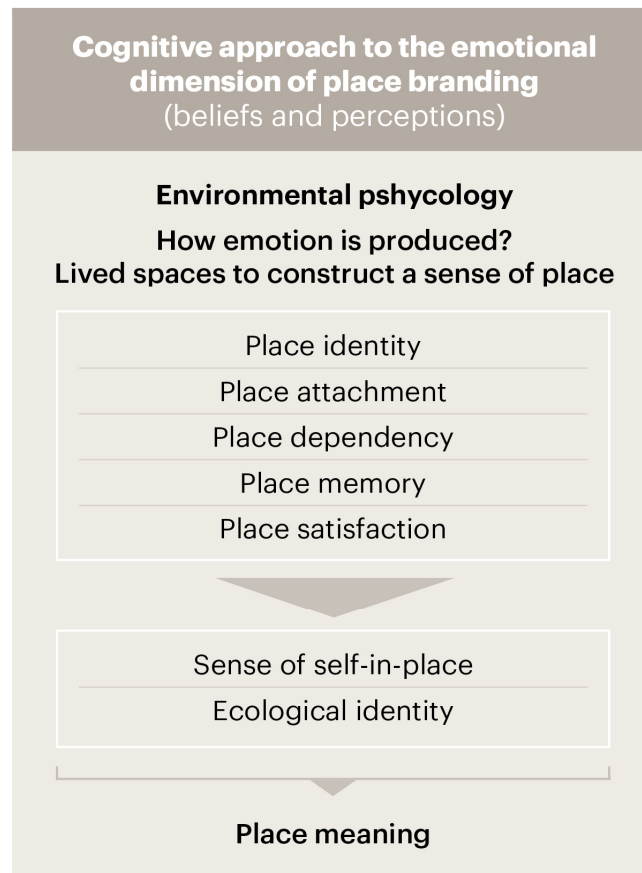
The interest in exploring the emotional-cognitive and phenomenological dimension of place branding lies in the need to seek, within the concrete or ideal, the typical or essential feature of phenomena (Merleau-Ponty, 1974). Seamon (1982) laid the foundations of the phenomenological treatment of space. The approach is not to explain the cause-and-effect relationship but rather to understand the experience, a principle that is close to non-representational theory (Thrift, 2008). In this way, three of the most prominent areas of phenomenological treatment can be applied to a place branding strategy: a) the nature of human experience in one’s relationship with the environment; b) the nature of the geographical world, which incorporates an element of human meaning (lived space, landscape and place); and c) the phenomenological study of person-environment nature in terms of being-in-the-world. Phenomenology, then, is transferable to the implementation of the place branding technique on the basis of two fundamental variables: the aspects of environmental experience and behaviour, and the person-environment relationship considering that the person is inseparable from his or her world.

First of all, let us consider *place identity*, which involves the intervention of the environment in an overall context of building social identities. This can be viewed, to some extent, as a spatial social identity (Valera & Pol, 1994; Jorgensen & Stedman, 2006). The uniqueness of a place should in no way be confused with the personal identity related to that place. Droseltis and Vignoles (2010) identify four main conceptions linked to the identity of geographical space. Firstly, there is the notion of self, in which places are understood to form part of the cognitive experience of our individuality, our self. Secondly, the authors talk of an ‘ecological self,’ related to an identity-based vision of the environment, whereby individuals develop a subjective sense of fitting into a physical environment. A third line of analysis is linked to the concordance between self and place, i.e., the degree of similarity established between the place, the values and the personality of the individual. The fourth and last approach refers to the concept of place identity, related to the emotional bonds that the individual establishes with places (Lewicka, 2008).

This leads on to the concept of *place attachment*, which is defined, in general terms, as an affective, cognitive and behavioural bond or link between individuals and certain places (Low & Altman, 1992; Giuliani & Feldman, 1993; Hidalgo & Hernández, 2001). In turn, *place dependency* is understood as “the importance an individual attaches to the use of a particular recreation resource” (Jacob & Schreyer, 1980, p. 373). Lewicka (2008) adds the concept of *place memory*, defined as a social memory built on the basis of lived individual and collective

recollections and experiences that ultimately characterise a certain place. Lastly, Soini *et al.* (2012) incorporate one more component into the variables that make up the sense of place: *satisfaction*. This is defined as “the utilitarian value of a place to meet certain basic needs” (Stedman, 2002).

