

THE ROLE OF EMIGRANTS IN THE CONSTRUCTION OF A DESTINATION BRAND: A NEW RESEARCH LINE

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Abstract

Purpose – The main objective of this work consists of proposing a new line of research which consists of exploring the role of emigrants in the construction of their country of origin's brand.

Design and methodology: To justify the need of this new research line we provide arguments by conducting a literature review on destination branding and topics related to migration in tourism.

Approach – A proper destination branding may have a bearing on the image of a particular area, attracting visitors, investments, and a greater economic wealth for the region. The relevance of this topic for tourism management explains the interest of research in determining the elements of the brand of touristic destinations and its influence on the tourists' behaviour.

Originality – Scant attention has been paid by the literature on the influence of stakeholders on brand construction at a regional level, and specifically on the influence of emigrant population, that is those people who are living outside their original territories and whose identity might exert an influence on the construction of their country's brand and attract potential tourists.

Findings – This study proposes a conceptual model to understand the role of emigrant population in the construction of their places of origin's destination brand. This model suggests that social identity processes may affect the way emigrants communicate to locals a brand about their places of origin, contributing therefore to the construction of the brand of their countries.

Keywords Destination branding, brand identity, brand image, emigrants, social identity

1. INTRODUCTION

In general terms, it is assumed that the creation and use of a good brand will enable political authorities, companies and society in general to reap the benefits of a more attractive region that attracts investments, capital and more people to develop different economic activities. In this context, destination branding as the brand process of a tourist destination arises as a key activity in tourism management.

The strategic and economic implications of destination branding have led to multiple studies from different perspectives in recent years (Hanna & Rowley, 2008). This proliferation has caused confusion with regard to the terminology (Hanna & Rowley, 2008; García et al., 2012), emerging different and complex concepts, such as place and destination branding, brand image, destination image, brand identity, brand awareness, brand meaning, brand equity, etc. whose definitions are not clear. This confusion has also been exacerbated by the lack of clarity of the contributions and main findings of this body of research. Indeed, some works assert that the study of branding as applied

to regions is still in its early stages, despite its startling growth in the last few years (Iversen & Hem, 2008).

In addition, it is important to highlight the scant attention paid to analysing the influence that certain stakeholders may exert on brand construction at a regional level. Indeed, only very few studies analyse the influence of local people, and specifically, of emigrant populations on the construction of a destination brand (Haug et al., 2007; Johansson & Cornebise, 2010). These studies analyse the influence that emigrants exert on tourism in the places where they are living, in many cases studying the effects of ethnic neighbourhoods and festivals because tourists could be attracted by their specific identity. But, as far as we know, previous research has not been interested in the role of emigrants in relation to the formation of their countries of origin's brand as tourist destinations. This neglect in the literature seems surprising given the important role that emigrants might accomplish regarding the construction of their countries of origin's brand when relating with locals in the hosting countries who might be potential tourists. This gap is particularly significant considering the increase of migratory movements in recent times.

The above arguments justify the objective of this work, which consists of proposing a new research line on the role of the emigrant population in the construction of the destination brand of their country of origin.

To do so, a review on destination branding and main topics related to migration in tourism, such as ethnicity and mobility, was conducted. The databases selected to do the search were the *ISI Web of Knowledge* and *Scopus*, because of their general acceptance and prestige in academic fields, and because both of them cover a large number of well-known journals in fields related to administration, management, marketing and tourism. The literature review was conducted using different combinations of the keywords significant for this research in tourism, such as brand, place branding, destination branding, brand identity, brand image, mobility, emigrants, migration, migration movements, ethnicity, and social identity, covering the period of the last two decades, although some previous works were also included in the literature review.

The structure of this study is as follows: after this brief introduction, the second section develops a review of the main concepts of regional branding and the different approaches used by this body of research. The next section proposes and justifies a new research line on the role of emigrants in the construction of destination brands. Finally, there is a concluding section that exposes the main contributions of this study.

2. DESTINATION BRANDING CONCEPT: DIFFERENT APPROACHES

Most brand definitions are based on the principles suggested by the American Marketing Association (Aaker, 1991; Wood, 2000) which defines a brand as a name, term, sign, symbol or design, or a combination of any of these elements, intended to identify the goods and services of a company and differentiate it from its competitors.

