



Visual Narratives for Local Development. Understanding Local Development through Local Place Branding: an Italian Case

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ABSTRACT

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Place Branding is a theoretical, economic and public policies that needed many years to be gradually acknowledged and told apart by Place Marketing. The academics that dealt with the production and distribution of the places' image, as matter of fact, often did it with a marketing-oriented approach, trying to measure how and many tourists, investors and new inhabitants were attracted by specific communications campaigns. Over the course of time, however, Place Branding has been increasingly identified as a more complex and multidimensional theme. By the end of this point of view changing process, Place Branding was not only an independent matter of study, but also was comprehending Place Marketing as an ancillary component. The Place Branding, indeed, has been described, during the last fifteen years, as a territorial government tool, even worthy to have specific institutional structures, too. "Participatory Place Branding" and "Public Branding" theories, at last, describe Place Branding also in its most social aspects and contemplate the need of participation during the local image management processes. Place Branding, in conclusion, can be now considered an independent matter of study and policies, which needs to develop new strategies to involve all the stakeholders in the local promotion process. The emancipation of Place Branding, however, still requires to overcome the common prejudice that links it to the commodification of spaces, which pushes some disciplines not to consider it an interesting study object in local development studies. To do so, it is necessary to address more precisely how the narratives about a place influence its development and to understand how the local development dimensions interact with the actions related to local Place Branding. This article wants to contribute to expand the knowledge about the connection between Place Branding and local development. It will try to do so using a still under-exploited methodology for this kind of studies, that is the visual content analysis as described by Bell (2000) and Parmeggiani (2011). This methodology will be applied to a dataset of pictures in the tourism context, taking in consideration that, even tourism has a certain tradition in visual studies, it often has been addressed to mere economic aims. Tourism visual narratives will be also considered as an important source of data because of the great importance that Anholt (2007) attaches to it as communication channel of a place. The research will consist of a comparison between different narrative lines about the same rural village of Central Italy, Postignano. It is a deserted hamlet bought by a private company that wants to make it live again attracting new inhabitants, tourists and investors, but also connecting it with the surrounding territory. This project, naturally, is taking place within an Italian region – Umbria – that already has its own active narrative on places like this one – that are a specific characteristic of its territory – and it could be interesting compare what are the similarities and differences between the different narratives activated by these entrepreneurs and the regional government. Another under-valuated narrative will be produced and considered for this article, that is the local inhabitants' one. Using the photo elicitation technique, indeed, a further comparison will be made, with the aim to underline what are the characteristics of the territory that have not been considered during its promotion. Visual content analysis of different narratives produced by Place Branding in tourism field can give useful hints about what is excluded by place branding and about many potentialities that can be carried out. This approach, indeed, is a way to confront different points of view, opinions and desires on the many different possible development paths that a place can choose

KEYWORDS

Place branding
Local development
Fragile areas

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Introduction

Considering communication as an essential activity for an effective local governance has been widely discussed already. The rhetoric of Postmodernity, while arguable, triggered a lively discussion on different theoretical fields, leading many States and authorities to modify their territory communication and ruling style, along with their law and organisational structures. Academics from different disciplines debated about this theme, sharing positions or outlining new theoretical discrepancies. Despite the variety which characterises such a debate, this paper will try to test once again the heuristic capability of certain visual methodologies when applied to the local development topic, basing itself on concepts borrowed from Place Branding and Tourism Sociology scopes.

In this first part of the essay, some of the basis of the idea of Place branding as a complex governance practice will be addressed. According to this point of view, Place branding will be depicted as an across-the-board attitude in relation to all the different administrative actions, crucial for local development and going beyond the mere advertising.

In the second paragraph, instead, the connection between Place Branding and marginal areas will be explored.

The third paragraph, furthermore, will explain why and how this topic has been studied, for this research, using a visual methodology.

Results and conclusions will be shared and discussed in the last two paragraphs.

1. Place Branding as development tool

The bedrock laying under the concept of Place Branding as a local development tool, enhanced during the last 40 years, states that operating on local reality representations corresponds to operating on the local reality itself. That is: modifying the way in which a place is described will mould the place itself, in the end.

About the concept of social representations Hall (1997) suggested that they can be defined as the outcome of a socially negotiated process. Hall especially highlights how this process should be considered as a political one, overall, since it contributes to create a storytelling which endorses some actors and their interests rather than others. Considering a certain local reality representation as expressions of its local identity, scholars belonging to different fields pointed out the processual profile of such social dimension (Banini, 2013). This perspective spreads light on territorial representations' political and conflicted side, which are continuously describing balances of power and actors' relations starting from visual elements, which are often given for granted or not considered as landscape representations (Barnes, Duncan, 1992; Cosgrove, Danieis, 1988; Darby, 2000; Duncan, Ley, 1993; Duncan, 1990).

