Place branding in strategic spatial planning

da Silva Oliveira, Eduardo Henrique

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Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1. Problem statement and strands of reasoning

The debate on place branding is gaining particular momentum at a time when the growing literature on the topic proves that the application of branding practices to cities, countries and (to a lesser extent) regions, is an “increasingly appealing topic for academic research” (Ashworth et al., 2015, p. 1). Furthermore, place branding has also become a well-known practice among place managers and governments (Boisen et al., 2011; Kavaratzis et al., 2015; Moilanen, 2015) who have been engaging with marketing and branding strategies in order to position and give visibility to their respective places - thereby attracting residents, tourists, businesses, investments and sporting and cultural events (Zenker and Jacobsen, 2015). The fact that place branding is both an appealing academic topic and a popular practice also has to do with the increase in online information/knowledge-sharing platforms, such as blogs, Facebook pages and Twitter feeds devoting attention to the topic (see appendix A, page 238 for an extensive, but not exclusive, list of those platforms). This phenomenon is in addition to the establishment of networks for place branding and marketing institutes, such as The Institute for Place Management, based in Manchester, UK, The European Place Marketing Institute, based in Warsaw, Poland, and The Nordic Place Academy, operating from Stockholm, Sweden, the recently established International Place Branding Association, among others. These entities have organized several academic and non-academic conferences on the topic of place branding, place marketing and place management, as well as publishing insightful reports shedding light on the application of branding principles to places (see, for example, Best Place Institute/European Place Marketing Institute, 2015) or discussing the contribution of the high street and street markets to the economic, social and political health of cities (see, for example, Hallsworth et al., 2015).

Situated at the forefront of the contemporary debate on place branding, this thesis sets out to investigate the phenomenon of place branding – that is, places making use of branding techniques and principles - and its theoretical linkage with strategic spatial planning, conceived as a means of overcoming the temporal and often spatial limitations and rigidities of traditional/statutory planning. Specifically, the thesis scrutinizes the role of place branding within a strategic approach to spatial planning, with special reference to a peripheral European region — that of northern Portugal (Nomenclature of Territorial Units for Statistics II, henceforth referred to as NUTS II). Before I define the aims of this thesis, it is important to clarify the two possible strands of reasoning for the above-mentioned approach and justify why I have developed further the primary line of reasoning.

In this thesis, I seek to explore critically the actual or potential roles of place branding as an instrument for the attainment of strategic spatial planning goals - that is the primary strand of reasoning debated theoretically in chapter 2 and explored empirically in chapters 3 to 7. An alternative strand of reasoning is also debated in chapter 2 as a counterpoint to the primary strand (Figure 1.1.). This alternative strand of reasoning takes place branding to be dominant over strategic spatial planning, while the line of reasoning that guided this research takes place branding within strategic spatial planning specifically to be an instrument (primary strand of reasoning/the optimal approach). Simply put, the primary strand of reasoning integrates place branding within wider spatial-planning strategies, and is developed in a close dialectic between place-branding goals and the
integrative and strategic approach towards spatial development that strategic spatial planning promotes (the two strands of reasoning are explained intensively in chapter 2).

![Figure 1.1. The two possible strands/directions of reasoning considered in this Ph.D. thesis. Source: own elaboration.](image)

Considering the primary strand of reasoning, this thesis aims to address two main problems:

1. First, it aims to bridge the gap in the place-branding literature by considering it as a strategic spatial planning instrument (Figure 1.2.). This is in line with Ashworth et al. (2015), who argue that place branding has witnessed some misgivings, misalignments and unbridgeable gaps in its theoretical progression and disciplinary maturation, and that it “is ripe for a rethinking in terms of its roots, theoretical underpinnings, practical application and expected outcomes” (2015, p. 2). One of those theoretical gaps is identified in Ashworth (2011a). Ashworth (2011a) claims that place branding “lacks at present any intellectual grounding or even positioning within place planning and policy making” (2011a, p. 702). Van Assche and Lo (2011) reinforce Ashworth’s (2011a) argument and state convincingly that “much terrain is yet to be uncovered by scientists in the investigation of the existing and potential linkages between spatial planning and place branding” (2011, p. 124). In addition, the theoretical assumption postulated in this thesis - that is, place branding operating as a strategic spatial planning instrument - provides a contribution to the theoretical advancement and disciplinary refinement of place branding, thus responding to the call of Ashworth et al. (2015).

![Figure 1.2. Layout of the approach taken in this Ph.D. thesis. Source: own elaboration.](image)
Secondly, it aims to contribute to the academic debate on regional branding by discussing its relevance and effectiveness in supporting economic and socio-spatial realignment through the shaping of clearly envisioned shared futures, and supporting structural change in that direction. This is in line with Ikuta et al. (2007), who touched upon the significant lack of attention paid to regional branding, and also with Zenker and Jacobsen (2015), who underline that “region branding has received relatively little research attention” (2015, p. 2) when compared to nation and city branding. For instance, in an analysis of 111 place-branding studies, Chan and Marafa (2013) identified about one third of the papers debating place branding on the urban and regional scales and two-thirds of them debating place branding on the national scale. In another study, Hanna and Rowley (2008) found that more than half of the cases in the literature related to the national scale, while a third focused on the city scale. Only 8 per cent of the articles studied related to the regional scale, with particular emphasis on rural regions. Similarly, Lucarelli and Berg (2011) and Hornskov (2007) have concluded that the academic literature has only seldom been concerned with regional branding. While some scholars argue about the lack of studies on regional branding, others highlight the reasons why regional branding is relevant. For instance, Andersson (2014) underlines that place branding has become a critical component of regional development strategies (Andersson, 2014). Pasquinelli and Terävä (2013), however, suggest that place-branding researchers must devote more attention to regions that struggle in building a reputation and gaining visibility. Recently, Zenker and Jacobsen (2015) have attempted to respond to the calls that Pasquinelli and Terävä (2013) and Andersson (2014) have made to further develop regional branding. In an edited book chapter (in Inter-regional Place Branding: Best Practices, Challenges and Solutions), a group of researchers, including myself, debate inter-regional branding and cross-border place branding by providing examples of numerous cases and best practices from Europe to Canada, from single-case regions to cross-border Euroregions. From my perspective, a possible explanation for this lack of attention paid to the regional scale could be supported by the fact that some regions have official governmental bodies and are institutionalized, while others are not politically accountable or have no regional governments, making it difficult to coordinate efforts towards a unique regional brand. This thesis directly addresses the need to develop place branding independently of the geographical scale of application, and integrating it within wider spatial-planning strategies with a specific focus on the challenges of branding regions (Figure 1.3.).
This thesis provides empirical evidence by paying particular attention to the region of northern Portugal (‘Norte de Portugal’ in Portuguese). The challenges of branding a region facing myriad economic and social deprivations were central from the beginning of this research. The identification of the key regional actors was the preliminary step in the research, besides listing both the current branding efforts at the national and regional levels and the spatial-planning documents in effect. As result of previous studies conducted in the field of place marketing, by taking the Minho sub-region in northern Portugal as a case study (see Oliveira, 2011), tourism was taken to be a relevant sector in the economy of the country and the region, as well as benefitting from the cooperation of the Spanish Autonomous Community of Galicia. Following the preliminary studies and the research proposal submitted to the institution funding this Ph.D. project, two chapters of this thesis focus on the tourism sector and Portugal and its northern region as tourism destinations, and another one (chapter 7) on the relationships between northern Portugal and Galicia (in the context cross-border place-branding).

Despite such place-specific analysis, this thesis aims to contribute to the scholarly and professional debate on place branding and strategic spatial planning instruments beyond Portugal and its northern region. In an attempt to shed light on the interplay between place branding and spatial-planning strategies, this chapter critically reviews theoretical and empirical endeavours linking the two fields, which together comprise the theoretical backbone of this research (Table 1.1.). The aim of this chapter is, in fact, to provide the reader with a solid framework as a starting point, by presenting the line of reasoning on which the following chapters are built. At the same time, it also aims to explain the research objectives, questions and methodology, as well as justifying the choice of case study.
1.2. Theoretical and empirical endeavours linking place branding and spatial planning

A considerable number of place-branding scholars acknowledge that corporate branding has paved the way for a more sophisticated appreciation of place branding (see, for example, Ashworth, 2005; Kavaratzis, 2008; Skinner, 2008; Kavaratzis, 2009; Hankinson, 2010; Kavaratzis and Hatch, 2013). For instance, Boisen et al. (2011) claim that much place-branding effort has been concerned with translating traditional methods from marketing and corporate branding to the situations of towns, cities, regions and countries. Van Assche and Lo (2011) strongly state that “place branding might still be indebted to marketing and corporate branding strategies and techniques” (p. 117) while Andersson (2015) claims that “place branding is commonly conceptualized with a focus on big cities, such as London, New York and Singapore, building from concepts and models from mainstream branding theory” (p. 5). In addition, McCann (2009) and van Ham (2008) argue that the dominant perspectives align place-branding practices with corporate Branding and business ideas, and little consideration has been given to its spatial connotations and associations. Corporate branding seemed to offer some insights into place branding at around 2005 (see, for example, Kavaratzis and Ashworth, 2005), mostly because both corporations and places produce multiple products. It soon became clear, however, that corporate branding was a blind alley, as places did not react like corporations but were quite different (see, for example, Ashworth and Kavaratzis, 2010).

It is only recently that research on place branding has significantly broadened its scope to include a wide range of other socio-spatial and spatial-economic issues, and is drawing closer to studies of multi-place actors’ governance and participatory planning (Van Assche and Lo, 2011). Likewise, Anholt (2007) underlines that appropriate governance processes may lead to increased social and political cohesion in related policies, and may construct a sustainable place-branding strategy. In addition, the branding option has been presented as a response to the competitive-authentic dialectic of places and, specifically, to areas in need of physical revitalization or urban regeneration and which face post-industrial or other forms of structural, socio-economic change (Evans, 2015). Andersson (2015) recently attempted to reconceptualize the idea of place branding through “more spatially aware readings of the geographies of place branding” (p. 37). Andersson (2014, 2015) introduces a geographical/spatial perspective to place branding by advocating that place branding is much more than merely the migration of corporate branding theories and strategies to places.

As a matter of fact, several conceptual frameworks have emerged over the last 25 years to ground empirical research on place branding and contribute to its theoretical underpinnings. However, only a handful of those models have permitted a more geographical/spatial dimension to the idea of branding places, though it was present largely at the city level. However, the conceptualization of place branding as strategic spatial planning instrument was pioneering and emerged in the literature in 2015 (see Oliveira, 2015a, 2015b). Table 1.1. aims to summarize the theoretical and empirical endeavours linking place branding and spatial planning which have contributed to the maturation and conceptual effectiveness of the primary strand of reasoning put forward in this thesis.
Table 1.1. Theoretical and empirical endeavours linking place branding and more geographical/spatial planning approaches between 1988 and 2015.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Theoretical approach</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Geographical marketing mix</strong></td>
<td><strong>Entrepreneurial model of city governance</strong></td>
<td><strong>Strategies for place improvement</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Spatial-functional measures; Organizational measures; Financial measures; Promotional measures.</td>
<td>Large-scale physical redevelopment; Public art and civic statuary; Mega events; Public-private partnerships and cultural regeneration; Advertising and promotion.</td>
<td>A place needs a sound design that enhances its attractiveness; Places need to develop and maintain a basic infrastructure to facilitate people’s mobility and trading; A place must provide basic services of a quality that meets business and public needs; Places need a range of attractions for their own citizens and visitors.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Empirical evidence or context</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>An analysis at the city level. References to the city of Groningen in the Netherlands are provided in Ashworth and Voogd (1988).</td>
<td>Places in the broadest sense.</td>
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## Theoretical approach

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Theoretical framework of city branding</strong></th>
<th><strong>Spatial cognition and spatial behaviour</strong></th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Primary communication</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Landscape strategies:</strong></td>
<td>The images that people hold in their minds about geographical units are formed in a similar way to images about products. However, geographers prefer to label this similarity as “spatial cognition”.</td>
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<td>Urban design; Architecture; Public spaces; Public art.</td>
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<td><strong>Place’s behaviour:</strong></td>
<td>Spatial cognition informs the literature on regional branding by arguing that a region's image is influenced in a positive manner by the extent to which the region is known in the outside world.</td>
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<td>Vision for the city; Quality of services; Events; Financial incentives.</td>
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<td><strong>Organizational structure:</strong></td>
<td>Spatial cognition for regional competitiveness demands that regions think about their identity, image and brand, as well as the reputation they desire. In this regard, Hospers (2004) argues that a strategy of place branding could indeed be useful.</td>
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<td>Community networks; Public-private partnerships; Citizens’ participation.</td>
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<td><strong>Infrastructure:</strong></td>
<td>“Spatial behaviour” is how people decide on a certain geographical location for their investments, to work, live or spend leisure time.</td>
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<td>Accessibility; Cultural and tourism facilities;</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Secondary communication</strong></td>
<td>Place (region) branding as a strategy of positive image forming as well as improving a place’s reputation.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Advertising; Public relations; Graphic design; Logo and taglines.</td>
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<td><strong>Tertiary communication</strong></td>
<td>In line with Passi (1996), the territorial shape is the degree to which a geographical area is distinct from other areas in spatial terms. The better defined the territorial borders of a region, the more recognizable they are.</td>
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<td>Word of mouth, reinforced by the digital landscape or electronic word of mouth.</td>
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## Empirical evidence or context