The relevant strategic and economic implications of the efficient use of corporate brands aim to extend its use to a regional level. This is behind the appearance of the term 'destination branding'. It can be described as the brand of a particular geographical area, planned and perceived as a tourist destination (Hall, 1999; Crockett & Wood, 2002; Morgan et al., 2004; Pike, 2009). A proper management and understanding of destination branding is crucial in certain regions where tourism is a key economic driver (Hall & Higham, 2005; Bigano et al., 2007; Pike, 2009). Destination branding is the process that allows a destination to be identified and differentiated from other alternatives, through the construction of a message, the brand, which tries to attract tourists and consumption (Cai, 2002; Qu et al., 2011). The ultimate objective is to create value for the different stakeholders involved in the region or for the tourist destination itself (Hankinson, 2004).

There are many common elements shared by corporate and regional brands (Kavaratzis & Ashworth, 2005). However, since the elements that make up a region are broader and more heterogeneous than those of a corporation, it is recognised that destination branding might be more complex (Kavaratzis & Ashworth, 2005). This complexity could be explained by the wide dispersion of control over the brand (Marzano & Scott, 2009), and the great number of different stakeholders involved (destination management organisations (DMOs), suppliers, consumers, workers, entrepreneurs, local people, tourists), all of whom have different interests with regard to the region and the tourist activity. The existence of this diversity of stakeholders makes more difficult to establish a common strategy to create and manage a brand to the benefit of all (Dinnie, 2004; Fan, 2006; Therkelsen & Halkier, 2008).

Another peculiarity of branding at a regional level concerns the physical unit of analysis. For example, destination branding can refer to different regional units such as countries, provinces, cities, etc., as well as other more specific or smaller spheres, which might include tourist complexes, theme parks and residential neighbourhoods, amongst others (Cai, 2002; Papadopoulos & Heslop, 2002; Johansson & Cornebise, 2010). This is important because it makes more difficult to reach generalised conclusions in this type of studies.

The literature has used a variety of approaches to analyse destination branding. On the one hand, we have those who use an external orientation and analyse the brand from the perspective of demand or its outputs (Aaker, 1996). This approach considers the consumer perception of tourists as the most important perspective for analysing destination branding, which they call the destination brand image (Kapferer, 1997; Hankinson, 2004; Kaplan et al., 2010). The brand image about a particular tourist destination has a crucial influence on the final choice of destination and on the tourist consumer behaviour of different tourist products.

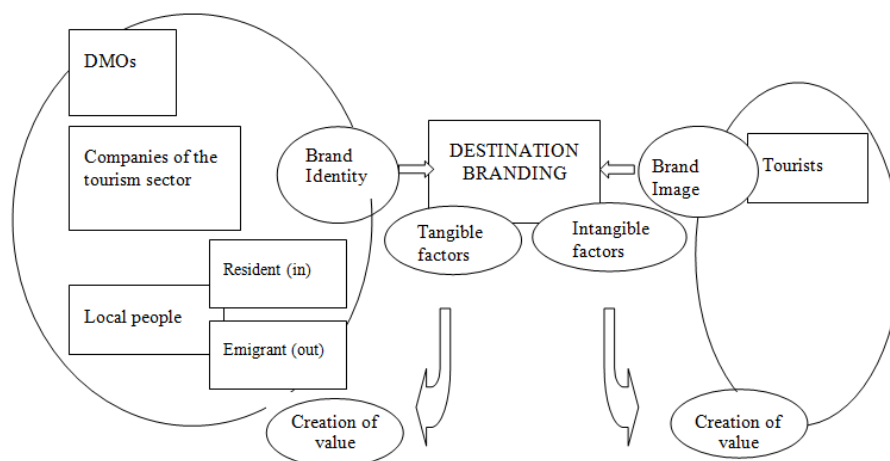
On the other hand, we find an internally orientated approach which analyses the brand from the perspective of supply or its inputs (Aaker, 1996). This approach focuses on the influence exerted by the builders or owners of the destination brand through different communication, channels and media on the users, consumers or visitors of a specific tourist destination (Aaker, 1996; Hankinson, 2004; Kaplan et al., 2010). In this case, the recommendation is to base the construction of the destination brand on the

attributes that determine the region's identity, to differentiate the destination from its competition (Cai, 2002; Mak, 2011).

