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Place Branding and Strategic Planning: Towards a conceptual model to brand regions

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Abstract

Purpose – The purpose of this paper is to bring two literatures into dialogue. The first, is the place branding literature that aims to assert the diversity and complexity of places in pursuit of various economic, political or socio-psychological objectives. The second, is the strategic spatial planning literature, that focus on place qualities and assets (e.g. social, cultural). Therefore, it re-examines the process of a place branding strategy, by highlighting the importance of strategic thinking in place competitiveness and non-linear regional development (i.e. explaining what strategic planning is, the role in discontinued trajectories of progress in regions, and as a response about how to go further). Strategic frameworks and visions for regional development, with an emphasis on the place assets and strengths, will provide the basis for a branding strategy. The link between place branding and strategic planning will determine the step forward for the theoretical debate, in both fields, by showing that doing marketing and branding, with particular elements of strategic planning, is possible and recommended (e.g. by convincing the stakeholders that new policies and territorial interventions are necessary).

Design/methodology/approach – The paper draws on place branding theory to point out the gap in the literature explaining the role of strategic spatial planning on branding regions. The analytic framework will be constructed by taking the Northwest region of Portugal as a case study. The region has a potential to develop a strategy capable of moving decisively beyond the crisis and create the conditions to be more competitive. Our argument, and contribution to the enrichment of the literature, is that a place branding strategy could stimulate a new regional dynamic, consolidate the practice of spatial planning, embrace the place complexity and uncertainty, and reshape the response to contemporary economic and social challenges.

Findings – Theoretical developments in social marketing, non-profit marketing and specially, place marketing, contributed to a greater interaction between place branding and strategic planning. Places, often adopt strategic policies to try face economic and political challenges and in an effort to rebuild awareness. The starting point is place branding theory as an instrument of spatial planning and place management in order to understand the common ground as well as the role in branding regions.

Originality/value – The concept of place branding is well documented in the literature, but its application in Portugal is relatively new. Moreover, the lack of conceptual explanations of the links between strategic planning and place branding bring out research opportunities. Therefore, the paper is of great value for planners and place brand managers.

Keywords *Northwest of Portugal, Place branding, Regional development, Strategic planning*

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