<p>| An analysis at the city level. References to Amsterdam, Budapest and Athens are provided in Kavaratzis (2008). | Several examples from Europe and North America are provided. Deeper focus on the branding process of the cross-border Øresund region. |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<th>Author(s)</th>
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<tr>
<td>2005–2008</td>
<td>Deffner and Liouris (2005)</td>
<td>Place (city) marketing as a significant urban-planning and urban-tourism planning tool.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Evans (2006)</td>
<td>Place branding as a concept and approach to city development and planning.</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>City marketing needs to take into account the multiple functions of cities — spatially, socially, economically, politically and administratively.</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Braun argues that the needs and wants of urban customers are expressed in their spatial behaviour. When a company or a household decides to change location, or when someone decides to visit a certain place, a spatial dimension is involved.</td>
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<td>2009</td>
<td>Pellenbarg and Meester (2009)</td>
<td>Regional marketing as an element in regional development strategies and in support of reimagining processes at the regional level.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Metaxas (2009)</td>
<td>The role and the significance of place marketing as a strategic planning process in the whole process of local development and competitiveness.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Pike (2009)</td>
<td>Pike argues that brands and the process of branding are geographical because they are entangled in inescapable spatial associations.</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Spatial associations of brands and branding suggest that their geographical entanglements may be relational and territorial, bounded and unbounded, fluid and fixed, territorializing and deterritorializing.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Empirical evidence or context</td>
<td>Province of Groningen, in the northern part of the Netherlands.</td>
<td>The case of the Island of Malta as a competitive tourist destination.</td>
<td>Several goods and services brands in association with the country of origin.</td>
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### Theoretical approach

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*Source: own elaboration based on the mentioned references.*
1.2.1. Highlights of Table 1.1. for the theoretical and empirical attempts to link place branding and geographical thinking/spatial planning

i) The period between 1988 and 2004

Reading Table 1.1., and highlighting the period between 1988 and 2004, the geographical marketing mix developed by Ashworth and Voogd (1988, 1990) deserves some reflections, here, for its contribution to the theoretical approach deployed in this thesis.

Ashworth and Voogd (1990), first proposed a geographical marketing mix to capture, according to Kavaratzis (2005, p. 336), the “whole entity of the place-products”. In their seminal work, the authors argue that a place (city) marketing and branding process is “inseparably linked with spatial policy, and especially with the physical structure plan” (Ashworth and Voogd, 1990, p. 23). Ashworth and Voogd (1988, 1990) provide the example of the 1986 structure plan for the Dutch city of Groningen, the northern Netherlands, as being, at the time, a new approach towards spatial planning. The plan contemplated the possibility of developing short-term actions in which place marketing and branding would emerge in support of the management of the city’s spatial structure. In addition, they stated that the promotion of the place image must occur not only within the market-planning process as a whole, but “used in preference to or in combination with other non-market-oriented place management techniques” (Ashworth and Voogd, 1990, p. 122). At the regional scale, the place image of the northern Netherlands region was promoted by public authorities or by private agencies with public responsibilities, “as part of the long-standing regional planning policies” (p. 122). This was an important reflection, one that influenced me to develop chapter 3 of this thesis by focusing on the region of northern Portugal (as well as in chapter 5).

In this philosophical approach to place management developed by Ashworth and Voogd (1990), place branding emerges not as having investment attraction, or an increase of tourism revenues, as the ultimate goal or purpose, but as contributing to achieving the economic and development objectives of spatial planning on the city scale. In addition, Ashworth and Voogd (1990) argue that “measures operating in spatial design features will contribute towards urban images and thus reinforce, or contradict, promotional measures” (1990, p. 31). According to Ashworth and Voogd (1990), the idea of marketing (and branding) places involves not only promotional measures but also spatial-functional, organizational and financial measures that are meant to improve places and facilitate place-management interventions.

The contributions from Ashworth and Voogd (1990) inspired the theoretical model developed by Kavaratzis (2004). Kavaratzis’s model (2004) included the components of what he calls “primary communication”, deepening the Ashworth and Voogd (1990) rationale of understanding place branding as far more than promotional activities. One can label Kavaratzis’s (2004, 2008) approach to city branding as an inclusive/integrative model, one in which place branding includes interventions in the spatial structure and the improvement of spatial qualities of places, as well as the definition of a vision for the place. However, it is interesting to note that in Zenker’s (2011) analysis of 18 place-branding studies (2005–2010), architecture, buildings and public spaces were largely absent from the brand elements employed. For instance, the terms “physical”, “built environment” and “architecture”, identified as being positive assets for a place, are mentioned in only three of
those 18 studies. Kavaratzis (2004) advances, when compared with Ashworth and Voogd (1990), by identifying the definition of a vision for a place as fundamental within the primary step of communicating a place brand. The secondary communication component in Kavaratzis's model “is the formal, intentional communication, that most commonly takes place through well-known marketing practices like indoor and outdoor advertising, public relations, graphic design, the use of logos” (2004, p. 43). Tertiary communication refers to word of mouth strategies, which have been reinforced to a large extent by electronic forms of word of mouth. In this third stage, the opinions and perspectives of citizens, who are among the most important actors in a place-branding strategy, independently of the spatial scale of the application, are taken in deep consideration. Nowadays, and following the development of various communication platforms that facilitate knowledge and information exchange, visitors, travellers and investors are opinion-makers when it comes to places, their assets and their qualities. Their opinions also play an important role in the final outcome of a place-branding process. In chapter 4, I have attempted to consider this issue by focusing on the opinions of traveller bloggers for the reasons that will be further explained.

Although the theoretical frameworks developed by Ashworth and Voogd (1990) and Kavaratzis (2004) have influenced my thinking, the approach taken here underpins such theory by using knowledge from strategic spatial planning literature to focus on key challenges, structural change, the definition of envisioned shared futures and the awareness of how to get there. Place branding is considered here as an instrument for the fulfilment of the defined strategic spatial planning goals. As Table 1.1. shows, I have developed my thinking in terms of other approaches to place branding, following the evolution of the idea of branding places.

**ii) The period between 2005 and 2010**

In the period between 2005 and 2010, the approach developed by Deffner and Metaxas (2006), subsequently reframed in Deffner and Metaxas (2010), is useful in enhancing the theoretical linkage between place branding and spatial planning.

Deffner and Metaxas (2006) highlight the “connection between place marketing and spatial development as an innovative approach to planning” (p. 6), and contend that in order for places such as cities to be successful, the application of marketing techniques must be interconnected with spatial (urban) planning. The authors build empirical evidence by taking as a case study the Nea Ionia municipality in the prefecture of Magnesia in Greece and the region of Paphos in Cyprus - partners of the CultMark (Cultural Heritage, Local Identity and Place Marketing for Sustainable Development) and supported by INTERREG IIIC project. Findings from this place-specific study reveal the fact that contemporary urban planning in Greece must focus on strategic spatial (urban) planning. On the links between place branding (and place marketing) and spatial planning, they argue that spatial planning “is not sufficient by itself if a city wants to attract businesses and investors, international and/or domestic tourists or new residents, or creating a sense of place and civic pride to its existing residents” (Deffner and Metaxas, 2006, p. 27). In line with Deffner and Metaxas (2006, 2010), place branding (and place marketing) and spatial planning are intertwined concepts. Spatial-planning interventions can contribute substantially to marketing and branding, which need to be strategic as well as to involve urban regeneration, focusing especially on tourism and culture. The
authors argue that place marketing and branding are “strategic processes contributing to urban/regional development and urban/regional competitiveness” (Deffner and Metaxas, 2010, p. 67). The place-specific conclusions drawn from analysis of the Neo Ionia and Paphos cases are presented in Table 1.2.

**Table 1.2.** A comparison between place-branding processes and spatial planning undertaken in Neo Ionia in Greece and Paphos in Cyprus.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Nea Ionia, Magnesia, Thessaly region, Greece</th>
<th>Paphos, Cyprus</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>The definition of a vision for the future (envisioning)</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Envisioning a city that is economically robust as well as socially balanced, and that pays due respect to both the natural and the cultural environments.</td>
<td>Paphos focused on the definition of a vision for a cultural and natural heritage area able to attract tourism whilst improving the quality of life of the citizens and communities.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Ability to accomplish the defined vision</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nea Ionia lags behind in the definition of a strategic planning process, which is the basis of an effective place-marketing plan.</td>
<td>Paphos has followed the strategic planning process and seems to be effective in terms of planning. This effectiveness mirrors Paphos’s ability to set up principal objectives, performing situation audit analysis, organizing efficient partnerships between local authorities and businesses and implementing practical methods of information and data collection.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nea Ionia was less successful in implementing place-promotional initiatives.</td>
<td>The implementation of strategic planning steps puts Paphos in the lead on the implementation of various promotional policies.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nea Ionia is affected by the Greek national tourism/cultural policy, but to a very small degree in comparison to Paphos.</td>
<td>Paphos follows a national tourism policy and also contributes to the national tourism strategic process.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nea Ionia has faced more difficulties in articulating its vision in terms of the national strategies.</td>
<td>Paphos has engaged with local authorities and decision makers, thus strengthening its local communities and their capacities.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Main empirical remarks</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The absence of strategic spatial planning and the presence of a weak link with the national strategy create difficulties for Neo Ionia in designing a stronger place brand, specifically for tourism and cultural purposes (the defined vision).</td>
<td>Paphos became competitive as a tourist destination through the development of strategic actions and the use of branding, making it successful in shaping the defined vision. Strategic spatial planning, for Paphos, has contributed to the success of its branding.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Main theoretical remark

The definition of a vision and its consequent integration within wider spatial planning strategies contribute to the effectiveness of place-branding initiatives. Strong strategic spatial planning is the basis of effective and successful place-branding initiatives.

Source: own elaboration based on Deffner and Metaxas (2006, 2010).

Despite the relevant contributions of Deffner and Liouris (2005), Evans (2006), Braun (2008), Pellenbarg and Meester (2009), Metaxas (2009) and Pike (2009) to the debate on the branding and brand management of city and regional brands, I have highlighted work by Deffner and Metaxas (2006, 2010) as their rationale has contributed to shaping my thoughts in the early stages of this research. Specifically, their findings contribute to enhancing the theoretical relevance of the primary strand of reasoning developed further in this thesis. The key remark of Table 1.2. is that a conceptual and empirical dialectic between place branding and spatial-planning strategies is necessary in order to align regional/civic actors’ perspectives with those of public and private organizations. In addition, one can conclude that strong spatial planning is the basis of effective and successful place-branding initiatives. This is close to the arguments debated by Van Assche and Lo (2011), which I explore in detail below and in chapter 2.

iii) The period between 2011 and 2015


Van Assche and Lo (2011) assert that the synergies between place branding and spatial planning “are there, and deserve further exploration” (p. 124). When investigating three regions — Tuscany, Italy; Missouri and northern Minnesota in the US — Van Assche and Lo (2011) noted that a strong place brand allows for strong planning interventions (as in the case of Tuscany). In Tuscany, the synergies between place branding and spatial planning are seen by regional actors as clear and undeniable. The approach to place branding through planning strategies developed in Tuscany is the result of a process of collective awareness that has promoted distinctiveness and Tuscan qualities. Strong articulation between regional actors, civic action/participation at the local level and the coordination of spatial policies are also key for effective branding and spatial planning that emerge from branding this Italian region (Van Assche and Lo, 2011).

The case of northern Minnesota offers an alternative perspective to the relationship between place branding and spatial planning. The cultural landscape of northern Minnesota was successfully rebranded as a natural landscape. The dialectical relationship between northern Minnesota’s image and spatial planning were crucial for the success of this rebranding — translating into protection measures and a more appropriate combination of land use. In addition, the spatial planning strategies implemented by Minnesotan authorities “improved the quality of the actual product that was branded, so it could obtain more followers” (Van Assche and Lo, 2011, p. 123).

A detailed analysis of Van Assche and Lo’s (2011) approach is presented in chapter 2. Drawing theoretical conclusions from their work here, Figure 1.4. presents a summary of what I term “the theoretical cycle between place branding and spatial planning”. Van Assche and Lo (2011) argue that
the absence of spatial planning in Missouri blocked the design of place branding; thus, a Missourian brand (absent in this case) could not contribute to supporting spatial-planning strategies. For them, spatial planning strategies that respect place narratives and place identities impact place branding positively and, conversely, a place brand would be able to contribute to spatial interventions. Moreover, the structural linkage between “place branding and spatial planning seems necessary, even urgent” if one aims to “avoid the stereo-typing of place-branding as an exclusionary neo-liberal endeavour” (Van Assche and Lo, 2011). For this to happen, the spatial planning strategies must be legitimized via civic participation and the engagement of all place actors.