Figure 2. The critical variables of the emotional dimension of place branding from a cognitive view. Source: Authors’ own elaboration.



The treatment of the cognitive (beliefs and perceptions), affective (emotions and feelings) and conative (intentions and behavioural commitments) dimensions of place branding brings us to the need to determine the logics whereby individuals attribute meaning to places (Gustafson, 2001). Therefore, we should refer to ‘environmental meaning,’ which Corraliza (1998, p. 59) defines in these terms: “Environmental meaning is the set of contents that enables the subject to understand what a place is for him or her.” The first level of this overall interaction with the environment is lived in terms of personal assessment, likewise overall and of the environment as a whole.

Psychologists define environmental meaning as the background response that lies at the foundation of other effective responses such as actions or intended actions. Thus, the process of attributing meaning is the basis on which the emotional experience of a place stands. “The environment is an emotional territory,” stated Ittelson (1973). And this is another of the key aspects for approaching the study of place branding from an emotional-phenomenological point of view, especially with regard to the construction of a strategic/premeditated sense of place through the use of brands and the cognitive contrast existing between physical

experience and vicarious experience of places. Furthermore, by interpreting signs of informative value present in the environment, the subject is able to understand the place, and ultimately to fix his or her degree of interest and involvement in that same environment. This highlights the pertinence of considering environmental psychology (from a cognitive, humanistic and rhetorical perspective) as a decoding element for the emotional component implicit in any place branding strategy.

6. The emotionality of place branding: spatiality of affect and performativity

We will analyse the emotionality inherent in any place branding strategy through two main contributions. The first is the concept of performative authenticity, which as we will see below, represents an approach to affectedness as a way of thinking, to the incorporation of meanings and feelings resulting from self-place interaction, constructed and lived through the sensuous body (Knudsen & Waade, 2010). This brings us into contact with the 'spatiality of feeling' and the principles of non-representational theory beyond the cognitive dimension of self-experience with places (Thrift, 2004).

Secondly, we will deal with the cognitive and phenomenological dimension of place branding as addressed above through the contribution of environmental psychology. On this occasion, we will approach individual experience as a sensory and emotional encounter with places. To this end, we will recover the concepts *sense of self-in-place* (Cantrill, 2004; Cantrill & Senecah, 2001) and *ecological identity* (Thomashow, 1996), which from our point of view will be fundamental for proposing a possible emotional dimension of place branding.

As regards the relationship between place branding and emotion, it is important to bear in mind that the branding of products, services, corporations and places defines brand value, among other variables, according to its capacity to arouse feelings and emotions among its target audience (Gobé, 2009). This is what Gobé (2009) considers to be a new paradigm of brand communication based on 'emotional branding'. Therefore, the emotional connection between brands and people allows a holistic approach to social wishes and desires, and achieves a feeling of wellbeing that becomes central to the process of purchasing a particular brand (Riezebos, 2003).

Similarly, the emotion implicit in any place branding strategy lies first of all in the study of self-place interaction, which has been explored through the contributions of environmental psychology. In addition to implications of a cognitive and phenomenological nature, Lash and Lury (2007) refer to an evolution from the symbolic to the real as a direct result of globalisation. This implies a transition from representational realism to a presentational logic called *indexical authenticity*³, which Knudsen and Waade (2010, p. 7-8) understand as "a general inhuman, or trans-human, framework through which bodies are connected to each other and to the world."