This idea was recalled by Amendola (2016) in a recent work, where he reiterates a concept he already expressed before (2013). According to Amendola, the contemporary city is centred on the different city users' demand, regardless of whether they are individuals or groups. Considering this idea, he brings some examples of how the apparently abstract parallelism between

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territorial representation and reality can tangibly affect the structure of a settlement. One example Amendola makes to support this theory is the widening of urban belts around city centres during the 80's due to the spreading of contact with nature, authenticity and social homogeneity rhetorics, which led many people to buy gardened detached houses at city borders.

Although the parallelism connecting representations and reality has been developed across disparate domains, the marketing field seems particularly effective in describing how regularly it is turned into practice. This belief derives from the combination of several social, economic, cultural and political inputs. Braun (2008), for instance, clearly listed some which refer to globalization, ICT evolution, media society, terrorism threat, geo-political changes and the possibility for regions to develop better transport connections.

Despite the causes and the theoretical fields this theme stems from, however, the result is a growing conviction about the crucial role of communication in place development (Acuti *et al.*, 2018; Kavaratzis, 2012; Vuignier, 2016), so much that someone stated that image is everything for a place (Green *et al.*, 2016). This statement sounds more convincing within the frame of a highly competitive context, in which territories are struggling to pursue their purposes (Thiard, 2009).

The idea that communicating effectively is fundamental for places' development is mainly based around the existence of a certain competition between places. Simon Anholt's competitive identity theory (2007), for instance, is an effectual synthesis – maybe too simplistic, under some points of view – of the communication-strategic aspect of place branding policies with the cultural one. It comes from the communication field and, according with the paradigm shift experienced in this branch of studies during the last decades, it reflects more the growing attention towards strategic place branding elements closely linked with local development rather than its mere commercial side (Oguztimur, Akturan, 2015; Rolando, 2021; S. Zenker Braun, 2010). This theory considers the worldwide competition between territories to gain more attention, investments, know-how, residents, tourists and cheap labour (Mihalís, 2004; Oguztimur, Akturan, 2015; Thiard, 2009) and states that this can be achieved by a place only if it is able to build and share a definite and precise identity.

Place Branding field's openness towards a much more product-oriented approach – the place, in this case – rather than a customer-oriented one, paved the way for more inclusive policy suggestions and research. The role of residents and local liveability has been increasingly involved with the local promotion issue, for some time now (E. Braun *et al.*, 2013; Hudak, 2019). Many relevant reflections are being carried out about the citizens' role in place promotion and development, in which they are gradually seen as actors to be involved systematically in place branding decisions with structured participatory practices. This branch of studies led to the formulation of new theoretical and practical concepts like Participatory Place Branding (Lambert, 2013; Sebastian, Zenker, Erfgen, 2014). This paper aims to develop a participatory approach to place branding. In doing so, it offers guidance on how to implement a participatory place branding strategy within place management practice. Design/methodology/approach – The paper is based on theoretical insights drawn from the combination of distinct literatures on place branding, general marketing and collaborative governance. Findings – The paper highlights the importance of residents in the place branding process and argues that their special functions as ambassadors for the place constitute the most valuable assets in place branding. Thus, a participatory place branding approach involving residents is needed. To implement this approach, three stages are necessary: (stage 1 and the more recent Public Branding (Rolando, 2021).

These proposals are focused on three main directions: analysing inhabitants' role in Place Branding, suggesting practices to involve them constantly in the branding process and underlying the most civic, public, social and cultural elements of branding activity. This way to think about Place Branding interposes a certain distance between the older top-down and market-oriented approach and a fresher concept, more development and residents-oriented. A closer look at the literature can provide different examples of the development of these ideas. Many authors

(Erik Braun et al., 2018; Govers, 2011; Skinner, 2008), for instance, pointed out the difference between the outside-in approach of traditional Place Marketing strategies and the more up to date inside-out Place Branding trends. The first are more aimed at humouring the market demands, while the second at strongly defining the local resources and selling points to address better-targeted clients. In the same way a wide literature review from Vuignier (2016) carried out a progressive shift from a concept of local promotion as a matter of image and reputation to a more identity-centred idea of branding. Not long ago, Rolando (2021) summed up many premises of these theories suggesting to consider Place Branding as a policies front in which the community vision of a place is shared, discussed and described connecting local values, ethics, participation and culture.

As Hudak (2019) describes, Participatory Place branding theories already anticipated such understanding, shedding light on the relevance of the potential active involvement of local stakeholders. The stakeholders involved in place branding processes are quite a lot (Hankinson, 2009; Kavaratzis, Ashworth, 2005; Zenker, Braun, 2010), and they can contribute far more effectively than be merely consulted in order to take information from them, as it often happens with the "classical" approach (Bennett, Savani, 2003; Sebastian, Zenker, Erfgen, 2014). According to the above-cited Lambert, Zenker and Erfgen, participatory Place Branding Processes are possible and can both empower communities and make governance actions more efficient.