The participation of citizens and other relevant parties in place-branding processes is discussed in Eshuis et al. (2014), who argue “that greater citizen influence in place marketing does have a significant effect on how place marketing affects spatial plans and physical place development” (p. 162). In addition, Eshuis et al. (2014) underline that place marketing and branding “involve not only promotion, but also spatial planning and urban design to influence the physical appearance of the place (the product)” (p. 154). An example might be useful here. By taking Katendrecht, a community in the south of Rotterdam as a case study, Eshuis et al. (2014) conclude that “citizen participation in branding processes is possible, and that place branding can influence wider urban policies, such as spatial planning and urban restructuring” (2014, p. 166). In addition, they suggest that branding processes are likely to be more effective if developed in an interactive mode. This means integrating citizens’ emotions into the place-branding strategy and follow-up campaigns.

Both emotions (according to Eshuis et al., 2014) and place narratives (according to Van Assche and Lo, 2011) play crucial roles in place branding and spatial planning. For instance, Van Assche and Lo (2011) argue that planning and branding are allies in the discovery and creation of narratives and assets, while Eshuis et al. (2014) argue that an interesting aspect of the participation of residents in a place-branding process relates to their feelings and emotions. However, Eshuis et al. (2014) argue that emotions are difficult to address in more classical interactive forms of policymaking, which have

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Figure 1.4. Theoretical cycle between place branding, spatial planning, place narratives and place identity.  
Source: own elaboration based on Van Assche and Lo (2011).
the tendency to emphasize rational argument and comprehensive planning. Van Assche and Lo (2011) underline that “planning strategies will hinge on the value that is attached in local and regional narratives to an image of place”, also that “spatial planning can contribute to the discovery and the creation of a place identity that produces economic value” (p. 123). Following the conclusions presented in Eshuis et al. (2014), citizens can have a say in the desired identity and symbolic representation of their community in place brands. One can conclude that as citizens take part in the branding processes, they contribute to envisioning shared/agreed futures for their own place. This is in line with the theoretical considerations presented in Ashworth et al. (2015).

It was my aim in the early stages of this research to contribute to the debate on place branding by arguing that place branding is about more than just place competition. I wanted to elaborate the notion that place brands are useful, not only in securing a desired position within the global flows of people (such as visitors, investors, students, entrepreneurs and potential residents), capital and international sporting and cultural events, but also in supporting reimagining processes and structural change. Ashworth et al. (2015), in an attempt to provide some answers to the question “why are place brands important and why do places attempt branding in the first place?” (p. 4), provide important reflections in that regard, which I would like to underline here as they contributed to shaping my thoughts and, consequently, the theoretical framework developed further in this thesis. Ashworth et al. (2015) did indeed argue that place branding and place brands are important in capturing and maintaining an important position in the international competitive arena for financial, cultural and human resources, and also that “the usefulness of place brands is their potential to be used as an instrument for envisioning an aspirational ‘imagined future’, (that is, as an ideal scenario for the place’s condition)” (p. 4). This is an important argument, which supported the justification of the primary strand of reasoning of this Ph.D. thesis — that of place branding as a strategic spatial planning instrument. Strategic spatial planning usually proceeds from vision-building and strategy-making to a final implementation phase. Envisioning is especially necessary to trigger change and to raise awareness of the need to do things differently (see Albrechts, 2010a, 2010b; Kalliomäki, 2015). European spatial planning has often been characterized as a normative form of envisioning for more economically, socially and environmentally sustainable spatial structures (see, for example, Dühr et al., 2010; Faludi, 2010; Kalliomäki, 2015). Ashworth et al. (2015) argue further that place brands provide strategic guidance for place development and that they also “provide a vision for the place’s future and a direction for the planning and implementation of various sorts of measures that will help achieve this vision” (p. 4) — this accords well with the idea of envisioning better futures that is postulated in the strategic spatial planning literature (see, for example, Albrechts, 2010a, 2010b).

In a practical-oriented study, Seisdedos (2015) describes the Oman National Spatial Strategy as one of the interventions implemented by public-planning authorities aiming “to address the spatial dimension of challenges that have accumulated over the last decades mainly as a result of the tremendous pace of growth” (2015, p. 90). The Oman National Spatial Strategy embraces the theoretical propositions of strategic spatial planning and integrates a framework of land use to ensure a sustainable socio-economic development at national and regional levels, as well as the improvement of the informational basis of spatial planning and the development of a data-management strategy to secure good quality information and transparency of decision-making. These
interventions will be carried out in line with a place vision: Oman Vision 2020. The Oman case (see Seisdedos, 2015 for details) does not introduce place branding directly but takes the steps of planning and defining strategic goals and a vision as preparation for potential branding exercises, which is in line with the approach put forward in this thesis.

Figure 1.5. summarizes, in chronological order, the main contributions to the links between place branding and spatial planning. From each contribution, a key theory is extracted. For example, from the geographical marketing mix developed in Ashworth and Voogd (1988, 1990), “spatial-functional measures” is the key theory and from Kavaratzis’s (2004) city-branding model, “landscape strategies” is the key theory that inspired the approach of this thesis. The shape of the wavy line aims to represent the non-linearity of knowledge and its progress/evolution through time.
The overall concluding remark is that place branding involves more than place promotion, the creation of a logo or tag line and subsequent advertisement strategies. In addition, it definitely involves more than place competition and the dire need to attract people and “money” to places such as regions. Place branding involves spatial functions; it makes attempts at place improvement, the shaping of identities and complements spatial planning. What is missing from the above-mentioned studies is a deep analysis of the role of place branding as an instrument in strategic spatial planning — which is what this thesis sets out to debate critically. In particular, the theories discussed in Ashworth et al. (2015) — of place branding as an instrument to support visionary readjustments; nurture economic reforms; promote social inclusion and cohesion, political engagement and civic participation and strengthen place identification and the general well-being of citizens and communities — are debated in close relation to theoretical propositions from the strategic spatial planning literature. The next section briefly covers the evolution of the strategic spatial planning discourse in Europe.

1.2.2. From traditional land-use planning to a strategic-oriented approach to spatial planning in Europe

Between the 1960s and 1970s, spatial planning evolved in several countries, regions and cities towards a system of comprehensive planning (Albrechts, 2010a). It was also in the 1960s and 1970s that places adopted a more procedural and systematic view of planning, and conceptualized complex systems that could only be understood and monitored through models developed from a spatial science approach (Allmendinger, 2009). In addition, according to Davoudi and Strange (2009), spatial planning in this period was concerned with developing spatial laws and organizing principles around which urban development could be planned.

In the 1980s, when the neo-liberal paradigm was adopted by some governments, thus replacing or complementing the Keynesian-Fordist paradigm, and when public intervention retreated in several domains, a considerable number of Western countries (for example, the UK, the Netherlands, as well as other central European countries) witnessed a retreat from spatial planning. This was fuelled not only by the neo-conservative disdain for planning but also by postmodernist scepticism, both of which tend to view progress as something which, if it happens, cannot be planned (Albrechts, 2010a). In line with this retreat, a more positivist view of spatial planning assumes that the best future follows automatically, if the correct analytical and forecasting techniques are applied rigorously. The same reasoning led modernist planners to believe that the future could be predicted and controlled (Ogilvy, 2002). According to Albrechts (2010a), places, including regions, are “faced by problems and challenges that cannot be tackled and managed adequately with the old intellectual apparatus and mindset” (2010, p. 4). Therefore, spatial planners were requested to think creatively and innovatively about possible ways forward and to prepare responses able to tackle these problems and challenges. This would involve addressing problems to secure better futures, based on shared or agreed futures (Ogilvy, 2002), for communities and all citizens — planning and managing a place where everybody fits in. In response, more strategic approaches, frameworks and perspectives for cities, city-regions, and regions became trendy in Europe by the late 1980s and 1990s (Albrechts, 1999; Albrechts et al., 2001, 2003; Hamnett, 2002; Healey et al., 1999; Pascual and Esteve, 1997; Salet and Faludi, 2000;
Lennon, 2000; Martinelli, 2005). Strategic spatial planning came into force as a mode of promoting new ways of imagining space by breaking with the absolute view of space that characterized spatial planning in the mid-20th century (Davoudi and Strange, 2009; Healey, 2007).

According to Oosterlynck et al. (2011) and Albrechts (2010a, 2010b), the traditional land-use regulations, urban maintenance and the delivery and management of public services are not sufficient responses to the challenges that most societies are currently facing. Most societies face major challenges and developments, such as the globalization of cultures and the economy, the ageing of populations, a growing awareness of environmental issues, as well as the technological developments and changes in production processes. These challenges “require the transformation of bureaucratic approaches and the involvement of skills, knowledge and resources that are often external to the traditional administrative apparatus” (Oosterlynck et al., 2011, p. 1). All of these factors call for more strategic approaches to spatial planning (Oosterlynck et al., 2011) and more entrepreneurial styles of planning able to respond to the new demands and cope with challenges (Albrechts, 2010a).

The communicative ‘turn’ in spatial planning, combined with global and European influences on policymaking, has led to a revival of strategic spatial planning in many EU member states since the late 1980s. This ‘turn’ to a strategic orientation in spatial planning in Europe (Healey, 2006a, 2006b), is associated with the development and promotion of the idea of “spatial planning” through work on the European Spatial Development Perspective (ESDP) and the European Union’s encouragement of regional and local economic development policy. For example, in the Netherlands, national spatial planning frameworks emerged in 1960 and underwent progressive developments, albeit with substantive and institutional perspectives that sometimes changed radically in response to social trends and market forces (Salet and Faludi, 2000). The example of spatial planning in the Netherlands might be useful for the rationale of this thesis. Dutch spatial plans provide frameworks for the preparation of planning instruments at the provincial (for instance, the province of Groningen) and local levels. In line with Dutch national spatial plans, the “Nota Ruimte” (see, for example, VROM et al., 2006) is more focused on the economic competitiveness of the Netherlands in an international context in comparison to previous spatial-planning frameworks.

The strategic dimension of spatial planning has expanded to several other countries (Salet and Faludi, 2000; Healey, 1997a). In recent years, spatial planning has become closely affiliated with ambitions to increase spatial competitiveness or improve strategic positioning in a wider European, or even global, context. It also increases the reliance of spatial planning on interaction and communication with a large number of agents and organizations, many of whom lie outside of the spatial-planning sphere. Although the final planning outcomes are the result of deliberation and persuasion, spatial planning remains embedded in a political process that favours particular decisions, directions and actions (Newman, 2008).

In the planning literature, significant attention has been paid to the renewed interest in strategic spatial planning, mainly across Europe, from the beginning of the 1990s (Olesen, 2011). Theoretical developments on strategic spatial planning at the European level have been dominated by spatial planning scholars: namely, Albrechts, Healey and Balducci. According to Olesen (2011), Albrechts and Healey tend to combine empirical research of strategic spatial planning with theorization on how strategic spatial planning could be operationalized in practice. In addition, they and other scholars
have argued for the capacity of strategic spatial planning to provide some answers to a portfolio of questions that statutory spatial planning and traditional modes of planning actions have not yet been able to answer (Sartorio, 2005). Furthermore, Albrechts and Balducci (2013) convincingly argue that there are stages of territorial development when traditional planning instruments are markedly insufficient or even unfit to govern processes of spatial transformation. Strategic spatial planning starts from the position that societies are not prisoners of their pasts and, therefore, carry the responsibility to transform their futures. This means that societies are beholden to find alternatives to proactively shape the unabated pace of change that is driven by structural developments and challenges. Traditional spatial planning is primarily focused on location, intensity, form and harmonization of land development, factors that are required for multiple space-using functions (Albrechts, 2010a). Abis and Garau (2016), in line with Cerreta et al. (2010) and Oliveira (2014c), argue that strategic spatial planning gives meaning and purpose to territorial resources and planned territories and combines different visions, knowledge and interpretations of phenomena in order to allow spatial planners and spatial strategists to focus on problems that impact the socio-spatial and spatial-economic conditions of places.