These two research approaches differentiate between brand identity and brand image (Cai, 2002; Qu et al., 2011); the first analyses destination branding from the perspective of the creator of the message or brand, while the second takes the viewpoint of the recipient of the message or brand (Kapferer, 1997). Brand identity is the answer to the question "Who are we?", while brand image answers the question "How are we perceived?" (Konecnik & Go, 2008). The answers to both questions will help regional managers and DMOs to select the relevant attributes when creating the global projection of the destination brand.

In an attempt to capture both of the above approaches we have included the following figure (Figure 1), adapted from various works that have made a conceptual study of destination branding (Cai, 2002; Hankinson, 2004; Govers & Go, 2009; Saraniemi, 2010). The aim is to develop a holistic and integrative model that considers the different approaches used in the literature on destination branding.

Figure 1: Destination branding: Conceptual model



Source: compiled by the authors from Cai (2002), Hankinson (2004), Govers and Go (2009) and Saraniemi (2010)

As Figure 1 shows, destination branding is composed at a theoretical level of different kinds of factors, tangible and intangible aspects of the brand. These factors are the elements that constitute the content of the destination brand and its value depends on them. This Figure also shows that there are two different approaches of destination branding, and they do not necessarily match. On the one hand, the destination brand is constructed through multiple stakeholders (governmental institutions, companies, local people, including emigrants, etc.) Who and how they are influence the factors included in the brand that they construct. On the other hand, this brand is transmitted to tourists, actual and potential tourists, and these tourists' perceptions determine the image of the

destination brand. So, the elements included in the brand identity and in the brand image of a tourist destination could be not exactly the same, because the brand identity depends on the idea of the brand's builders over themselves and their regions, while the brand image is determined by the tourists' perceptions on the regions' brand. Thus, there are two different ways of analysing destination branding, from the point of view of the builders of the brand (brand identity) and from the point of view of the recipients of the brand (brand image). Identity and image do not influence the process of branding, they constitute two perspectives to analyse branding.

The literature on destination branding has primarily focused on analysing the brand image as this has a direct effect on the tourist consumer behaviour, so frequently this research analyses data and information obtained from tourists. However, there have been fewer studies on brand identity, in spite of the importance of the role played by the different regional managers and the agents responsible for creating the destination brand (Konecnik & Go, 2008).

Brand identity can be defined as the contribution made by all the brand's stakeholders to creating an awareness, providing a direction, purpose and meaning to the brand, and turning it into a central element of the brand's strategic vision (Aaker, 1996). A review of the literature on brand identity allows us to identify the different elements or components which make up that identity (Zenker, 2011). However, every stakeholder can build their own brand identity by focusing on some of these different elements.

3. THE ROLE OF EMIGRANT POPULATION ON THE CONSTRUCTION OF DESTINATION BRAND: PROPOSING A NEW RESEARCH LINE

Many authors suggest the usefulness of classifying the different types of stakeholders, depending on their strategic significance with the brand (García et al., 2012). Thus, it would be possible to differentiate between primary stakeholders that influence the brand directly, like DMOs or stakeholders that have regular interactions with them (industries, investors, etc.). On the other hand, secondary stakeholders would be those with no regular interactions with DMOs, although they could be important for specific issues, for example local people.

A review of contemporary practices and literature shows that brand identity usually adopt a top-down approach (Campelo et al., 2009), as if it was only relevant the leadership of DMOs, governments and institutions through their agencies for economic or tourism development. However, local people also make an important contribution to tourist-driven marketing through the sense of belonging to a specific place (Campelo et al., 2009). As García et al. (2012, 648) state "local people may be an important factor when distinguishing and selling a destination brand, and it would be problematic not taking them into account when constructing the destination brand identity".

Indeed, local population is one of the focuses of the literature on destination branding from an internal point of view. The influence of local people on destination branding has been highlighted by previous research. For example, Freire (2009, 420) establishes that "local people are relevant and important for a destination brand-building process".

Moreover, Campelo et al. (2009, 2) suggest that “frequently, residents and ad-hoc communities are left out of the branding process”. However, as these authors suggest “it makes sense to include them in the process of branding”.

Most of the studies interested in the role of local people have analysed the elements of the brand that they tend to transmit, but many of these elements are specific to the particular destination that is being analysed in each case. Some examples of this type of research are the studies by Campelo et al. (2009) on Chatham Island (New Zealand), by Freire (2009) on the Portuguese Algarve, by Konecnik & Go (2008) on Slovenia; and by Wheeler et al. (2011) on Rural Victoria (Australia), amongst others.