1.1 Place Branding, fragile areas and tourism: the storytelling space left for marginal spaces

Once recalled the potential relevance of Place Branding practices for local development, we will try to make clear if they have any special relevance for rural, marginal, socioeconomically fragile and developing places.

Amendola's work (2016) is useful, once again, to frame precisely how, generally, local place branding is urban-centered. In fact, when observing the academic debate about Place Branding, regions appear promoted almost exclusively by points of attraction located within the urban fabric. Several essays are centred on Citytelling and Urban Storytelling (Perissinotto, 2020; Rolando, 2021) as they would constitute the Place branding itself. By the urban context, however, the place storytelling contents are provided along with the actors, the rules and the style with which they are led.

What is the storytelling space left for other territories, then?

Such questions appear particularly significant in the Umbria region's scenario. In this part of Italy – like in many other Italian Regions, actually – the storytelling of the mountainous and rural world seems relegated only to the tourism field. Outside the tourism sector, very little is told about Umbrian marginal areas except in specific and highly specialized circles like, for instance, the agriculture management, developing and funding sector. These latter rhetorical sectors, however, are reserved to politicians and technicians, who often are not able to open a breach in their field's boundaries to reach the public debate and the public decisions areas.

In addition to the economic growth and redevelopment occasions provided to these areas by tourism, they can also be used as important drivers for place promotion. The lack of other communication flows about these places outside tourism makes it important for local development and makes it, basically, the only storytelling line actively participated also by external content authors like tourists. Tourism, thus, presents itself as a highly strategic field for marginal and fragile areas (Musella, D'Isanto, 2018), because it offers them their main development opportunities and gives the local governments the occasion to talk about their local qualities and points of attraction. Under this light, the social and political mediation process which characterizes the place branding dynamics becomes even more important, because there are some aspects of tourism itself which accentuate it (Larsen, 2014).

Only the places which pass this social, political, cultural and media process appear on the tourist's map. Institutions, moreover, also have such a fundamental role in this mechanism (Cheong, Miller, 2000; Dann, 1996; Hollingshead, 1999; McGregor, 2000), as local communities have, especially where active storyteller actors producing their own narrative are missing. However, the representations' self-reproduction mechanism is still in place, repeating over and over again what has already been told about the place. This process avoids innovating the image of these places and is the so called "Representation spiral" (Parmeggiani, 2016).

This is the same dynamic already mentioned by authors like Urry and Larsen (2011) and MacCannell (1975), where the pictures of places keep repeating the same image, encouraging tourists to reach the represented place (D'Eramo, 2019; Gemini, 2008; Urry, Larsen, 2011). New tourists, in turn, will confirm their actual presence on the place reproducing it once again, trying to reproduce the same pictures as described in the sightseeing theory. Such course of action, which the Place Marketing world has acknowledged for quite some time (Ejarque, 2015), is considered, here, as a place development matter. Sure enough, this representation circle seems pushing the places themselves to indulge the image that all tourists are apparently looking for (Andéhn et al., 2014). This doesn't just affect the places' self-communication, but also the places themselves. In fact, local governments, tourism actors and DMO's will try to surround the tourists with the setting they already experienced through photography.

To sum up, it is possible to state that visual narratives produced within the tourism field are an interesting research object to address any development issue regarding rural and marginal areas. For this reason, further research on visual narratives about places is needed to compare different points of view and to try to get some new hints about local development.

2. Promoting and understanding territory through pictures: a methodological exercise

Up to this point we stated that we can identify a recent Place Branding approach that is more inclined to develop the place and to involve the wider number of stakeholders in the branding process than a mere "marketing-oriented approach" aimed at attracting the highest number of visitors and "selling" the places. According to this point of view, inhabitants should have the main role in structuring and, at last, owning the local brand. Moreover, if the aim is attracting people, knowledge and investments, the starting principle of this theory consists primarily in developing the place to make it more attractive. Attractiveness, in this way, comes after improving the residents' quality of life. We also saw that (Umbrian) marginal areas are interested only by the tourism storytelling. What we are going to do, now, is narrowing the Umbrian case to understand which promotional model the local government adopted, in order to better define how studying this region could be useful to give a research contribution.

The Umbria regional government has worked hard, in these years, to modernize its promotion strategy, reaching remarkable quantitative results, actually. In fact, the visits, the nights spent in accommodation and the clicks on the website increased considerably². From our point of view, the Umbrian branding approach, however, still embodies a "traditional marketing model", apparently, which is not updated to the latest inputs provided during the last decade by Participatory Place Branding scholars.