There are several explanations why some cities and regions, scholars and spatial planners have decided to engage and experiment with or reflect upon the processes of strategic spatial planning. One of the reasons has to do with the growing need for cities and regions to reposition themselves in a globally competitive arena in order to address changes in key economic domains, and to cope with the progressive reduction in the availability of central funding and a scarcity of resources. The need to boost a competitive position in the market place, together with the idea supported by Schön (1971), who argues that traditional planning instruments seem to be ineffective because they are designed for situations of stability, have influenced several cities and regions to try out processes of strategic planning (Albrechts and Balducci, 2013). On the one hand, and within the strategic spatial planning processes, Albrechts (2010b) calls for a stronger confrontation with complex dynamics and realities in contemporary spatial planning. In this regard, he requests of spatial planners “ways of thinking and for tools and instruments that help society to cope with change in a dynamic environment” (Albrechts, 2010b, p. 1122), and that they help actualize alternatives. Table 1.3 summarizes the key differences between traditional spatial planning and the strategic approach in spatial planning.
### Table 1.3. Key differences between traditional spatial planning and strategic spatial planning.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Traditional spatial planning</th>
<th>Strategic spatial planning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Master plans or land-use plans.</td>
<td>Strategic plans — articulating a more coherent and coordinated long-term spatial logic for land-use regulation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Technical/legal regulation.</td>
<td>Provides strategic and flexible frameworks for socially and ecologically sustainable development.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Government-led forms of master- and blueprint planning.</td>
<td>Government-led, but a negotiated form of governance.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Land-use control and zoning (functional separation).</td>
<td>Definition of a vision and concrete actions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Concerned with rational analysis and programming.</td>
<td>A set of concepts, procedures and instruments.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rational-comprehensive technical analysis.</td>
<td>Tailor-made and context-sensitive (economic, social, cultural, political or power) spatial interventions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contingent response to wider forces.</td>
<td>Selective and oriented towards issues that really matter in day-to-day life.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Focuses on integrating objects and functions.</td>
<td>Active force in enabling change.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relying on a ‘Euclidian’ concept of space and place and focusing on objects and forms</td>
<td>Dynamic and creative process, targeting discovery and creative synthesis — thus aiming for more relational concepts of space and place, and focusing on relations and processes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More concerned with the physical structure of a place — physical (statutory) planning</td>
<td>Envisioning as a process by which citizens and a place’s key actors develop visions of the future and envision the spaces in which they live — visions must be rooted in an understanding of the basic processes that shape places.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provides a detailed picture of some desired (or the predicted) end state to be achieved in a certain number of years.</td>
<td>Focuses on what a place ought to be — thinking creatively about possible (and desirable) futures and how to get there.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


A move away from statutory land-use planning/traditional planning and towards “episodes” (Healey, 2004, p. 45) of strategic spatial planning based on new governance modes, is embedded deeply within the processes of rescaling and the re-territorialization of the state (Healey, 2004; Allmendinger and Haughton, 2010). The need to adapt to new scales of social and economic life, as
well as the need to adapt to recent spatio-political and socio-economic dynamics such as globalization, economic competitiveness and sustainable development agendas have led to a widening of the spatial-planning notion, in both scale and scope, with a renewed emphasis on the need for the following — long-term strategic thinking and short-term actions, envisioning processes (the definition of a vision), strategy-making, new identities for places, policy integration and the inclusion of a wide range of stakeholders, civic participation and new skills and resources (Albrechts, 2006; Allmendinger and Haughton, 2010; Healey, 2004, 2007; Cremer-Schulte, 2014). Friedmann (2004) argues that strategic planning is a process, the output of which should be much more than merely a plan document or a vision statement (Friedmann, 2004).

Aiming to capture different aspects of strategic spatial planning that contribute to the theoretical framework discussed in detail in chapters 2 and 5, the following six points summarize the key focal points of strategic spatial planning. Strategic spatial planning focuses on:

**i) Place-specific qualities, assets and key regional strategic domains — social, cultural, productive, intellectual and physical**

According to Albrechts et al. (2003, p. 113), strategic spatial planning “involves the construction of new institutional arenas within structures of government that are themselves changing. The motivations for these new efforts are varied, but the objectives have typically been to articulate a more coherent spatial logic for land use regulation, resource protection, and investments in generation and infrastructure. Strategic frameworks and visions for territorial development, with an emphasis on place qualities and the spatial impacts and integration of investments, complement and provide a context for specific development projects.” In line with Healey (2004, p. 61), “Spatial strategies achieve their effects, if they get to have any leverage over future conceptions and actions, over the long term. They do this by influencing agendas of projects and schemes for physical development, and by shaping the values with which the qualities of places are promoted and managed.” Albrechts and Balducci (2013, p. 18) argue that “Strategic spatial planning focuses on place-specific qualities and assets (social, cultural, and intellectual, including the physical and social qualities of the urban or regional tissue) in a global context.”

**ii) Addressing issues that really matter in the day-to-day lives of communities**

Albrechts (2004, pp. 751–752) underlines that “Strategic planning is selective and oriented to issues that really matter. As it is impossible to do everything that needs to be done, “strategic” implies that some decisions and actions are considered more important than others and that much of the process lies in making the tough decisions about what is most important for the purpose of producing fair, structural responses to problems, challenges, aspirations, and diversity.” Albrechts and Balducci (2013, p. 18) continue, and state convincingly that “Strategic spatial planning focuses on a limited number of strategic key issues; it takes a “collective” critical view of the environment in terms of determining problems and resources.” The unspoken question one can detect in the definitions above is: to whom do the decisions and actions matter? To governments exclusively, or to citizens and communities as well? This thesis emphasizes the need to focus on day-to-day issues that matter
to citizens and communities, and which require the attention of governments to address those issues or constraints.

**iii) Enabling structural change in an integrative, creative and innovative approach**

Spatial planning scholars such as Albrechts and Balducci (2013, p. 19) highlight that “strategic spatial planning, both in the short and the long term, focuses on results and implementation by framing decisions, actions, and projects, and it incorporates monitoring, evaluation, feedback, adjustment, and revision. In this way strategic spatial planning is not just a contingent response to wider forces, but is also an active force in enabling change.” Recently, Albrechts (2015, pp. 1–2) has referred to “A growing literature (Albrechts, 2004; Balducci et al., 2011; Healey, 2006a, 2006b, 2007; Motte, 2006) and an increasing number of practices, all over the world, [which] seem to suggest that strategic spatial planning may be looked upon as a possible approach able to cope with the challenges our society is facing and embed structural changes that are needed.” Recently, Kalliomäki (2015) has argued that “the actors involved in the planning process should openly acknowledge the limits of arriving at a consensus, and focus more on searching for ways to open the discussion on the state’s spatial structure and create a meaningful debate that can mobilize political power to generate structural change” (p. 116).

**iv) Involving/engaging with key regional actors, civic society and institutions, and supporting the co-production of just and fair regional planning strategies**

Albrechts and Balducci (2013, p. 17), argue that “most traditional spatial planning efforts, the focus is clearly on producing a plan, while public involvement is mainly end-of-the-line. In strategic spatial planning, the plan is just one vehicle among others to produce change. As spatial planning has almost no potential for concretizing strategies, strategic spatial planning involves relevant actors needed for their substantive contributions, their procedural competence and the role they might play in gaining acceptance, getting basic support and providing legitimacy.” Furthermore, “strategic planning allows for a broad (multi-level governance) and diverse (public, economic, civic society) involvement during planning, decision-making, and implementation processes. It creates solid, workable, long-term visions or frames of reference and strategies at different levels, taking into account the power structures (political, economic, gender, cultural), uncertainties, and competing values” (Albrechts and Balducci, 2013, p. 19). Cremer-Schulte (2014), emphasize that in contrast to land-use planning that aims at shaping local spatial development, strategic spatial planning aims at shaping the minds of actors who have a stake in spatial development (p. 290). Strategic spatial planning needs imaginative actors to help forge new forms of collective action (Newman, 2008). Recently, Albrechts (2015) has underlined that strategic spatial planning “implies an open dialog in which opinions, conflicts, different values, power relationships are addressed.” (p. 107). It aims to provide a dialogue platform through which actors can reflect on who they are and what they want. In this way, they can articulate their identities, traditions and values, and reflect on what spatial quality, equity, accountability and legitimacy mean to them. Participative strategic spatial planning allows actors to “assess together and co-construct spaces of possibilities or impossibilities” (Forester, 2010b, p. 172) or, in other words, the desirable and less desirable futures. With the participation of those
who have a stake in the city or region, futures are imagined that will be sufficiently clear and powerful to arouse and sustain the actions necessary for (at least parts of) such visionary realignments to become a reality (Goodstein et al., 1993). Therefore, a participative envisioning process “includes not only the views of the most articulate or powerful, but also the views of those who have been systematically excluded by structural inequalities of class, gender and religion” (Sandercock, 1998, p. 65). As a learning process (Ostrom, 1990), it also acquires emancipatory potential and legitimacy, as a place-branding strategy becomes integrated into wider strategic spatial planning.

v) Envisioning agreed, hopefully better, and realistic futures in a more hybrid mode of democracy and multilevel governance that is open to diversity, equity, mutual knowledge and values

In line with Kalliomäki (2015, p. 115), “strategic planning is about making (difficult) choices concerning the objectives that are considered the most important for creating a ‘better’ future, and about acting according to those objectives.” Albrechts (2013, p. 55) emphasizes that “envisioning possible futures involves a conscious, purposive, contextual, creative and continuous process of representing values and meanings for the futures. In strategic planning, envisioning provides direction without destination, movement without prediction.” Albrechts and Balducci (2013, p. 19) reinforce the point that “strategic spatial planning […] creates solid, workable, long-term visions or frames of reference and strategies at different levels, taking into account the power structures (political, economic, gender, cultural), uncertainties, and competing values”.

vi) Acquiring and strengthening a spatial identity, reinforcing spatial feelings of belonging and attachment

According to Healey (2006b, p. 542), spatial strategy making, “with an appreciation of “relational complexity” demands a capacity to “see”, “hear”, “feel” and “read” the complex multiple dynamics of a place in a way which can identify just those issues which need collective attention through a focus on” spatial qualities. Albrechts et al. (2003, p. 126) assert that “despite the claim often made that the agenda of economic competitiveness and European integration has been driving strategic spatial planning initiatives in Europe”, a content analysis of the strategic spatial planning documents for Hanover City Region (1996), Flanders (1997b) and Northern Ireland (2001) show a preoccupation in the “search for ways of strengthening regional identity and cohesion, developing new forms of regional collaboration, and promoting city region profiles internationally”. Healey (2006b, p. 542) goes on to underline that “Strategic spatial planning informed by ideas of “relational complexity” is therefore decidedly not “comprehensive” in its approach. It needs to be highly selective, focusing on the distinctive histories and geographies of the relational dynamics of a particular place”. It also “needs to be able to mix different forms of knowledge and expertise to
grasp the many ways in which people experience the complex relational dynamics which constitute their existence and identity in places”. As place marketing from the 1880s was generally powered primarily by a need for place identity, it predates strategic spatial planning efforts in that regard.

The six key focal points mentioned above have been summarized in a form of six interconnected pieces, with links between each other and to the centre, in Figure 1.6. This framework will be reshaped with insights from the place-branding literature and tested using empirical evidence from the case study.

**Figure 1.6.** The six key focal points of strategic spatial planning.

*Source: own elaboration. The format of Figure 1.6. has been inspired by Albrechts et al. (2003, p. 124). This model has been developed in chapter 5 - the theoretical framework of the study (Figure 5.1., inspired by Albrechts et al., 2003 and Kavaratzis, 2008). The six key focal points will be aggregated and a new layer will be created in order to contemplate place branding as strategic spatial planning instrument. The colours bring consistency between Figure 1.6, Figure 2.2. (chapter 2) and Figure 5.1.

According to Ashworth et al. (2015), a number of unresolved issues pertaining to the theory and practice of place branding remain in the literature. It is the contention of this thesis and the theoretical framework of this study debated in chapter 2 and presented in a more mature construction in chapter 5, to not answer these questions completely but, instead, to contribute
alternative approaches for answering them. The special focus and preoccupation of this thesis is clearly on bringing a more strategic spatial planning approach to the branding process of places. In order to do this, a qualitative research methodology has been employed; further details are presented below.

1.3. Research methodology

1.3.1. Research objectives

This thesis has a main and central objective, which is to contribute to the advancement and maturation of place branding by using it as an instrument within the strategic spatial planning approach. By debating the intertwining relations between place branding and strategic spatial planning, it fulfils one of the prerequisites of illustrating the potential of place branding to assist urban and regional development, as identified by Ashworth et al. (2015). In addition, by exploring the theoretical linkage between place branding and strategic spatial planning, it responds to the call made by Albrechts (2010a, 2010b) to address the challenges that societies are facing in a more radical and alternative way, beyond the traditional planning structures, and to accept that the past is no blueprint for how to go forward.

As a geographer and spatial planner, I felt motivated to embrace this theoretical problem by the work of those scholars identified in Figure 1.5. From those key references, Albrechts’s (2010b) arguments are most important to the rationale postulated here and to justify the objectives of this thesis. Albrechts (2010b) encourages spatial planners to shift away from rigid, conventional approaches towards a more proactive way in order to bring structural issues onto the political agenda and to give substance to the instruments and transformative practices that are needed to address the challenges. Place branding in strategic spatial planning brings into focus specific contexts, set up priorities, focuses on preserving place qualities and assets and requests the engagement of both civic society and key place actors.