The main attributes of brand identity repeatedly considered by the literature are the natural environment (landscape, flora, fauna, beaches, mountains, climate, etc.), the atmosphere (peaceful, relaxing, funny, nightlife, enjoyable, etc.), the infrastructures (monuments, accessibility, safety, accommodation quality, transport, etc.), the economic situation (most important business sectors, price-quality ratio, economic and commercial development), and sociocultural aspects (a sense of community, the friendliness and hospitality of the local people, traditions, cultural activities and attractions, history, gastronomy, etc.), amongst others. One important classification of these attributes considers the difference between physical or tangible elements, such as the natural environment, infrastructures and the economic situation; and intangible elements and attributes, which would include sociocultural aspects and the atmosphere of the tourist destination.

These studies conclude that the local population is a very valuable resource for the formation of the destination brand of a particular region. The value of this population emerges from the difficulty of differentiating between destinations that share very similar characteristics, whereby local people become a truly differentiating factor between them. Also, the strong sense of belonging that local people usually show towards their region of origin can have a very significant influence on the construction of the brand, and can send a stronger message that tourists could easily perceive of that place.

However, this research refers to the local people who currently live in the tourist destination whose brand is under analysis, and as far as we know there is very little research on the influence that the emigrant population has on destination branding, and in particular with regards to which brand attributes they communicate (Haug et al., 2007; Johansson & Cornebise, 2010; McClinchey, 2008).

Let’s address some arguments with regards to the interest of exploring the role of emigrants in the construction of destination brands as a new research line.

First of all, it is necessary to note the relevance of the migration phenomenon in recent times. Migratory movements have become generalised, influenced by globalization and the economic and social crisis of certain regions compared to others (Moufakkir, 2008; 2011). Thus, emigrants constitute an increasing group in developed societies, which are the origin of most of the tourists.

Second, the arguments used to justify the relevance of local people for the construction of destination brands (Campelo et al., 2009; 2011; Freire, 2009) are also appropriate for emigrants. Even more, emigrants from the same country develop some common characteristics (longing for home, keeping local customs abroad, etc.) and the sense of belonging showed towards the region of origin is even stronger when people emigrate and live abroad. This factor may contribute to the construction and communication of the brand. However, the existing literature of migration in tourism just considers emigrants as workers in the hospitality sector (Janta et al., 2011a; 2011b; Janta, 2011; Jope, 2011) and neglects their role as potential builders of their country of origin's destination brand.

Third, emigrants of the same country might share their social identity and this fact could influence the construction of the destination brand. Since emigrants tend to define themselves in terms of their group membership to a social category such as a region, nation, culture, geographical area, etc. and since these social identities are made salient when they interact with locals through communicating the brand of their places of origin (Badea et al., 2011) Social Identity Theory (SIT) (Tajfel & Turner, 1979) appears as a suitable theoretical framework to analyse the influence of emigrants on the construction of destination brand.

Identity is a description of the idea of every individual about themselves and addresses two meanings '*Who am I?*' and '*How should I act?*' (Alvesson et al., 2008). Individuals' self-concept has two dimensions; on the one hand, the idiosyncratic characteristic of 'the self', which is called 'personal identity'; and on the other hand, 'social identity', which refers to the characteristics that define the salient group classification to which one belongs (Turner, 1985). Stets and Burke (2000) define social identity as being at one with a certain group, being like others in the group, and seeing things from the group's perspective. This means that having a social identity implies defining oneself as a member of a social category and identifying with that. Therefore, individuals might have multiple social identities because of the different groups to which they pertain and identify with.

SIT has been used mainly to understand issues of social structure and inter-group relations. It establishes that members of a group have a favouring reaction and assessment towards in-group members compared to out-group ones. This social process has been defined as in-group favouritism and has been recognised as an important tool to protect self-esteem (Tajfel & Turner, 1979).

This assumption of SIT might be applied to the specific case of emigrant population, in that they tend to perceive their in-group in a positive way and differentiate from the out-group members, who are the population of the places where they currently live. And in doing so, they construct and communicate a certain brand of their places of origin. Hence, emigrants' social identity might influence the elements of the destination brand of their places of origin and the way they construct and communicate to the potential tourists the brand of these places.