The Umbria Region, in fact, entrusted the marketing management to marketers and to a third party, that is a partially public-held company. This body is appointed to customize the regional brand so that it can be promoted within and outside the regional borders. The company uses

2 Good results both in terms of virtual and real visits to the Umbria tourism website and territory have been reported by local government in December 2019 and good performances in terms of nights spent in accommodation are shown by official statistics about the summer period also during the pandemic crisis (<https://www.regione.umbria.it/turismo-attivita-sportive/statistiche-turismo-2022>).

many different tools, among which the main one is the umbriatourism.it website. This process takes place without the activation of any participatory mechanism, with consultation practices that are involving some specific stakeholders only, although their opinion is not binding. The Regional Tourism Observatory, for its part, restricts itself to only analysing quantitative data collected from hoteliers and tourism offices, publishing merely descriptive reports. Great attention is given to tourists' perception and preferences, which are currently being analysed with web analytics tools and, in previous years, with dedicated surveys (that are no longer used now). As stated above, the most modern approaches to Place Branding remarked that a not-inclusive branding strategy risks to overlook important regional resources, opening discrepancies between place representation and reality. Neglecting a wide stakeholder involvement, indeed, could present several problems like a sort of discomfort experienced by places lacking a definite characterization (La Foresta, 2018); the place commodification and trivialization (Ashworth, Voogd, 1990; Kavaratzis, Ashworth, 2005; Kotler *et al.*, 1999); damages to place authenticity (Aitken, Campelo, 2011); disappointing the visitors who are not discovering what the website promised them, hostility (Gainsforth, 2020) and what someone defined a mere "show-place" (Baule *et al.*, 2014). Considering the differences between Participatory Place branding and the purely market-oriented approach and the risks connected with this last one, we can hypothesize that, following a non-inclusive approach, the Umbrian government promotion strategy will present some problems and rifts between places representations and reality. On one hand, this potential incongruity might be a serious problem for a region where 57 municipalities on 92 have been classified as marginal by the Italian Government in 2014, according to the National Strategy for Inland Areas³. On the other hand, moreover, it might be also a useful index to understand how these marginal places are depicted and perceived. As previously stated, in fact, tourism storytelling is the only kind of organized communication constantly dedicated to these areas and has the potential to define their prosperity or their further descent into fragility and marginality.

3. Case study and methodology

This research aims at comparing different visual contents about a specific place produced and shared by different actors. The goal is understanding if the visual content analysis can explain something more about the connections between place representations and local development. Searching for an innovative approach to study the rural and marginal areas development is the main reason why this research is mainly based on the visual content analysis. Not to dwell on the theoretical phase, if not in the paragraphs concerning to the photo elicitation technique description, only the two main reasons why visual contents have been chosen for this research will be discussed. The first one is the lack of tourism studies confronting different stakeholders' points of view (Piva, Prats, 2021). Piva and Prats argue, basing on other scholars' work (Qu *et al.*, 2011; Wagner, Peters, 2009) that in many researches the place image and the place identity concepts have often been mixed up and rarely compared to each other.

The second one, instead, is the necessity to produce further research on development studies based on User Generated Contents or UGC (Acuti *et al.*, 2018). UGC, especially visual UGC, have been definitely underused by social research on local development (Acuti *et al.*, 2018; Goodchild, 2007; Loda, 2010).

The selected place for this study is the municipality of Sellano, in the Italian region of Umbria. This region represents not only the most common kind of rural and mountainous Italian area (Carver, 2017; de Salvo, Pizzi, 2020), but also the typical landscape that characterises this re-

³ The National Strategy for Inland Areas (SNAI) is an Italian government's initiative to identify and restore the socioeconomically weakest parts of the country. It started in 2012 with a mapping action that showed a widespread situation of isolation characterising many municipalities along the entire Country (almost 60% of the territory).

gion, the “medieval villages on top of the hills”. This specific municipality, moreover, has the peculiarity to host an interesting restoration process which is taking place in the hamlet of Postignano. This village has been completely restored after having been abandoned during the Sixties. The village is entirely owned by private citizens, now, who are trying to revitalise it as a scattered hotel and as residential space for potential new buyers. Therefore, an effective place branding strategy is vital for such a place. The visual storytelling set by this actor will be compared with the regional government’s one concerning the same territory, with the tourists and with the surrounding inhabitants.

Tourist-produced pictures have been obtained with an Instagram scraping operation⁴. Many pictures posted by public profiles and georeferenced within the Sellano municipality have been collected with this method. The period selected for the picture gathering is the entire month of August 2020. This month, in fact, presents unique features for this kind of research. By that time, the law setting dealing with the COVID-19 pandemic was allowing the opening of almost all the tourism activities but limited the access to the country for foreign people. Such situation implies a more solid certainty that the tourism regional offer was enjoyed by a more homogeneous public, that year. This characteristic of the picture sample is really important due to the relevance attached by several studies to the tourists’ cultural background during the production of images (Deng *et al.*, 2019). The individuals’ cultural framework, in fact, seems able to affect contents and meanings linked to touristic pictures. Furthermore, August 2020 was chosen as a good period to consider touristic pictures since it was also an Umbrian record-month for nights spent in accommodation and visits⁵. This fact encouraged us to think not only that the Umbrian territory has been massively photographed, but also diffusely. The need for safe and healthy places to visit, in fact, appeared as one of the main reasons for choosing secondary and isolated destinations to spend the holidays. These areas were perceived as safer (Izzo, 2020). Choosing this sample, then, is supposed to ensure high probabilities to deal with pictures produced by culturally homogeneous tourists (Italians) and by a more consistent number of tourists in comparison with the previous years. The final sample is a picture series composed by 66 pictures.