It was with these motivations that I devised the main objective at the beginning of this Ph.D. project in 2012:

**Main-research objective:**

To contribute to the advancement and maturation of the place-branding field, by: taking it to be an instrument within the strategic spatial planning approach, thus lending a more strategic approach and geographical/spatial consciousness to the process of place branding; by discussing its relevance and effectiveness in supporting economic and socio-spatial realignment; by contributing to reimagining processes and structural change through civic participation and the shaping of clearly envisioned, agreed, socially responsible and realistic futures, independently of the spatial scale of application (country, neighbourhood, districts, city, region, across administrative border territories), as well as independently of the nature of the branding process, if it is a novel one or an exercise in rebranding.

Table 1.4. summarizes the main and sub-research objectives of this study.
Table 1.4. Main and sub-research objectives of this Ph.D. project/thesis.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Main-research objective</th>
<th>Sub-research objectives</th>
<th>Objectives discussed in</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>To contribute to the advancement and maturation of the place-branding field, by: taking it to be an instrument within the strategic spatial planning approach, thus lending a more strategic approach and geographical/spatial consciousness to the process of place branding; by discussing its relevance and effectiveness in supporting economic and socio-spatial realignment; by contributing to reimagining processes and structural change through civic participation and the shaping of clearly envisioned, agreed, socially responsible and realistic futures, independently of the spatial scale of application (country, neighbourhood, districts, city, region, across administrative border territories), as well as independently of the nature of the branding process, if it is a novel one or an exercise in rebranding.</td>
<td>To clarify why and how place branding can be used as an instrument in strategic spatial planning to support reimagining processes and structural change.</td>
<td>Chapter 2 (published journal article)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>To understand how place branding has (or has not) been approached in strategic spatial planning documents, spatial development plans, strategic initiatives and policy documents.</td>
<td>Chapter 3 (published journal article)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>To explore through a case study the relevance of co-creation in a place-branding strategy by understanding how content analysis can be used to identify and understand the way tourists and travellers perceive a place and its image.</td>
<td>Chapter 4 (published journal article)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Chapter 2 is a slightly revised version of the following published journal article:


Chapter 3 is a slightly revised version of the following published journal article:


Chapter 4 is a slightly revised version of the following published journal article:

To discuss the effectiveness of civic participation/place actors’ engagement in a place-branding strategy and in strategic spatial planning processes. To clarify the conceptual and practical challenges of developing place branding at the regional scale.

To explore the relevance of tourism in a place-branding strategy and to understand the effectiveness of a regional branding strategy in responding to the contemporary challenges such as weak economic confidence and unemployment.

To understand the extent to which place branding as a strategic spatial planning instrument can be employed across administrative border regions.

**Chapter 5**

(forthcoming journal article)

Chapter 5 is a slightly revised version of the following forthcoming journal article:


**Chapter 6**

(published journal article)

Chapter 6 is a slightly revised version of the following published journal article:


**Chapter 7**

(see below)

Chapter 7 is a slightly revised version of the following published book chapter and journal article:


Regional scale as the primary spatial context of analysis
The objectives stated in Table 1.4. have been translated into research questions that are presented in further detail below.

1.3.2. Research questions
By depicting the theoretical linkage between place branding and the strategic spatial planning approach, the theoretical framework was constructed in line with the arguments that support the primary strand of reasoning. The theoretical framework guided the data collection and was enriched throughout the four-year research project with reference to additional literature, knowledge gained during my participation in international conferences and the practical experiences of the selected case study. The main research question of this Ph.D. thesis is:

How and why might (and, eventually, should) place branding be taken as an instrument in the strategic spatial planning approach (thus contributing to the improvement of the socio-spatial and spatial-economic conditions), reshaping responses to contemporary challenges faced by places and shape clearly envisioned, agreed, socially responsible and realistic futures for places?

The analysis of the main research question is guided by six sub-research questions, one for each of the six components/vectors running through this Ph.D. thesis, and which are represented in the theoretical framework debated to a greater extent in chapters 2 and 5 and complemented by chapter 7 (for the sub-research question number six). The six sub-research questions are:

1: Is place branding as a strategic spatial planning instrument able to identify current economic, social and political constraints as well as identify place qualities, strategic domains, assets and attributes and further understand to what extent those strategic domains would support a regional branding strategy?

2: Would a place-branding initiative that is integrated as an instrument in strategic spatial planning be able to support strategic structural change, enable economic and social transformation in a place, thus responding to the contemporary challenges such as weak economic confidence and unemployment as well as generating new images or reframing current ones and change public agendas?

3: Who are the place actors, experts and organizations that must be involved in a potential place-branding initiative that is integrated as an instrument in strategic spatial planning? In addition, to what extent can the messages/content produced by tourists/travellers be integrated in a place-branding strategy?
4: Would a place-branding initiative integrated as an instrument in strategic spatial planning be able to support the envisioning of shared, better and realistic futures for a place, such as a region?

5: Would a place-branding initiative integrated as an instrument in strategic spatial planning be able to reinforce place feelings and place identity, environmental identity (the senses of places) cultural identity (the spirit of a place), historic identity (the roots of a place), social identity (the sense of belonging) or civic identity (the sense of citizenship)?

6: To what extent can branding northern Portugal be differentiated from branding the country as a whole, and how can the branding of Portugal be differentiated from the branding of Spain? In addition, how might the branding of northern Portugal explore strategic spatial planning and place-branding synergies with the Spanish Autonomous Community of Galicia?

The following chapters in this thesis provide answers to the above-mentioned questions, following the research philosophy and research strategy clarified below.

1.3.3. Research philosophy
The research philosophy that guided this Ph.D. project and the case study which was conducted is interpretivism. Interpretivism actually is more than a research philosophy as it represents an approach to studying social life with the assumption “that the meaning of human action is inherent in that action” (Schwandt, 2001, p. 134). Those researchers who embrace an interpretivist stance share very specific beliefs about the nature of knowing and reality. According to Goldkuhl (2012), interpretivism is not a unified and unequivocal tradition and there are many forms of interpretivism. For instance, Butler (1998) discusses several different variants of interpretivism such as conservative, constructivist, critical and deconstructionist.

The aim of understanding the subjective meanings of individuals in studied domains is essential in the interpretive paradigm. Goldkuhl (2012) goes on to argue that the core idea of interpretivism is to work with subjective meanings already existing in the social world; that is, to acknowledge their existence, reconstruct them, understand them, avoid distorting them and use them as building blocks in theorization. Orlikowski and Baroudi (1991) state that “the aim of all interpretive research is to understand how members of a social group, through their participation in social processes, enact their particular realities and endow them with meaning, and to show how these meanings, beliefs and intentions of the members help to constitute their actions” (p. 13).

This research and the academic publications that inform it share all of the elementary characteristics of interpretivism as listed in Williams (2000), Carson et al. (2001) and Goldkuhl (2012). This study is also in line with a recent study on city branding developed by Kavaratzis (2008): i) the emphasis is on theory building, meaning and understanding the theoretical links between place branding and strategic spatial planning (see chapter 2); ii) previously existing theory on place
branding and strategic spatial planning is used in various chapters; iii) it is inductive research; iv) it was relatively unstructured/semi-structured at the beginning of the process and v) the involvement of the investigator (with no separation of subject and object) was considered central to the investigative process. For instance, Orlikowski and Baroudi (1991) underline that interpretive researchers can never assume a value-neutral stance, as they seem to work rather close to the practice field, which may imply high engagement in the studied practices, findings or knowledge claims that are created as the investigation proceeds. Despite what I have argued above, it is important to acknowledge the value and importance of external ideologies and beliefs that also play an important role in the research process. Besides adopting an interpretivist paradigm, the research strategy is presented in further detail below.

1.3.4. Research strategy

According to Yin (2003), there are three conditions that determine the form of a research strategy: the type of research question posed the extent to which the investigator has control over the behavioural events and the focus on contemporary or historical events. This Ph.D. project adopted the case-study method as a research strategy. The case study of this project is the region of northern Portugal (NUTS II), which includes eight sub-regions (NUTS III) - Alto Minho, Cávado, Ave, Porto Metropolitan Area (Metropolitan Area of Porto/Área Metropolitana do Porto, referred to henceforth as AM Porto), Alto Tâmega, Tâmega e Sousa, Douro and Terras de Trás-os-Montes and 86 municipalities (see Figure 1.7. for the region’s geographical location).

In line with previous studies (see Braun, 2008; Kavaratzis, 2008; Pasquinelli, 2011/2012), the case-study approach appears to be the most adequate research strategy within place branding. Olesen (2011) states that it is an adequate method in conducting research in the domain of strategic spatial planning. Both scholars — Pasquinelli (2011/2012) in a study dedicated to inter-regional place branding and Olesen (2011) in a study dedicated to strategic spatial planning — argue that in cases where the boundaries between the phenomenon and research context are not clearly evident (Yin, 2003), the case study is a peculiarly useful research approach because it considers a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context (Yin, 2003). This makes the case study a particularly appropriate research approach, not only for this Ph.D. project but also for research within the fields of place branding and spatial planning. The reason is that planning and branding practices must be understood within the particular context in which they are embedded, as the observed phenomena are not “easily observable outside the natural settings in which they occur” (Bonoma, 1985, p. 202).

Yin (2003) argues that the case-study approach is relevant when “a ‘how’ or ‘why’ question is being asked about a contemporary set of events, over which the investigator has little or no control” (p. 9). Chapter 2 of this thesis discusses ‘why’ and ‘how’ place branding can be used as an instrument in strategic spatial planning to support structural changes in places. In line with Braun (2008), in this thesis, the case-study findings can be considered as experiences to test the applicability and explanatory capacity of the theoretical framework that is presented below and debated in chapters 2, 5 and the Conclusion chapter. Several comparative examples are provided throughout the thesis. A more in-depth comparative case is provided in chapter 7, which dedicates particular attention to the potential place branding and cross-border planning synergies between northern Portugal and the
Spanish Autonomous Communities of Galicia. The reasons to adopt Portugal (specifically, its northern region) as a case study are presented in further detail below.

### 1.3.5. The case study choice
The reasons that justify the selection of northern Portugal as the case study area are manifold. First, this Ph.D. thesis follows a M.Sc. thesis developed by me between 2008 and 2011 on the topic “Territories, brands and competitiveness: the Minho region and its international promotion” (see Oliveira, 2011). This academic work supported the research proposal submitted in April 2011 to the FCT, which was awarded in September 2011. Secondly, as I mentioned above, this Ph.D. project was funded by the FCT with the specific intention of researching place and destination branding, in both theory and practice, by taking northern Portugal as a case study. The Ph.D. project highlighted tourism as a key strategic domain for northern Portugal, following the conclusions debated in Oliveira (2011). The tourism potential of Portugal and its northern region is subsequently debated in chapters 4, 5 and 6. Thirdly, as emphasized strongly in chapter 3, the literature on place branding that takes Portugal, Portuguese regions or cities as case studies is almost non-existent. Thus, this thesis contributes not only to place-branding literature worldwide but also to the development of place-branding research and practices by building empirical evidence of Portuguese territories.

The few studies on place branding that adopt cities and regions in Portugal as case studies mainly employ a business- and tourism-oriented approach, neglecting (as in other geographical contexts) a more spatially oriented planning perspective, which can bring into focus the distinctive elements of a place — this is unlikely to happen within a corporate approach. This thesis aims at providing an exploratory insight into the role of place branding as an instrument for the attainment of strategic spatial planning goals, thus contributing to filling the literature gap related to more strategic spatial planning-oriented approaches to the process of branding places beyond northern Portugal.

Within the case-study research approach, a multi-method strategy was adopted for the empirical investigation. First, primary data were gathered through 16 in-depth, semi-structured interviews with key regional actors and organizations with a stake (and expertise) in Portugal and northern Portugal. Secondly, secondary data were gathered through content analysis of tourism-oriented online sources of information (see chapter 4), strategic spatial plans, development plans, strategic initiatives and documented regional promotional initiatives (see chapters 3, 5 and 6).

As case study research often combines various methods of data collection and multiple types of data — such as those resulting from document analysis, archives, direct observation of the events being studied, questionnaires and in-depth interviews with people involved (Kavaratzis, 2008 in line with Yin, 2003) — the data collection for the present case study involved two methods that are clarified further below. Before data collection, a thorough literature review of place branding and strategic spatial planning was conducted.
1.3.6. Collecting and revising the literature

This Ph.D. project began with an extensive review of the relevant literature in the fields of place branding (specifically, its application at the regional scale) and strategic spatial planning (specifically, literature produced at the European level after the 1970s). However, because of the complex and multi-disciplinary nature of the subject of place branding (see Lucarelli and Berg, 2011; Kavaratzis et al., 2015), the review extended to publications from several other fields that shed light on certain aspects of the subject, such as constructing a regional advantage (for example, Asheim et al., 2011; Cooke, 2007), co-creation in branding tourism destinations (Volo, 2010) and destination branding (Morgan et al., 2011).