Fourth, there is a relevant gap in the research on the construction of destination brands. Although in the last few years the study of emigrants' identities has attracted considerable research (Jasperse et al., 2012; Phinney et al., 2001; Bastian & Haslam, 2008) in parallel with the increase of studies regarding ethnicity, mobility and migration in tourism as a consequence of globalization (Moufakkir, 2008; 2011; Wilson & Ypeij, 2012; Ypeij, 2012; Salazar, 2013), there are hardly any studies analysing the influence of emigrant populations on the construction of a destination brand. The few studies we have found either describe cases in which the destination brand has been enriched by a multicultural presence, giving the example of the influence of an emigrant neighbourhood on a particular city (Johansson & Corneise, 2010), or the proliferation of cultural festivals involving different ethnic groups (McClinchey, 2008). Regarding the first group of studies, the literature describes an ethnic destination as an urban space designed as an ethnic area for residents and tourists at the same time (Sheth, 2010). As Sheth (2010) states "ethnicity can be perceived as an element that boosts tourist destinations, however the proper management of an ethnic tourist destination, and the construction of its brand, is not a simple task because there might be controversial interests between different stakeholders like institutions, local population, different ethnic groups, etc.". On the other hand, the group of studies on ethnic and cultural festivals shows that these can constitute an important element of the brand identity of a tourist destination, and might be associated to positive economic and social impacts for the territory (Schnell, 2003).

All these studies analyse the impact of multiculturalism, ethnicity, and emigrant population in the construction of the destination brand of the hosting region, but they have ignored the influence of emigrants on the construction of the brand of their places of origin.

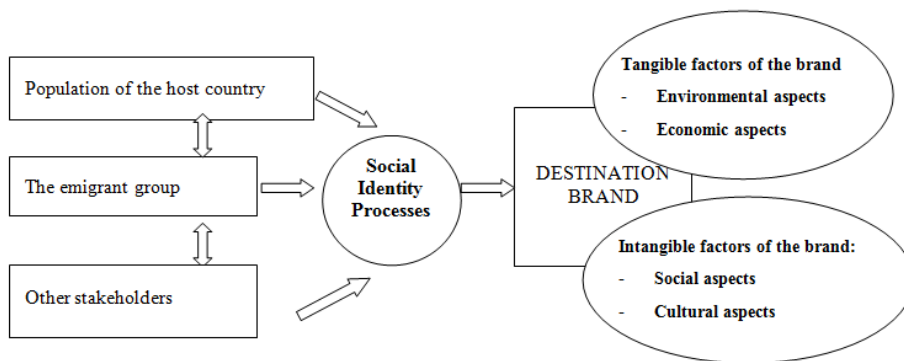
Likewise, the studies regarding mobility, ethnicity and migration in tourism have focused on the role of emigrants as workers (Janta et al., 2011 a and 2011b, Janta, 2011, Joppe, 2012) or on the extent to which ethnic and gender identities influence and are influenced by tourists through the construction of a destination brand (Moufakkir, 2008; 2011; Ypeij, 2012) focusing on locals-tourist relationship but ignoring the emigrants-locals as potential tourist relationship.

Regarding this topic, some research has already detected the close relationship between emigrants and tourists, because tourism can serve as a previous phase before the permanent residence in a specific region (Haug et al., 2007). Also, emigrants and tourists share common characteristics related with mobility, coexistence, and adaptation to a different context. Finally, not as an argument to justify our proposed line of research but as a necessary consideration for the operationalization of this future research, the heterogeneity of the emigrants as a group should be taken into account. Different groups of emigrants can be distinguished when we consider their specific group identities. On the one hand, there is the group of emigrants usually from developed countries, who live abroad as permanent tourists and maintain a limited interaction with local population. The places where they live have a well defined identity, which is strongly linked to their countries of origin (as can be seen in their houses, bars, hospitals, shops, etc.), Costa del Sol in the South of Spain might be a good example (Haug et al., 2007). On the other hand, there is the group of emigrants