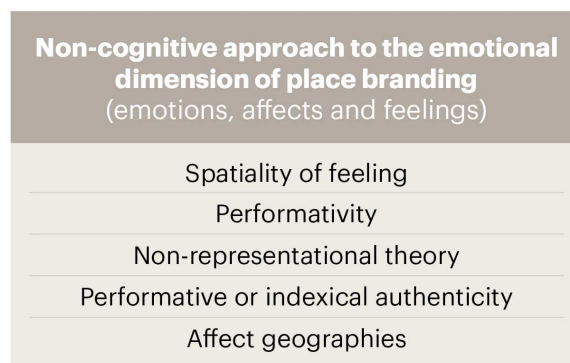
The affective connection with the world through media representations, which may include place branding strategies, encourage an emotional investment and linkage between people and places. The resulting subjective authenticity is focused on the interior of the individual and his or her relationship with a place (intensity of feeling, degree of involvement, etc.), as an alternative to an objective authenticity (Knudsen & Waade, 2010). Furthermore, the decoding of the emotion implicit in a place is measured through a reinvented authenticity, now channelled through mediatised place representation strategies (Knudsen & Waade, 2010). In this context, the emotionality implicit in a place branding strategy would be understood as a mediation technique that encourages a phenomenological relationship between body and place through performative practices favouring mediation with places (Thrift, 2008).

³ As Grayson and Martinec (2004, p. 307) state: "Indexical authenticity being the authentic mode in play when something 'is thought not to be a copy or an imitation' or that it is 'the original' or 'the real thing.'"

All the above leads us to the principles of non-representational theory, as postulated by Thrift (2008). The non-representational approach stresses the concept of performance, which according to Thrift and Dewsbury (2000) can change academic practices in two ways: a) “by changing what we consider as method, offering a whole field of techniques to make the world a living entity, techniques that extend the range of current research and provide means to perceive new forms of knowledge” (Thrift & Dewsbury, 2000, p. 424); b) “by emphasising the fact that performance is in itself a form of knowledge, an intelligence in action” (Thrift & Dewsbury, 2000, p. 425).

Therefore, we can understand the emotional component of place branding, as well as its cognitive component, through the fact of its mediated representation of places. The aim is to enhance experience of and emotional connection with places, by making an actual experiential proposal for the place, rather than a merely commercial simplistic representation of geographical space (Jansson, 2002). In this context, the boundaries between imaginary, symbolic and material spaces dissolve (Falkenheimer and Jansson, 2006). And this is where the concept of *performative authenticity*, as defined by Knudsen and Waade (2010, p. 12-13), comes into its own: “This represents a move away from a hermeneutical perspective towards a more corporeal and inter-related perspective. Our point is here that performative authenticity not only signifies that we do and perform places by our actions and behaviours, but that places are something we authenticate through our emotional/affective/sensuous relatedness to them.” In the same way, the place branding strategy represents a meeting point between the immateriality (experiences, feelings and emotions) and the materiality (physical structure) of a place. Thus, we can consider place branding to be based on performative authenticity, which implies an individual connection of a sensorial and bodily nature with places. This is very close to what Thrift (2008) calls affectedness as a way of thinking.

Figure 3. The critical variables of the emotional dimension of place branding from a non-cognitive view. Source: Authors’ own elaboration.



The concept of performative authenticity and non-representational theory are not the only grounds for establishing a possible emotional dimension of place branding. We must also bear in mind that the place branding strategy proposes a renewed symbolic management of places, based on the use of brands and with the main aim of fostering a particular sense of place.⁴ Adding to this the component of experience and individual meaning that is attributed

⁴ Cantrill and Senecah (2001, p. 187) define sense of place as follows: “It is the perception of what is most relevant in a specific place, which can be reflected in value preferences or through the way in which a specific place appears in the discourse.”

to the environment (*environmental self*), we find *sense of self-in-place*,⁶ a psychological and cognitive construct suggested by Cantrill (1992, 1996, 1998). This sense of self-in-place connects the individual to the environment and seeks to determine the meaning that this same individual attaches to his or her surroundings. The proposal made by Cantrill (1992) has a direct influence on one of the most important fractures of place branding: it determines the perceptual bias that exists with regard to the environment between the *a priori* level (induced, mediated perception) and the *in situ* level (physical, organic perception). In short, it matches the imagined space against the lived space (Cantrill, 1998, 2011).