Along with this photographic series, moreover, an inhabitants-produced one has been analysed. These pictures have been collected using the photo-elicitation technique, which consists in interviewing the dwellers surrounding Sellano about some self-produced pictures. In this case we chose to make the inhabitants produce the pictures according with Beilin’s (2005) approach, since this makes it possible to work on pictures better connected to the interviewee’s point of view. The inhabitants’ point of view has often not been considered within the territorial planning. Participatory Place Branding theorists, thus, started laying the groundwork for the regular listening of the residents’ opinion for the place branding strategies design. The path for inclusiveness and participation to become a standard in this field is still long, however (Hudak, 2019). This has been recently restated referring to the tourism field and especially to the Italian context (Piva, Prats, 2021; Rolando, 2021), but further research to strengthen this concept and integrate practices and policies is still required.

The photo elicitation technique is an interesting research tool, speaking of place branding strategies development. As explained by Parmeggiani (2006), the Visual Sociology perspective has many features that make it suitable to carry out a local development study. According to this scholar, in fact, places are research objects characterised both by a tangible and an intangible dimension. Photography, then, is a powerful media to make connections, symbols and meanings connected to objects emerge, due to its capacity to bridge the physical world

4 We used a software called “4KStogram” to collect pictures, taking inspiration by Acuti *et al.* (2018). Despite its wide diffusion (1,074 billion users in 2021), Instagram is an underexploited source of pictures, according with the above-mentioned study.

5 August 2020 saw a +7% increase of visitors compared to 2019 (<https://www.regione.umbria.it/turismo-attivi-ta-sportive/statistiche-turismo-2020>).

with the cultural one. Place pictures, in fact, not only depict the society which inherited those places and which is continuously modifying it, but also represent different subjects' and social groups' gazes (Collier Collier, 1986; Curry Clarke, 1983). Many studies about rurality based on a photo elicitation technique, to conclude, demonstrated how this method can be useful to communicate the local identity characteristics (Panelli *et al.*, 2003). Concretely, Photo Elicitation consists in asking different actors to take pictures about their territory, in order to interview them about what they chose to show.

For this research, 15 interviews to inhabitants have been realised, for a total amount of 96 pictures.

The final sum of pictures analysed for this study, then, is 518 (96 from the inhabitants, 66 from tourists⁶, 91 from the local government website and 265 from the village of Postignano).

3.1 Coding procedure

As anticipated, this research consists in comparing multiple visual narrative strands about one territory led by various actors.

To compare polysemic languages such as those of images, the most accurate and structured coding procedure has been adopted. The main references for the preparation of the phases we are about to describe were the works of Bell (2001), Parmeggiani (2006, 2010), Frisina (2016) and Konecki (2011). The evolution of these techniques and approaches will not be recalled, here, but we can suggest the above-mentioned works in order to get some wider insights about the application of visual methodologies in sociology. We want to reaffirm, however, that the main reason to adopt a visual approach for this kind of study is its potential in comparing different points of view with many related benefits. It is not necessary to directly contact the tourists to have their pictures, since they spontaneously shared their visual contents online taking part in a collective Digital Storytelling of a place (Gubrium, Harper, 2016; Gubrium, Turner, 2011; Oliveira, Panyik, 2015; Perissinotto, 2020); the self-production of pictures has been a good excuse for establishing a contact with local inhabitants, overcoming their distrust (Bignante, 2010; Harper, 2002; Stedman *et al.*, 2004); an organized and structured storytelling like that of the local government and private enterprises is based right on this kind of language to promote territories.

Let's see what the steps to code the pictures have been in order to compare them to each other.

The first step has been the pictures collection from websites ("web scraping") and using the photo elicitation technique without rejecting the pictures not related to this study, yet.

Table 1 The categories used to classify the pictures

| VALUE | LABEL | DESCRIPTION |
|-------------------------------------|-------|---|
| Landscapes/green environment | green | Nature appears conspicuously (landscapes or backgrounds, generally naturalistic contexts) |
| Urban fabric | urb | Urban landscapes, not villages (streets with non-historic inhabited areas, cities, urban fabrics) |
| Water | wat | Predominant water element |

6 The 66 pictures selected for this study were all the pictures available scraping only Instagram public profiles – that are social profiles whose owners have allowed access to all users registered on the same platforms – within the 1st-30th August 2020 timeframe.