whose motivation to emigrate has been based in economic reasons and to improve their quality of life. In this case, this group is frequently forced to interact with local population, for example, for working reasons, and normally does not have resources enough to build and adapt the places where they live to the characteristics and conditions of their country of origin (Devadason, 2010; Janta, 2011, Janta et al., 2011). However, in these groups of less wealthy emigrants, it is quite frequent also that close ghettos appear. It is important to note here that the most important factor for the construction of the destination brand is not the type of emigrant you are, but the interactions that the emigrant maintains with local population in the hosting country. When a group of emigrants, regardless of their type, chooses to live in a ghetto without regular interactions with local people, their social identity as emigrants from a particular region might be strengthened, but they will influence the construction of a destination brand very slightly because of the limited interaction with people from the out-group. In other words, the brand that they can build of their countries might not be broadly communicated. So, interaction is a crucial element in the destination brand construction by emigrants. As Devadason (2010) clearly stated “this interaction can be explained by other different reasons such as the feeling of belonging to a particular region, the characteristics shared between the country of origin and the hosting country, and the links between them”.

In an attempt to summarise the main aspects that should be considered when analysing the role of the emigrant population in the construction of destination brand, we have included the following figure (Figure 2). The aim is to develop a conceptual model that shows the different elements that should be considered by future research on this topic.

Figure 2: **The influence of emigrants on the construction of destination brand**



Source: prepared by the authors

Figure 2 shows that destination brand is composed of different kinds of elements, both tangible and intangible aspects. Also, social identity processes that arise from the interaction between different destination brand stakeholders might influence the destination branding process. In particular, the salience of emigrants' social identity as a consequence of their interaction with locals in the hosting countries might influence the construction and communication of their country of origin's brand, and its different elements. Moreover, the influence of emigrants on the construction of a destination brand may depend on their interactions with other stakeholders. Also, it would be interesting to compare the destination brand built by emigrant population with the brand constructed by other stakeholders, such as local population of the country of origin (residents in), companies of the tourism sector, or governmental institutions. This comparison is crucial given the relevance of constructing a homogeneous brand, which could be easily perceived and differentiated by potential tourists.

4. CONCLUSIONS

The main objective of this study was to justify the need for a new line of research with regards to the role of emigrants on the construction of the destination brand of their country of origin. To do so, we conducted a literature review on destination branding and related topics such as migration and ethnicity in tourism. This literature review shows that despite the study of emigrants' identities has attracted considerable amount of research, few studies have focused specifically on the role of emigrants in the construction of their place of origin's destination brands. These studies are basically interested in analysing the influence of emigration, ethnicity or multicultural phenomena on the construction of destination brand of their hosting countries, cities or neighbourhoods, but not of their countries of origin.

Having identified this gap, this study proposes a conceptual model to understand the role of emigrant population in the construction of their places of origin's destination brand. In this model, we suggest that social identity processes may affect the way emigrants communicate to locals a brand about their places of origin, contributing therefore to the construction of the brand of their countries. This destination brand could incorporate both, tangible aspects (like information about the environment, the economic situation, etc.), and intangible aspects (such as cultural and social characteristics of their countries). In addition, we suggest the degree of the influence of emigrants on the construction of this destination brand will depend on their interactions with local population, because if they live apart, maintaining scarce or weak relationships with local people, their messages about their country will not have any impact. The frequency and strength of these interactions might be influenced by the economic situation of the emigrant population or their previous link with the hosting country (for example, cultural proximity, geographical proximity, degree of mutual knowledge, etc.).

In sum, developing a strong and consistent destination brand is crucial for tourism management and should be a matter of concern for government agencies and DMOs trying to promote the tourism of their countries. This explains the necessity to explore what the contents of the brand build by emigrants are, with the purpose of aligning the messages of different stakeholders about the brand of a particular tourist destination. In this sense, understanding the brand elements communicated by emigrants may be useful in building a strong and consistent destination brand. In addition, governmental institutions should take into account and consider the contribution of emigrant population, who can act as ambassadors of their countries, representing their countries abroad, and might be considered as a valuable asset to promote them.

Therefore, it would be interesting to initiate the proposed line of research by choosing a specific group of emigrants in a hosting country to analyse: Firstly, whether the socio-demographic characteristics of the emigrants (gender, age, educational and professional background) have an influence on the communicated destination brand elements. Secondly, to identify what are the elements of the destination brand related to their identity and what is really the brand that they build. Finally, to examine the tacit or explicit nature of the place branding elements, and the processes that could be used to make them more explicit.

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