To sum up, the link between emotion and place branding offers several ways of dealing with individual-environment interaction understood as an emotional expression. Initially, it allows us to identify behaviours and attitudes to the environment, as a result of the conception of a particular sense of place (Jørgensen & Stedman, 2006). The multidimensional variables that make up personal experience of a place⁷ that are dealt with in this article are a good example of this. Equally, by engaging in introspection on the aspects that condition subjective experience of places, originating essentially from environmental psychology, we have been able to provide some theoretical arguments on an aspect that is relatively neglected in the existing place branding literature: the relevance of emotional management in a place branding strategy. This entails exerting a direct impact on the possibility of interpreting and subsequently managing human interaction with expressive environments (Govers & Go, 2009, p. 134).

Lastly, the concepts *sense of self-in-place*, put forward by Cantrill (1998), and *ecological identity*, by Thomashow (1996), highlight the usability of the theoretical concepts addressed in this article. Both authors' proposals enable us to evaluate, monitor and interpret the emotion resulting from self-place interaction. Cantrill (1998) and Thomashow (1996) have shown their functionality in work contexts related to the management of regional ecosystems, implementation of environmental policies, landscape planning, wildlife conservation schemes and promotion of urban expansion, among other activities of note. The working patterns used by the authors enable place branding professionals to bring guidelines for evaluating emotional variables into the field of place branding.

7. Conclusion

Contemporary society places much of the meaning associated with places in branding and its inherent symbology. In this regard, as shown by authors such as Govers and Go (2009), the place branding literature has basically focused on the analysis of case studies and their links to research and market development. Very few studies face the process from the perspective of emotion, from a sensorial-affective conception of the body's experience with geographical space and to what extent it matches the brand's initial promise. This is surprising, especially when we consider that place brands are defined on the basis of the essentially emotional influence they exert on individuals' scope of perception. According to this, the purpose of emotional place branding is to create a bond between the people and the place by provoking the people's emotion.⁸

Furthermore, the predominance in capitalist societies of a commercial logic that spotlights places as spaces of attraction, seduction or fun, fit for consumption and enjoyment, serves to accentuate forms of encounter or deep emotional linkage between self and place,

⁵ Cantrill *et al.* (2004, p. 161) define the term *environmental self*: "This position suggests that we form a lasting internal sense of what we are through our continuous relationships with the things in our world."

⁶ Psychological-cognitive structure relating the individual to the place.

⁷ Namely: place identity, place attachment, place dependency, place memory and place satisfaction.

⁸ By way of illustration of how the variable 'emotion' is used in a place branding strategy we recommend reading: Morgan, N., Pritchard, A. & Piggott, R. (2002). New Zealand, 100% pure. The creation of a powerful niche destination brand. *The Journal of Brand Management*, 9(4), 335-354.

and at present this is channelled largely through place branding strategies. In this way, the centrality of emotional components in any place branding initiative can be determined.

Emotional geographies provide an interesting observatory for analysing the relationship between emotion and place, in the context of the emotionality inherent in any place branding strategy. This seems pertinent if we bear in mind that this emotional geography is defined essentially through societies' search for emotional ties with their spaces, or through studying the experience afforded by interaction with geographical space (Davidson, Bondi & Smith, 2007). If we add to all this the growing interest expressed from the field of advertising, marketing and branding and their applicability to the geographical sphere, we can glimpse the disciplinary link between a domain of emerging interest in geography (emotional geography) and the proliferation of commercial strategies of a persuasive and affective-emotional nature (place branding) for which geographical and symbolic space is a basic framework.