The purpose of the literature review undertaken in this research is in line with the arguments of Yin (2003). Yin (2003) argues that, “novices may think that the purpose of a literature review is to determine the answers about what is known on a topic; in contrast, experienced investigators review previous research to develop sharper and more insightful questions about the topic” (p. 9). The literature review was aimed at identifying intellectual fissures in the theory and critically evaluating existing knowledge. The literature review led to the development of the theoretical linkage between place branding and the strategic spatial planning approach, and the construction of the theoretical framework debated in chapter 5 and the Conclusion chapter.

It should be noted that Carson et al. (2001) argued that existing theory may be used as a foundation and introduced at appropriate stages throughout a research study. In this Ph.D. project, the theoretical framework also served the purpose of guiding the research process, including the data collection and analysis specified later in this Introduction chapter — specifically, the examination of the content of the documents and online channels analysed (chapters 3, 4, 5, 6 and 7) and the decisions regarding the type of organizations and people to act as informants, and the specific questions to be asked during the interviews. At this level, the work developed by Stubbs and Warnaby (2015) on the role of stakeholders in the development of place branding was fundamental. Stubbs and Warnaby (2015) argue that understanding who stakeholders/place actors “are and the nature of their opinions about the place in question should be key determinants of any place branding strategy” (p. 101).

In this study, the theoretical framework, besides contributing to the academic discussion around the actual or potential roles of place branding as an instrument for the attainment of strategic spatial planning goals, played a crucial role in collecting primary (see section 1.3.7.) and secondary data (see section 1.3.8.) and the respective analysis.

1.3.7. Primary data collection and analysis: in-depth interviews

Responding to the call made by Oliveira (2015b) to develop place branding research by collecting primary data — as well as the request by Houghton and Stevens (2011), Kavaratzis (2012), Ashworth et al. (2015) and Stubbs and Warnaby (2015) to initiate an effective dialogue between place players/actors in a place’s branding strategy and strategic spatial planning — a set of interviews with key regional players/actors and organizations involved in the regional planning and development of northern Portugal was employed to gather primary data. Collecting data through interviews is in line with Kavaratzis (2008) and Carson et al. (2001) because issues concerned with branding and
marketing in a place-specific context require in-depth analysis. Therefore, a qualitative approach (specifically, the method of conducting expert interviews) was demonstrated to be the most appropriate one for a deep analysis of the case study (Maxwell, 1998).

The interviews were all based on an interview guide (see appendix B, page 239) with a pre-formulated set of questions, thus reflecting the semi-structured interview approach (Kvale and Brinkmann, 2009) and also following previous studies on place branding (see, for example, Pasquinelli, 2013; Giovanardi, 2015) and strategic spatial planning (see, for example, Olesen, 2011). The interview guide was used as an intermittent checklist of themes to be covered in the interviews, in order to elicit deeper and more rounded answers from the regional actors interviewed (see Table 1.5.). The interview guide and a brief explanation of this research project were sent with the request for an interview to a total of 32 regional actors. Sixteen actors and organizations agreed to participate (see appendix C, page 240) and sixteen declined participation in this research, or did not reply to the email that was sent out twice (see appendix D, page 241).

Table 1.5. Main and sub-themes covered by the semi-structured interview guide.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Main theme</th>
<th>Sub-themes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Strategic territorial diagnosis</td>
<td>i) Identify key economic, social and political constraints and limitations of northern Portugal;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>ii) Characterize the current image of northern Portugal;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>iii) Identify visions and perspectives on the future of the region.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Place branding at the regional scale</td>
<td>i) Identify key strategic domains of northern Portugal;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>ii) Identify and comment critically on the current branding efforts at the national (Portugal), regional (northern Portugal) and Euroregion (Galicia-northern Portugal) levels;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>iii) Identify the entity that could lead a regional branding strategy.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strategic spatial planning on the national and regional scales</td>
<td>i) Identify the current main strategic spatial planning documents, development plans, strategic initiatives and policy documents for the period 2014–2020*;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>ii) Understanding the effectiveness of the current strategic spatial planning documents and instruments to enable structural change, and reinforce regional positioning and competitiveness at the regional level;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>iii) Identify the financial mechanism for regional planning.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Place branding in strategic spatial planning at the regional level</td>
<td>i) Comment critically on the effectiveness of a regional branding strategy integrated as an instrument in strategic spatial planning to support regional development and the attainment of strategic planning goals;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>ii) Identify political and financial mechanisms that could operationalize a regional branding strategy.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Participation/regional actors’ engagement/cross-border cooperation in strategic spatial planning and place branding

i) Characterize the cross-border cooperation between northern Portugal and Galicia;
ii) Debate a cross-border branding strategy for the Euroregion Galicia-northern Portugal;
iii) Identify and recommend key regional actors.

Source: own elaboration based on the interview guide used during the in-depth interviewing with the regional actors (for the 23 questions, please see appendix B, page 239).

* Period coinciding with the European Union (EU) multiannual financial framework 2014 to 2020.

The interviewees were selected on the basis of their experience and expertise in dealing with strategic spatial planning and regional development in northern Portugal. The selection of the respondents began as a process of “convenience sampling” (Neuman, 2011, p. 267) as a result of knowledge gained in previous studies (Oliveira, 2011) and continued as a snowball sampling. Interviews were carried out at the interviewees’ workplaces in December 2013; March, July and September 2014 and February 2015 (see Table 1.6.). Two interviews were conducted online, and lasted around one hour. They were all carried out in Portuguese, recorded digitally with the permission of the participants and were subsequently fully transcribed with the key parts translated into English (Kent, 1999).

Table 1.6. List of key regional actors interviewed, their role and interview date.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interviewee number and name of the institution*</th>
<th>Representing**:</th>
<th>Interview date</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>IN 1 - North Regional Coordination and Development Commission (CCDRN)</td>
<td>Regional strategic planning Technical expertise on regional planning and development</td>
<td>March 2014</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IN 2 - CCDRN-II (policy/decision-making)</td>
<td>Regional policy and decision-making Regional development European Union financial frameworks</td>
<td>September 2014</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IN 3 - Regional Entity of Tourism of Porto and Northern Portugal (TPNP)</td>
<td>Regional tourism Tourism planning and development Destination branding at regional level Cross-border regional cooperation</td>
<td>March 2014</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IN 4 - Regional Development Agency of the Ave Valley (ADRAVE)</td>
<td>Regional development Rural development Local entrepreneurship Low-density areas</td>
<td>March 2014</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IN 5 - European Grouping of Territorial Cooperation Galicia-northern Portugal (GNP- EGTC)</td>
<td>Cross-border Galicia-northern Portugal Cross-border synergies between universities, research centres and entreprises Cross-border labour mobility</td>
<td>September 2014</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| IN 6 - Health Cluster Portugal (HCP) | Regional higher education, research and development on health sciences  
Internationalization of health related activities | June 2014 |
|---|---|---|
| IN 7 - Textile and Clothing Association of Portugal (ATP) | Regional economy, textiles, agro-food  
Regional higher education, research and development | March 2014 |
| IN 8 - University of Minho (UM-I) | Regional higher education, research and development | September 2014 |
| IN 9 - Department of Economics School of Economics and Management (UM-II) | Regional economy, textiles, agro-food  
Regional higher education, research and development  
Regional tourism,  
Regional wines and other products | March 2014 |
| IN 10 - Department of Economics School of Economics and Management (UM-III) | Regional economy, textiles, agro-food  
Regional higher education, research and development  
Galicia-northern Portugal expert  
Cross-border cooperation | March 2014 |
| IN 11 - Department of Civil Engineering School of Engineering (UM-IV) | Regional strategic planning  
Regional mobility and accessibility  
Place marketing and competitiveness | March 2014 |
| IN 12 - Geography Department Social Sciences Institute (UM-V) | Spatial planning  
Regional development, low-density areas  
Tourism planning and development  
Tourism geographies | December 2013 |
| IN 13 - Quaternaire Portugal - Corporate society working on Spatial Planning; Strategic Planning (QP) | Regional strategic planning  
Regional development, low-density areas | December 2013 |
| IN 14 - A member of the business community (TRP) | Regional mobility and accessibility | December 2013 |
| IN 15 - A member of the civic society (CS) | Regional mobility and accessibility | March 2014 |
| IN 16 - PortugalFoods (PF) | Regional economy, textiles, agro-food | February 2015 |

Source: own elaboration. *Please see the full list of regional actors of northern Portugal interviewed in appendix C, page 240. **Due to the complexities of some representatives’ situations, numerous intersections of responsibilities occurred.

The interviews were semi-structured with open-ended questions, which were considered the most appropriate for the purpose of this project for four main reasons. First, and in line with
Harvey-Jordan and Long (2001), the open-ended interview structure allows themes to be developed throughout the conversation in a flexible way, as the loose structure facilitates matters. The flexibility resulting from the semi-structured form also allows the researchers to explore themes that would emerge from the experts’ experience and knowledge, which reveals more and assists us to understand the strategic spatial planning process taking place in Portugal and northern Portugal, for instance, as well as regional branding attempts where they occur. Secondly, this flexible form was considered adequate in order to successfully deal with the multiplicity of experts interviewed who have different backgrounds, such as research into regional economics, regional planning, tourism planning and development, destination marketing, plan- and policymaking. Thirdly, according to Kavaratzis (2008) and Pasquinelli (2011/2012), the branding process of places is a complex matter and includes several interrelations between spatial issues, spatial contexts and interlocutors. Therefore, in-depth interviews are considerably more appropriate to “deal with such complex matters and the less degree of structure allowed room for clarifications and adequate descriptions of interrelations” (Kavaratzis, 2008, p. 23). Moreover, Kent (1999) argues that interviews with open-ended questions are more responsive in terms of what individuals have to say. Fourthly, Flyvbjerg (2006) emphasizes, for example, how theoretical knowledge can be derived from in-depth research into how planning is carried out in practice. In addition, Kavaratzis (2008) states that since we lack a clear and unanimous definition of place branding, a flexible yet rigorous method of data collection would make a better contribution to the debate on place branding and obtain a clear understanding of the interviewees’ perceptions.

The interviews began in a rather exploratory manner. First, the research topic was introduced, which sparked immediate responses from the interviewees. This spontaneous reaction prior to the first question reflects on the explorative interview approach (Kvale and Brinkmann, 2009). The interviewees were encouraged to give their account of the current socio-economic and political environments of northern Portugal, as well as the national scenarios for the same subjects and their perspectives on the future of the region.

1.3.8. Secondary data collection and analysis: documental content analysis

According to Chan and Marafa (2013), the predominant qualitative methods in place-branding research are in-depth interviews, focus groups, document or content analysis and observations. In this study, I have employed two of these qualitative methods: in-depth interviews in order to collect primary data, as I have stated above, and a documental content analysis in order to collect secondary data. In addition, statistical information was also collected and analysed. Data collection and analysis was developed in four stages.

The first stage, on secondary data collection and analysis, started with an extensive and critical analysis of the most up to date statistical information provided by different sources (for example, Statistics Portugal, North Regional Coordination and Development Commission, Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, World Travel and Tourism Council), which reported on the demographic (for example, resident population or population density) and macroeconomic situations (for example, unemployment rate, GDP per capita, including the tourism sector) of Portugal and NUTS II — Northern Portugal (Norte). Some of these indicators are presented and
analysed in this Introduction chapter and in chapter 6 (which is a slightly revised version of the published journal article, following the publication of new macroeconomic and demographic indicators).

The second stage comprised analysis of the content of strategic spatial planning documents, development plans, strategic initiatives (see chapters 3 and 5) and sectoral strategic plans (for instance, for the tourism sector; see chapter 6) as sources of secondary data, mainly for the period coinciding with the EU’s multiannual financial framework 2014 to 2020 (see appendix E, page 242 for the full list of documents). In attempting to understand the developments of place branding in northern Portugal, I have also analysed the recent regional promotional efforts undertaken by northern Portuguese entities, such as the initiative “Be Smart. Go Norte” (that is, “Be Smart. Go Northern Portugal” - Norte is the Portuguese word for North and the name of the NUTS II – Northern Portugal region), developed by the North Regional Coordination and Development Commission, and “Porto and the North – The essence of Portugal”, developed by Regional Entity of Tourism of Porto and Northern Portugal.

The third stage responds to the call made by Ashworth et al. (2015) to explore theoretical perspectives in relatively recent developments in marketing theory and practice; for example, Service Dominant Logic, experiential marketing, digital marketing and branding and co-creation in place branding. In this stage, I analysed tourism-oriented online publications in which the tourism potential of Portugal (and its northern region) has been discussed (see chapter 4). Content analysis is concerned with categorizing and counting occurrences of aspects of a text’s content (for example, policy documents, editorials, blog posts and opinion pieces, among others), which are assumed to be significant (Hannam and Knox, 2005). The content generated by tourists, travellers, professional travel bloggers and travel journalists who post, comment and share information on social media channels is arguably the greatest digital challenge faced by destination branding (see Munro, 2011; Munar, 2011) and strategic place branding (Hanna and Rowley, 2015).