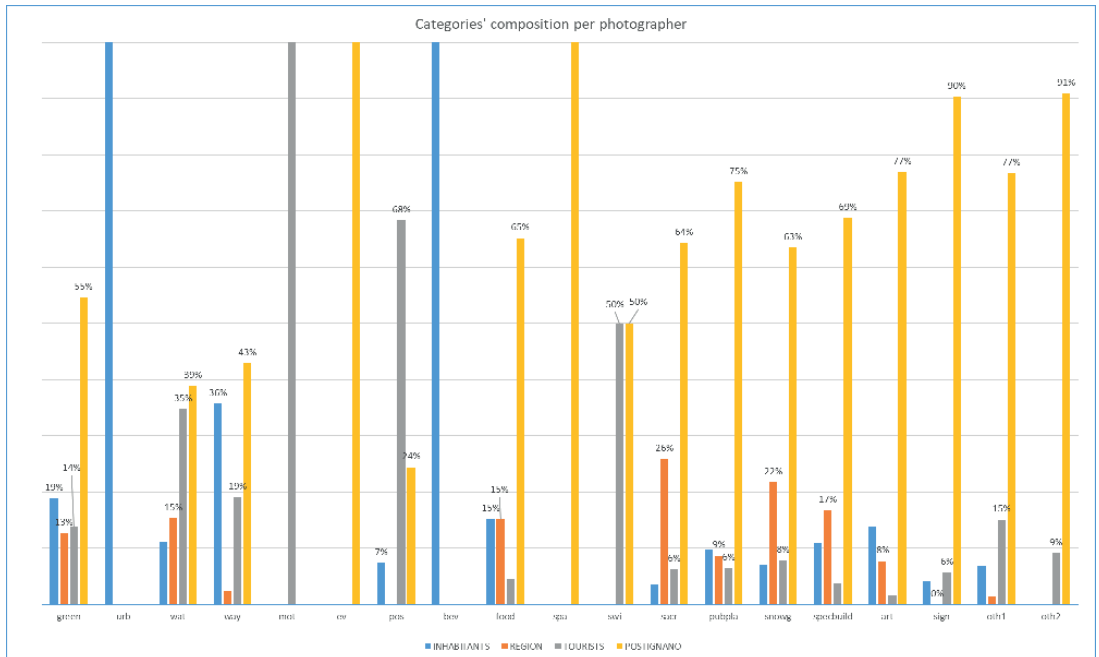
| | | |
|--|-----------|--|
| Walking, cycling, pathways | way | The infrastructure itself, but also the walking and cycling activities |
| Motors | mot | Motorcycle or car as the main object of the representation |
| Events | ev | Concerts, festivals, sporting events |
| Pose | pos | Selfie in front of the landscape or other contexts. The subjects do nothing in particular: they pose in front of the camera and are the main subject |
| Wine, liquors, local beverage | bev | The focus is on the wine, on the drinking |
| Chocolate | choc | The element of chocolate is present as the protagonist of the photograph |
| Food | fd | Any other food related product, but also dinners and the act of eating, even without food appearing |
| Sport | sprt | Sports activities represented as the main subject |
| Wellness | spa | Scenes set in spas or similar places |
| Swimming pools, bathing | swi | The subjects represented in swimwear near ponds or swimming pools (also photos of the subject dressed, but next to a swimming pool) |
| Wellness - other | freet | Any other activity that has to do with body care, recreation and tourism |
| Fiction | fict | Everything concerning movies and fiction production |
| Sacred places and objects | sacr | Churches or other sacred places as the main subject, including relics or costume jewellery linked to religion |
| Sacred - other | sacr2 | Any other thing related to religion |
| Streets, squares, villages, public spaces | pubpla | Open spaces within villages |
| Villages - Snowglobe | snowg | Villages represented externally in full figure |
| Specific buildings | specbuild | Architectural details of villages or historic buildings also outside the villages as the main subjects |
| Artifacts and artworks | art | Ancient artifacts, artworks in their context |
| Signs, graphics, newspaper articles, drawings | sign | Signs, writings, information material |
| Other 1 | oth1 | Photography linked to the representation of the territory but which does not fall into the previous categories; Selfies that occupy the entire figure and in which it is not possible to determine what one is doing |
| Other 2 | oth2 | Not concerning the representation of the territory |

The public papers describing the regional government's strategic plans for place tourism promotion have then been analysed to understand what the Region wants to be known outside its borders. First categories to classify the pictures have been created, basing on this first desk analysis.