This article has offered two fundamental approaches on which to base a possible emotional dimension of place branding. The first is built on the concept of 'performative authenticity', which has led us to the foundations of non-representational theory and performativity, with special attention to bodily feelings, emotionalities, identity construction and narration related to place (Knudsen & Waade, 2010). The second is built on a cognitive approach based on aspects of environmental psychology, developed and singularised through two concepts (sense of self-in-place and ecological identity), which we also consider key for locating the emotional variable of individual experience of places. We understand that the sum of the two proposals provides background to explore the emotional resonances of place branding. For all the reasons set forth above, we can consider the technique of place branding as a new proposal to live places affectively and emotionally, to experience them, and not only to represent them. Undoubtedly, therefore, place branding strategy stands on the horizon of non-representational theory (Thrift, 2008). To quote Knudsen and Waade (2010), we could describe it as an 'indexical-performative authenticity.'

Really, place branding represents the contemporary refounding of the creation of a sense of place, in line with a particular experience lived individually or collectively with the place. This is why the psychological-cognitive construct proposed by Cantrill (2004) and called *sense of self-in-place*, resulting from the fusion of *sense of place* and *environmental self* (individual interaction with the environment), pays particularly close attention to the connection between the individual and the environment. In this regard, Carbaugh (1996, p. 38) states that communication plays a decisive role in creating sense of place: both as an instrument of geographical localisation and in the generation of a particular sense of place.

Thomashow (1996) and his *ecological identity* have also made a fundamental contribution to the exploration of the emotional dimension of place branding, by significantly reinforcing the affective dimension that characterises contemporary environmentalism, insofar as it defines society's experience of the environment. This author's proposal focuses primarily on the interpretation of our personal experience of the environment and the definition of the connection between our own identity and our experience of nature; again, this is very close to non-representational theory.

Place identity is a topic of paramount importance today, basically due to the emerging need to foster regional identities in times of globalisation. In this context, the construction of a place brand does not necessarily involve the theming of space, but rather the living, discovery and subsequent projection of its identity-based roots. Place brands often constitute one of today's clearest expressions not only of representation but also of the direct experience of geographical areas. Furthermore, the postmodern and contemporary globalised world in which we live influences the economy of identity, image and symbolism time and time again.

Projects aimed at the cross-cutting management of geographical space by means of a brand often face a disciplinary monopoly (originating essentially from marketing) that in

many ways is worrying and detrimental to the heterogeneous nature of geographical space. Therefore, it is crucial for the process of conceptualisation and subsequent management of place brands to open up to the contributions of other disciplines, especially those more directly related to the study of the geographical environment. It is precisely in this context that emotional geographies acquire their full relevance and meaning. Life is essentially spatial and emotional at the same time. We continuously interact emotionally with places, which we imbue with meanings that they return to us through the emotions they arouse. The individual and collective memory, like the imagination, is more spatial than temporal. The basic geographical categories that are learnt in schools, or which we use in our everyday lives, entail emotional associations. We experience specific emotions in different geographical contexts and we 'live' places emotionally because they are not just tangible materialities, but also social and cultural constructions impregnated with a dense intangible content often accessible only through the universe of emotions (Nogué, 2009).

With regard to the most outstanding contribution of this work to the thematic field of place branding, we believe that the novelty in the study of emotion as an intrinsic variable of place branding does not lie in the already well-known use of persuasive resources for the projection of places, but rather in the carefully instrumented construction of gazes, angles, representations, narratives and interpretations of geographical space, and this brings us squarely to two fundamental aspects dealt with in this article. Firstly, the cognitive-phenomenological –and therefore emotional– connotations resulting from self-place interaction. And secondly, an emerging *performative geography*, which gives priority to the mediated experience of places. Knudsen and Waade (2010) call this 'performative authenticity', a term very close to non-representational theory, focusing on the analysis of the affective connection with the environment by connecting bodies to the world (Thrift, 2008).

Lastly, in view of everything set forth in this article, we perceive the need to establish an ineluctably interdisciplinary field of study with capacity to evaluate the emotional aspects present in any place branding strategy. If this necessarily interdisciplinary approach to place branding does not gain ground in the short run, place branding runs the risk of becoming a practice conditioned exclusively by the projection of a positive image of a particular place. This would clearly obviate the need to transcend the benefit of the image in the overall management of a place brand.

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