Travel blogs, destination branding and place brand websites do not only offer detailed information, but also create virtual product experiences (Alonso and Bea, 2012). Content analysis can be used to identify and understand the ways in which tourists and travellers perceive the country as a tourist destination. According to Addis et al. (2007), perceptions of the potential or actual experiences associated with a place brand (for instance, for tourism purposes) can be achieved indirectly through communication tools, such as colours, typefaces, websites and advertising. The tourist-/traveller-generated content is likely to generate brand value if it is integrated into the place-branding strategy (Oliveira and Panyik, 2015), as well as providing unprecedented levels of direct engagement between place users, other place actors and organizations (Kavaratzis, 2012).

Given the fact that most of the chapters have been developed in a rather exploratory way, I acknowledge the limitations of using exclusively qualitative methods in this study, particularly those of in-depth interviews and content analysis. In addition, I also acknowledge the challenges that have emerged during the past four years of research investigating northern Portugal. To overcome such criticism, the analysis was extended to Portugal as a whole. In addition, in responding to the calls of several peers, the cross-border branding relations between Galicia and northern Portugal were also explored, including in-depth interviews with the main entity at the Euroregional level (see chapter 7.
for details) and content analysis of the Joint Investment Programme for Galicia-northern Portugal 2014–2020. In spite of this, northern Portugal remained the central case study area. The geographical, demographic and economic backgrounds of the region are provided in further detail below.

1.4. Background of the case study

1.4.1. Northern Portugal

Northern Portugal is where national peripherality and a trans-frontier geography have exacerbated the decline of traditional agricultural and industrial activities in the face of the effects of globalization and increasing competition both within and beyond the EU. The region has 144 kilometres of Atlantic coastline and is the Portuguese region with the largest border area; it borders the Spanish Autonomous Communities of Galicia and Castile-Leon (see Figure 1.7.).

In Portugal, there are five layers of government which are politically accountable (directly) in certain matters or domains while in others subjects of day-to-day life the political/decision-making is centralised in the central/national government. Leaving aside the autonomous regions of Azores and Madeira, Portugal mainland has not the corresponding regional autonomous governments:

i) The central/national government level based in the Portuguese capital of Lisbon;

ii) The regional level (NUTS II):

1. **Northern region (NUTS II - Norte/north);**
2. Centre region (NUTS II - Centro);
3. Metropolitan Area of Lisbon (NUTS II - Área Metropolitana de Lisboa);
4. Alentejo (NUTS II - Alentejo);
5. Algarve (NUTS II - Algarve);
6. Autonomous Region of Azores (NUTS II - Região Autónoma dos Açores);
7. Autonomous Region of Madeira (NUTS II - Região Autónoma da Madeira).

iii) The intermunicipal level (=NUTS III) with intermunicipal communities. For instance, in northern Portugal there are 7 intermunicipal communities and 1 metropolitan area (see Figure 1.7. for the spatial limits of each community):

1. The Intermunicipal Community of Alto Minho;
2. The Intermunicipal Community of Câvado;
3. The Intermunicipal Community of Ave;
4. Metropolitan Area of Porto/Área Metropolitana do Porto;
5. The Intermunicipal Community of Alto Tâmega;
6. The Intermunicipal Community of Tâmega e Sousa;
7. The Intermunicipal Community of Douro
8. The Intermunicipal Community of Terras de Trás-os-Montes;

The inter-municipal communities and the two metropolitan areas (Porto and Lisbon), have been gaining particular relevance following the elaboration of the Regional Strategic

**iv)** The municipal level (86 municipalities are located in northern Portugal);

**v)** The civil/administrative parish level (1426 parishes are located in northern Portugal).
The spatial-planning regime remains rather static and is organized around administrative, rather than functional, territories (OECD, 2014b). As I argue in chapter 5, strategic spatial planning at the country and regional levels remains underdeveloped (see Rosa Pires, 2005). In addition, as stated by the OECD (2014b), “in the view of the central government, provisions for integrated planning of land use, transport, economic and infrastructure development exist in theory but are rarely applied in practice” (p. 151).

1.4.2. Spatial-demographic setting

According to the latest territorial statistics published by Statistics Portugal (INE, 2015), NUTS II of northern Portugal has a resident population of approximately 3.7 million people, which corresponds to 35 per cent of the national resident population, and 36 per cent of the national youth population aged between zero and 34 years (see Table 1.7.). The population density (number per square kilometre) in 2013 was 113 in Portugal, 171 in northern Portugal, 81 in the central region, 931 in AM Lisbon, 24 in Alentejo, 88 in Algarve, 107 in Azores and 326 in Madeira. The proportion of early leavers from education and training in 2010 was approximately 28 per cent in Portugal and 31 per cent in northern Portugal — the highest rate in mainland Portugal. Only the Autonomous Region of Azores surpassed this figure, with approximately 37 per cent of students leaving the educational system before completing their studies.
Northern Portugal registered in 2013 a crude rate of increase of -0.60 per cent and a crude rate of natural increase of -0.17 per cent. In the same year, and according to the same source (INE, 2015), the crude birth rate was 7.3 per 1,000 people which represents the third lowest in the country (7.9 per 1,000 people on the Portuguese mainland), and a crude death rate of 9.0 per 1,000 people, the lowest in the country (10.2 per 1,000 people on the Portuguese mainland).

The ageing ratio in 2013 was 125.3, which compares to 138.9 on the Portuguese mainland. For a value calculated between the years of 2011 and 2013, the life expectancy at birth of the resident population was 80.32 years, which compares to 80.13 years on the Portuguese mainland. The life expectancy of 65 years for the resident population in northern Portugal was 19.04 years for the same period, which compares to 19.05 years on the Portuguese mainland and 18.97 years in Portugal (including the autonomous regions of Azores and Madeira). In Portugal, 55 per cent of the population lives in cities of different sizes — the share of population in metropolitan areas (urban areas with more than 500,000 inhabitants) is 39 per cent, compared to 49 per cent in the OECD area (OECD, 2014b).

Table 1.7. Demographic indicators for Portugal and its northern region (NUTS II).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Resident population</th>
<th>Population density</th>
<th>Crude rate of increase</th>
<th>Crude rate of natural increase</th>
<th>Crude birth rate</th>
<th>Crude death rate</th>
<th>Total fertility rate</th>
<th>Ageing ratio</th>
<th>Life expectancy at birth of resident population</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3rd quarter 2014</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N.º</td>
<td>N.º/km² (1)</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>% (2)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Portugal</td>
<td>10,427,301</td>
<td>113.1</td>
<td>-0.57</td>
<td>-0.23</td>
<td>7.9</td>
<td>10.2</td>
<td>1.21</td>
<td>136.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Northern region</td>
<td>3,694,152</td>
<td>171.2</td>
<td>-0.60</td>
<td>-0.17</td>
<td>7.3</td>
<td>9.0</td>
<td>1.09</td>
<td>125.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Source: own elaboration based on the Statistical Yearbook of Northern Portugal Region 2013 (INE, 2014). (1) Number per square kilometre. (2) Per mile.  

Portugal and its regions have been dramatically losing numbers of their populations in the past few years (Dias, 2015). The crude rate of natural increase in 2013 was negative for the Portuguese mainland (-0.23 per cent) and in its northern region (-0.17 per cent). These numbers reflect the trend of the past few years (Table 1.8.). According to the World Bank Development Indicators 2013/2014 cited in Dias (2015), Portugal ranks fifth in the world of countries that have lost the most numbers of people in 2014 (-0.6 per cent, approximately 60,000 individuals). The World Economic Forum (2015) revealed that Puerto Rico tops the list of the fastest shrinking countries, with a population decline of 1.3 per cent from 2013 to 2014. The top 10 is dominated by EU member states, such as Spain and Bulgaria, which both experienced a population decline of half a per cent over the period. For Spain, this amounts to around 215,000 individuals.
Table 1.8. Crude rate of natural increase (%) for Portugal and its northern region.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
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<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Portugal</td>
<td>0.04</td>
<td>0.07</td>
<td>0.02</td>
<td>0.03</td>
<td>-0.01</td>
<td>n/info</td>
<td>-0.05</td>
<td>-0.04</td>
<td>-0.06</td>
<td>-0.17</td>
<td>-0.23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Northern region</td>
<td>0.18</td>
<td>0.19</td>
<td>0.13</td>
<td>0.13</td>
<td>0.07</td>
<td>0.09</td>
<td>0.03</td>
<td>0.02</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>-0.12</td>
<td>-0.17</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: own elaboration based on the Statistical Yearbook of Northern Portugal Region 2013 (INE, 2014). The grey highlights represent the negative rate of natural increase (%).

Furthermore, and according to Statistics Portugal (INE, 2015), approximately 134,624 individuals left Portugal in 2014 in the hope of finding work or continuing their studies abroad. This phenomenon is not a novelty but, rather, the confirmation of a trend. In 2012, a record was set for the first time in five decades, when 121,418 individuals left the country. In 2013, the number grew to 128,108. Therefore, the rise of emigrants in 2014 was 5.1 per cent. The net migration observed in northern Portugal has been negative since 2003 (-1,395 reaching -15,730 individuals in 2013), which corresponds to a crude migratory rate of -0.43 per cent. This closely reflects the tendency registered in Portugal more generally (a crude migratory rate of -0.35 per cent in 2013) (see Figure 1.8.).

Figure 1.8. Net migration observed in Portugal and its northern region between 2000 and 2013 (number).

Source: own elaboration based on INE (2014).
A surprising statistic (or perhaps not) is the evolution of the ageing ratio in Portugal between 2003 and 2013. In only 10 years, the ageing ratio rose by more than 30 per cent, and registered 136 individuals 65 or over for every 100 individuals aged between 0 and 14 years (INE, 2015). The total fertility rate registered in 2013 reveals that neither Portugal nor its regions are renewing their populations. Northern Portugal is the region in mainland Portugal with the lowest total fertility rate in 2013 that is 1.02 per cent against 1.21 per cent in Portugal, 1.11 per cent in the Centre region, 1.44 per cent in AM Lisbon, 1.22 per cent in Alentejo, 1.31 per cent in Algarve (INE, 2015).

The ageing of the population has been identified as one of the major challenges posed to societies, according to Albrechts (2010a, 2010b), which cannot be tackled or managed with the concepts and mindset of traditional spatial planning. Reflections on macroeconomic indicators at the national and regional levels are presented below.

1.4.3. Spatial-economic setting
In line with the OECD Regional Outlook 2014 (OECD, 2014b), Portugal had the seventh largest regional disparities in GDP per capita of the OECD countries. In the previous decade, regional growth was the highest in Madeira (2.1 per cent) and the lowest in Alentejo (0.2 per cent). According to the OECD (2015a), Portugal was hit hard by the economic and financial crisis, and unemployment hit record levels, including in its northern region. However, a speedy decline in unemployment rates (and an increase in employment rates) has been recorded since early 2013. Unemployment rates fell while employment rose for seven consecutive quarters (11.9 per cent in Portugal and 13.4 per cent in northern Portugal in the 2nd quarter of 2015, in line with CCDRN, 2015a. See for details chapter 6). However, it is important to underline here the increase of emigrants, since once they leave Portugal they will not be registered in the unemployment rates. Therefore, analyses of the unemployment rate have to be approached with considerable criticism. With nearly 60 per cent of unemployed individuals having been out of work for more than a year, reducing unemployment still further will be more difficult as workers become increasingly disengaged from the labour market.

The OECD (2015a) highlights another key challenge for Portugal and its regions: that is, to reduce the high level of youth unemployment (33.4 per cent in Portugal and 34.5 per cent in northern Portugal), which is one of the highest in the OECD area.

In September 2014, the minimum wage was increased further to €505 per month. Around 13 per cent of the employed population receives the minimum wage of €505 per month. This represents a social and economic challenge, argued the OECD (2015a), as to supporting minimum-wage workers in Portugal who need to work very long hours in order to escape poverty. More needs to be done to support low-income families effectively. In addition, it is also important to activate policies able to connect unemployed and inactive people with jobs; for example, by strengthening the motivation and employability of jobseekers while improving their job opportunities.

The Portuguese economy is projected to grow by around 1.3 per cent in 2015 and 1.5 per cent in 2016. Exports will continue to lead the strengthening recovery as growth in Portugal’s export markets, especially the EURO area, picks up. All else being equal, this will also lead to further improvements in the current account balance. However, high private-sector debt levels and high
unemployment will hold back domestic demand. The most up to date OECD Economic Outlook (see OECD, 2014b) underlines that “any successful policy reform that enhances competitiveness, including by reducing the cost of non-tradable inputs, would strengthen export performance more than assumed in the projection” (p. 12). By strengthening its export performance, Portugal would boost growth, narrow the cyclically adjusted current account deficit and further bolster international confidence in the Portuguese economy. A place-branding strategy would contribute to boosting confidence in the Portuguese economy, including that of its regions, and contribute to structural change. Reflections over other macroeconomic indicators published in August 2015 by Statistics Portugal are presented in chapter 6 of this thesis.