A portion of each photographic series (about 10% each) has been chosen for a first look, extracting the picture randomly for this preliminary phase. For each of these pictures a brief description (no more than 100 words) has been noted, in which the coders tried to describe the contents they were able to catch as precisely as possible. Once the notes completed, they have been ana-

lysed looking for key-contents which could allow to define new categories of objects contained in the pictures (table 1), in addition to those created previously. Basing on them, all the pictures have been classified separately by the two coders. For each picture a maximum of only 4 elements have been recognised, to force the coders to identify inside the frame only those elements that they considered relevant. These two different classifications have been compared using the Pearson's R, to verify how deep the differences were, if any, and to discuss them. The different actors who produced the pictures, then, have been crossed with the content categories obtaining this distribution (chart 1):

Chart 1



Note that, as suggested by Konecki, all those contents which did not appear in any pictures are not displayed in the chart (like "chocolate", "sport", "fiction").

4. Results

After coding and analysing the contents of all the images we were able to observe how much each actor contributed to the composition of each contents category. Below we will analyse the main contents of the visual storytelling actor by actor, trying to understand what are the characteristic elements of each approach to the visual side of Place Branding. We have summarized the main contents of our analysis within the following framework (table 2):

Table 2 The pictures' content summary-scheme

| ACTOR | REGION | TOURISTS | POSTIGNANO | INHABITANTS |
|----------------------|---|--|--|---|
| MAIN CONTENTS | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Landscapes/ green environment • Villages - Snow-globe • Food • Sacred places and objects • Specific buildings • Streets, squares, villages' public spaces | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Landscapes/ green environment • Water • Walking, cycling, pathways • Motors • Pose • Swimming pools, bathing • Signs, graphic, newspaper articles, drawings • Other | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Events • Spa • Bathing (swimming pool) • Streets, squares, villages' public spaces • Villages – Snow-globe • Artifacts and art-works • Signs, graphic, newspaper articles, drawings • Other | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Landscapes/ green environment • Walking, cycling, pathways • Beverages • Food • Specific buildings • Artifacts and art-works |
| LABEL | PICTORESQUE, POST-CARD POINT OF VIEW | SIGHTSEEING AND LOISIR | INFORMATION AND PERFORMANCE | INSIGHTS AND INVESTIGATION |
| NOTES | Life, actions, performance and services missing. | No museums or guided tours, experiences or activities (except bathing). Visual and aesthetic relation with landscapes with the environment. | Information about what is happening, about their activities and potential experiences to be done in Postignano. | The objects depicted are mere pretexts to describe aspirations and problems about the territory. |

The narrative attitude of the regional government has been labelled by us as “Aesthetic, symbolic, postcard-like and picturesque”.

The regional government visual narrative, in fact, seems to insist a lot on the amenities and aesthetic resources present within the territory. Elements such as landscapes, villages, buildings are often represented from an external point of view, with an apparently documentary and descriptive attitude. The goal, apparently, is to create a sort of regional catalogue in which the different points of interest are described in a realistic way: according to this representation style, giving the idea of the object means making it appear in full within the picture. This can be found both in the visual representation of specific points of interest, such as buildings such as churches, castles or monuments in general, and of entire settlements. The absence of actions, performances and service delivery representation is another evident aspect of this actor visual narrative style. To make an example, food is not represented showing people who eat it, food production steps, or photos constructed to trigger emotional reactions, but is rather represented with photographs of the ingredients or the spaces in which it can be consumed.

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make an example, food is not represented showing people who eat it, food production steps, or photos constructed to trigger emotional reactions, but is rather represented with photographs of the ingredients or the spaces in which it can be consumed.

The regional government's visual narrative style, therefore, can be described as a picturesque catalogue of the places and the salient sights present within the territory.

The visual contents of the region also seem to correspond perfectly with those proposed by tourism communication strategies, with great emphasis on the sphere of the Sacred, the Green and the Middle Ages.

The tourists' visual narrative, on the other hand, can be defined as that of "Witnessing and sight-seeing". According to this pattern, the tourists testify to their presence in places by associating their image with the place's icon that attracted them there.

In this case, the photographers seem to welcome some of the region's tourist attraction proposals, often photographing themselves in front of religious buildings and green landscapes. There are, however, some elements that characterize the tourists' gaze on the territory.

The first element is the introduction of photographic themes almost exclusively participated strongly by them such as motors, of which they represent 100% of contributors, bathing and, in general, of the relationship with water (50% in the category "bathing" and 35% in the "water" category) and posing (68% of the pictures representing people posing in front of the camera is given by tourists). Tourists represent themselves through a visual connection with the landscape. They do not represent themselves in the act of performing actions such as playing sports, eating, attending a concert or listening to a guide, but they enter directly into the photo (posing) simply communicating that they have been in the presence of the specific sight.

The need to resort to the "other" category, albeit in a reduced way (15%), is another characteristic element of the tourist view and demonstrates that here there is some greater thematic variety than the visual narrative of the region, whose contents, instead, are all classifiable within 8 content categories out of the 19 used for the classification of the images⁷.

The Castle of Postignano (or Postignano Relais), for its part, adopts a visual storytelling attitude that we have defined as "Information and performance".

The main objective of this type of communication seems informing the website users about what is happening inside the village and providing insights on what surrounds it. The marketers' gaze, in this case, emphasizes the performative and emotional aspect much more than other actors analysed. This emerges not only because this actor is the only one feeding the "events" category, but also because it also dominates the "infographics" category, in which newspaper articles referring to the territory and graphics relating to events are also collected.

The intention to create a catalogue of architectural, historical and cultural resources present in the area is very apparent, as in the case of the regional government (see for example the surroundings representation through the photos of villages in its entirety), but this time with greater attention to specific artifacts and objects of interest.

There is also the need to analyse this actor's penchant to make an abundant use of the "other" category. This, as mentioned about tourists, denotes a certain variety of contents and a communicative dynamism.

Finally, the inhabitants' case is certainly the one of greatest interest.

The inhabitants, in fact, seem to describe the territory with the same content and stylistic attitude of the regional government, leading us to think that the mapping of territorial resources by the regional government has been efficient and exhaustive.

The elements of greatest characterization of this actor are certainly the proposal of the theme of beverage and of roads and paths, which are two themes on which the region has proposed to insist in its strategic plans, but on which they seem to contribute a lot more (36% and 100% respectively).

⁷ The regional government pictures have been analysed using 10 categories, actually, but we are not considering two of them here, because the actor's contribution was lower than 2%.

The narrative of the inhabitants, therefore, is apparently divergent from that of the local government only due to the presence of these two content strands which, in our opinion, do not mark a clear separation between the two ways of describing the territory.

The most significant points of separation, in fact, emerge through the interviews carried out with the photo elicitation technique. The commentary on the images taken, in fact, reveals how they are used as a pretext to tell the limits, inefficiencies and problems of the territory, even if the places represented and the style with which they are depicted are similar.

According with the interviewees, among these problems, the following four are the main ones. The disaffection of the inhabitants towards their own residence areas, firstly. The interviewees report how the historical, artistic and cultural heritage does not receive the due attention from the local community. Secondly, the local administrators' inability to understand and exploit the attractiveness of the territory, as well as to attract and manage funds to enhance it, and their inconsistency in maintaining it. Thirdly, the disparity between the visual narration of the territory within the regional official site and the services actually provided. Several examples have been made of how there are no road signs to the places represented on the site, or of how public funds have been spent to restore cultural sites which then fall into disuse because they are not connected to any activity that keeps them alive. Lastly, some tourists' disappointment when they found themselves faced with a reality different from that represented on the web.

Conclusions

Places can be represented in many different ways. The differences between some of them can provide us some glimpses on the marketing field, while others are able to describe the Place Branding capability to affect local development.

Comparing the regional government visual storytelling with the Postignano one, for instance, could give some inspiration to local administrators so that they could update their way to depict the territory. Also representing people and appealing details could be the way to enhance local promotion, to make an example. Moreover, the comparison with the tourists' perspective could be an interesting occasion to move some steps forward. Exploiting more visual UGCs, in fact, is an innovative way to build a sort of "regional map of tourists perception" to be compared with the local government promotional strategy. Comparing the regional government way to depict the territory with the inhabitants and the tourists ones, in fact, highlights how the Place Branding field is a multidimensional ground with a certain heuristic capability on local development field. The main conclusion this study is inclined to reach is that this region – for which the tourism industry and its storytelling are crucial, as mentioned before – is mostly depicted basing on its aesthetic virtues and this, in our opinion, is an index of low vibrancy and passiveness.

Presenting such a thematic density in various independent storytelling is a promotional strength, for sure, but some specific features of this narrative should start a debate. About 89% of the pictures considered have been included within the 19 categories used. Only 10% among them were representing people and we can hypothesize that this is the first clue of the under-representation of services, performances and activities present in the region. The inhabitants interviewed never chose to represent their territory photographing their workplaces, the streets and the roads they use daily, or the community's meeting points. This is leading us to think that their way of seeing their region is getting closer to the tourists' one, so that their perception of the territory is more connected with the amenities and the aesthetic rather than with aspects like jobs and productivity, for instance. This thesis, moreover, is supported also by all the similarities between the official regional tourism website and the inhabitants' pictures.

Despite the common ground of contents that draw these two points of view nearer, however, the problems with local promotion emerged during the interviews confirm once again how the local

inhabitants' involvement in the place branding promotion should become a standard, as should the place development itself as a form of promotion.

Further research should address more widely the diversity mentioned opening this conclusions paragraph, anyway. In general, places and territories can be very different from each other. In addition, this is even more true and significant in the Italian context, which is densely inhabited and can most likely contain highly characterizing peculiarities even in relatively small areas. A study like this, therefore, should be reproduced on a larger territorial scale, using more material and classifying even more precisely the different types of users who create the visual content to be analysed for the study.

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