1.5. The role of strategic spatial planners in place branding

Branding a place is a complex task (see, for example, Ashworth and Kavaratzis, 2010), requiring the interaction of different disciplines (Kavaratzis et al., 2015) as well as the participation of various experts, including strategic spatial planners. However, cities and regions have been promoted and brands have been designed by those who are more accustomed to promoting shoes or electronic equipment than publically accountable authorities. Stating this does not call into question the expertise, capabilities or integrity of those dealing with place branding in executing public-sector commissions. It does, however, raise a number of problems for spatial planning (Ashworth and Voogd, 1999).

The request that spatial planners get involved with place marketing and branding is not new. Ashworth and Voogd (1999) underline that if marketing and branding “is to be part of public sector planning then it must be exercised, or at the very least its capabilities and results understood, by public sector planners” (1999, p. 156). What is required is a combination of visions, intuition, organization and determination (Hall, 1987) to deal with the challenges of branding places, and spatial (strategic) planners must play roles that are less common in traditional approaches to spatial planning — spatial planners must now strengthen their creativity to respond proactively to the complex issues faced by places (Albrechts, 2010a; Oliveira, 2014c).

It has been assumed that some of the attempts to respond to the complex issues places are facing depend on the ability to combine the creation of strategic long-term visions with short-term actions (Albrechts, 2004) or a series of short-term projects (Hillier, 2010). The role of strategic spatial planners goes beyond the technicality of land-use plans, territorial zoning or spatial regulations. Spatial planners are also strategic navigators trying to work out future potentialities (Hillier, 2010). It is also necessary to deal with competitive agendas, place-based innovation and transnational learning processes, as well as dealing with private capital. It is paramount that we discuss and maintain the needs and hopes of the community at the core of all spatial interventions and spatial strategies. Maintaining a consistent and confident attitude on the part of spatial planners is fundamental if only to avoid alienating citizens from their living and working environments. A successful place-branding initiative, at the regional scale, for instance, that is able to integrate the stories of communities at the heart of the branding process in a participative-oriented approach is likely to enhance the perceived value of strategic spatial planning and the role of spatial planners.
According to Healey (2006a), there is an imaginative power in strategic spatial planning — a strategic spatial plan or the design of strategic plan-making can be imagined as a vision of the future of a place, such as a region. The anticipated role of place branding is to construct and convey a preferred image of a place, and to formulate a concept that resonates with a specific group of potential participants, be they external visitors, potential investors or present inhabitants (Johansson, 2012). Therefore, spatial planners must play a core role of being creative thinkers, catalysts and initiators of change (Albrechts, 1999) and develop instruments such as place branding (Oliveira, 2015a) to create better places to live, work, study, invest, play, love and dream in the long term (Oliveira, 2015f). This would only be possible if the envisioning process consists of the development of a realistic long-term vision that is operationalized with short-term actions taking into account power structures, uncertainties and competing values. Furthermore, the spatial planner must also play the role of a negotiator engaging various relevant place actors in a spatial context, in defining spatial strategies and constructing a spatial logic. Thus, they design plan-making structures and develop content, images and a decision framework through which to influence and manage spatial change. In the same line of reasoning, a spatial planner must embrace future-strategic thinking in place-branding exercises as they deal with spatial qualities, multiple place actors including citizens and organizations, place opportunities and threats and external trends and forces — all within the resources available. At its very least the role expected of the spatial planner is more complex, uncertain and its outcomes less predictable than in more traditional utopian regulatory master-planning. Figure 1.9 provides a summary of the roles that strategic spatial planners should play in a place branding strategy.

Figure 1.9. Summarizing strategic spatial planners’ roles in place branding.

Source: own elaboration.
Spatial planners must understand their role in dealing with the pace of developments and complex challenges that societies are facing. In line with Albrechts (1999) and Mintzberg (1994), strategic spatial planners have played the role of negotiators by engaging with place actors in order to provide explanations of the external forces identified in the diagnostic stage. Strategic spatial planners “must be able to grasp the momentum and they must try to come up with many different responses, some of which may be unconventional, and possible unique” (Michalko, 2001, p. 2) but desirable alternatives (Albrechts, 2010a). ‘Alternative’ responses, here, means the discovery of structurally different futures and the design of “a transformative agenda” (Friedmann, 1987, p. 389) in which creativity emerges that has a primary need for spatial planners to deal with instruments (Albrechts, 2010a) such as place branding (Oliveira, 2015a).

Strategic planners must have the practical capacities to work in the face of conflict (Forester, 2010a), to balance interests between traditionally locked and often opposing systems (for example, of governments and business) and the open systems linked to co-production and to manage tensions between those embedded within the system (for example, politicians and policymakers), those with access to the system (such as influential actors) and those who function outside the system (such as community organizations) (Moulaert, 2011). In order to focus actively on place qualities, strategic domains, place assets and landscape - and thus contribute to the improvement of the socio-spatial and spatial-economic conditions and creating a spatial logic that is economically and socially balanced, equal and fair - spatial planners must use their imaginations and all the power available to them (Albrechts, 2015a).

In line with the role of strategic spatial planners in place branding, this thesis is divided into eight chapters. The chapters cover the ground that strategic spatial planners must also cover when dealing with place branding — including a diagnosis of the spatial condition, the visions of key place actors and the current spatial policies at the national (Portugal) and regional (northern Portugal) levels. The final chapters draw conclusions for contexts beyond that of the case study, which could be helpful for other regions dealing with place-branding processes. The next section details the structure of the thesis and provides an overview of the chapters.

1.6. Structure of the thesis
This thesis is divided in three parts and is composed of eight chapters, as illustrated in Figure 1.10. and described below. The eight chapters of the thesis are interconnected and contribute to the line of reasoning previously clarified. In Figure 1.10. the circles and lines connect the chapters to the central topic; in addition, the lines indicate connections between the chapters themselves. In an attempt to bring a more geographical/spatial-oriented approach to the process of branding places such as regions, this thesis is structured as follows. Due the fact that this thesis is the result of four years of academic work, the eight chapters are slightly revised versions of existing publications. Therefore, some repetition of ideas and methods could be identified.
PART A: THEORETICAL AND METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH

Chapter 1 is the present chapter and provides an introductory overview of place branding and strategic spatial planning. It also critically discusses the primary and secondary lines of reasoning and problem statement. In addition, this chapter presents the methodological approach behind the research, and explains in detail how the research was carried. The reasons behind the selection of northern Portugal as the case study area are also explained. The overall aim of this chapter is providing the reader with theoretical and methodological points of reference, by presenting the notions on which the following chapters are built and, at the same time, by explaining the objectives and the foundation of the research questions tackled throughout this study.

Chapter 2 is mainly a conceptual one. It debates place branding and the strategic approach to spatial planning. This chapter presents the two strands of reasoning introduced above and critically debates why and how place branding can be used as an instrument in the strategic spatial planning approach. The chapter emphasizes that place branding as a strategic spatial planning instrument could contribute to improvement of economic and socio-spatial logic, as well as reshaping responses to contemporary challenges faced by places, for example high unemployment rates by attracting investment and new business, creating, thus job opportunities to the maintenance of existing ones. This chapter is the theoretical backbone for the following chapters.


PART B: EMPIRICAL RESEARCH - PLACE BRANDING IN STRATEGIC SPATIAL PLANNING WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO NORTHERN PORTUGAL

Chapter 3 explores the roots of place-branding theory and practice in Portugal and in its northern region. It synthesizes the main literature on the subject at the national and regional levels, with a special focus on the approaches taken (for example, whether mainstream branding or spatial planning is deployed). In addition, it undertakes content analysis aimed at understanding how place branding has (or has not) been approached in spatial development plans, strategic initiatives and policy documents, mainly for the period between 2014 and 2020 at the national (Portugal), regional (northern Portugal), cross-border Euroregion (Galicia-northern Portugal) and supra-national levels. The chapter deepens the debate, following the primary strand of reasoning debated in the Introduction chapter and chapter 2. It also critically explores the actual or potential roles of place branding as an instrument for the attainment of strategic spatial planning goals through its integration in strategic spatial plan-making. The findings of this chapter justify the decision to focus on tourism and on the brands created to position Portugal and its northern region as tourism destinations (in discussion in chapters 4 and 6). Furthermore, the approach to place branding undertaken in the spatial strategic documents elaborated at the Euroregion level justifies the existence of chapter 7 in this study and the publications that support it.

**Chapter 4** shows how content analysis can be used to identify and understand the ways in which tourists and travellers perceive Portugal and its northern region as a place for tourism. Bearing in mind the fact that place branding is about far more than tourism (Kavaratzis, 2008), the preliminary findings that emerged after the first round of in-depth interviews and document content analysis motivated me to write the journal article that contributes to this chapter. This chapter contributes to rethinking place branding as suggested by Ashworth et al. (2015): “to explore theoretical perspectives based on relatively recent developments in marketing theory (for example, co-creation of experiences) and marketing practice (for example, digital marketing)” (p. 1). Furthermore, it fulfils one of the “seven Cs” of digital, strategic place-brand management as proposed by Hanna and Rowley (2015, p 86): “channels, clutter, community, chatter, communication, co-creation, and co-branding”. The integration of this journal article on digital challenges in place branding is also justified by the recent work developed by Sevin (2016) and Therkelsen (2015). Therkelsen, for instance, examines co-creation and the changing nature of place-brand communication by highlighting the multiple dialectics involved in place branding and the active involvement of consumers — an approach that could be extended to place branding with focus on tourism and tourists/visitors. Therkelsen (2015) also primarily focuses on tourism: specifically, on a place-branding initiative proposing Denmark as a tourism destination. This chapter suggests that the application of content analysis methodology on online material could contribute to a refined place-branding initiative for Portugal and its regions, including the northern part, by integrating user-generated and travel experts’ content within the place-branding strategy — a co-creation of place brands.


**Chapter 5** aims at deepening the debate on place branding as a form of strategic spatial planning. Particular emphasis is given to regional actors’ participation in a potential region-branding initiative for northern Portugal. This is in line with the fourth reason to rethink place branding, as stated by Ashworth et al. (2015), to “integrate the practice of place branding with wider theoretical considerations. Insights from the practice of place branding (for example, stakeholder management, residents’ involvement, the use of social network sites) can be gained to assist and complement theoretical development” (p. 1). Two years earlier, Kavaratzis and Hatch (2013) argued similarly for an improved understanding of the relationship between place identity and place brands, and the balance of stakeholder involvement in the development of place-brand identity and place-brand management. This chapter aims at understanding the opinions of 16 key regional actors on a set of questions. A primary focus is given to understanding the opinions of regional actors on a regional-
branding strategy for northern Portugal that is integrated as an instrument within strategic spatial planning.


**Chapter 6** also debates the opinions of key regional actors and offers an in-depth analysis of the main documents for the tourism sector in northern Portugal. Specifically, the two entities that one can consider the most important in terms of tourism planning, development and regional branding initiatives, among other substantive matters for envisioning better futures for the region, are: i) Regional Entity of Tourism of Porto and Northern Portugal and ii) the North Regional Coordination and Development Commission. In addition, and deepening the findings presented in chapter 3, analyses of the strategic regional planning documents - Northern Portugal Strategic Guidelines 2014–2020 and the (Portuguese) National Strategic Plan for Tourism 2013–2015 have been carried out. This chapter aims at understanding the perspectives of the two entities on a regional branding strategy for northern Portugal. It also aims at clarifying the role that tourism can play in such regional branding efforts.


**Chapter 7** reflects the findings of chapter 3 and the opinions of the regional actors interviewed for the purposes of this thesis. If the findings reveal a more mature approach to place branding than that of the European Grouping of Territorial Cooperation Galicia-northern Portugal, it is because the regional actors have underlined the possible synergies that northern Portugal can establish with the Spanish Autonomous Community of Galicia. This is not only justified by the strong cooperative ties between the two regions but also by the fact that this Euroregion will benefit greatly from the EU multiannual financial framework 2014 to 2020, specifically through the programme INTERREG V-A (also called INTERREG Europe) Spain-Portugal 2014–2020. In February 2015, the European Commission approved the application of €288 million in cross-border initiatives between the two countries on the Iberian Peninsula. This chapter adopts a strategic spatial planning approach to cross-border place branding in order to discuss the extent to which cross-border branding can enhance the reputations of and give visibility to northern Portugal and Galicia. Key findings from a journal article on constructing a regional advantage have been integrated in the concluding part of this chapter.

PART C: CONCLUSIONS

Chapter 8 is the Conclusion chapter and synthesizes the main conclusions of the thesis and details future challenges for investigation. The chapter returns to the theoretical contribution postulated in chapter 2, and attempts to augment the related explorative efforts, by building on the findings of chapters 3, 4, 5, 6 and 7. The conclusion provides the reader with an alternative view on the debates on place branding and strategic spatial planning instruments. Suggestions for future research are also provided, as the important matter is to keep the discussion alive, thus contributing to the maturation of place branding and alternative instruments of the strategic spatial planning approach.

Figure 1.10. Structure of the thesis. Source: own elaboration.