



Original Article

Place branding and endogenous rural development. Departure points for developing an inner brand of the River Minho estuary

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ABSTRACT Place branding holds a promising contribution to sustainable territorial development and requires changes in the social organisation of places, which implies complex transitional processes towards new management regimes. This article explores place branding of the River Minho estuary in the borderland of Portugal and Spain. It deals with the tension between creating a brand, enhancing market development and sustainable (endogenous) development. The central question is: 'How to develop a successful inner brand in the context of a geographically peripheral area facing severe ecological, social and economic vulnerabilities?'. In the case study, area rural dwellers, entrepreneurs and representatives of institutions represent contrasting viewpoints on innovation, ecosystem coordination and economic progress, viewpoints that point to power issues on control over the natural environment, but also provide input for the development of a common strategic vision or connective storyline. This article provides a 'tool' for sustainable development in this vulnerable estuary and contributes to our understanding of how place branding – as a means to create place distinctiveness and attractiveness – can be combined with an endogenous approach in vulnerable peripheral areas. Such an

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approach fits with the EU objectives of sustainable, inclusive and smart growth and an increasing focus on place-based development.

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INTRODUCTION

Over the past decades, social and environmental problems have been associated with economic growth (Daly, 1990; Naredo, 1996), demanding a fundamental reorientation of the interrelations between society and the economy (Bruckmeier and Tovey, 2008; Haberl *et al.*, 2009; Kitchen and Marsden, 2009). As Marsden and others emphasise, effective adaptations to environmental and resource vulnerabilities need to be inherently territorially rooted (Marsden, 2003; Wiskerke, 2009; Pike, 2011; Mettepenningen *et al.*, 2012). Managing a territory implies ‘fostering adaptive capabilities and creating opportunities’ (Holling, 2001) and presumes the interaction between all stakeholders and the development and improvement of policies (Raadgever *et al.*, 2008; Wellbrock *et al.*, 2012). Dynamic social–ecological systems (Rammel *et al.*, 2007) subject to these continuous adaptation processes (Holling, 2001; Stagl, 2007; van der Ploeg, 2008) are sustained when producer–consumer relationships are incorporated (Sevilla Guzmán and Martínez Alier, 2006; Holloway *et al.*, 2007).

New producer–consumer relations can be part of a *place branding* strategy of ‘reconnection’ (Ilbery and Maye, 2007, p. 507), and lead to new sustainable perspectives for territories (Horlings and Marsden, 2012). A brand can be described as ‘a consistent group of characters, images, or emotions that consumers recall or experience when they think of a specific symbol, product, service, organisation or location’ (Simeon, 2006, p. 464). This can in general refer to destinations, corporations, products and services (Balakrushnan, 2009). Product and corporate branding on the one hand, and place branding on the other hand, are both aimed at creating a more positive image and reputation, but there are important differences in

the way these goals are achieved. The amount and heterogeneity of the public and private actors involved in place branding create a complex context that is quite different from the corporate sector. Place branding requires connection of the worlds of private, public sector and knowledge institutions. This makes it difficult to apply effective interventions and align different stakeholders with various interests around a joint agenda.

The commonly used distinction between place branding and product/corporate branding is therefore relevant, but we have to acknowledge, as Pike (2011) argues, that product branding is also geographically ‘entangled’ and has spatial associations and connotations shaped by the agents involved. Related in spatial circuits of value and meaning, producer, consumers and regulators are conditioned by the spatial associations of product brands in market contexts (Pike, 2011).

Following Pederson (2004), place branding consists of the deliberate planning of the image and identity of a region that contributes to its legibility. Successful place branding strategies mutually strengthen endogenous knowledge and the local territory (Ray, 1998), take into account the ‘historical trajectories of social relations in places as well as the contemporary relations which are continuously formed’ (Kneafsy, 2000, p. 48), and cope with how place ‘is appropriated, articulated and represented by the webs of agents involved in production, circulation, consumption and regulation’ (Pike, 2011, p. 210).

Via a multi-stakeholder process, an ‘inner brand’ or connective storyline can be developed in collaboration with local groups/stakeholders, which should be distinguished from the ‘external’ brand, the marketing to outside target (consumer) groups (Horlings, 2012). Via the interaction process among local people and communities,

endogenous resources are managed and controlled in new forms of institutional organisation, often operational in more informal networks. When these 'promising' dynamics are 'taken up' and incorporated in supportive structures and/or policy frames, this might result in the establishment of a management regime in which the defence of a vulnerable ecosystem is 'organised' by its economic exploitation.

There is, however, a tension between the process of creating an inner brand, enhancing innovation and new markets, and sustainable (endogenous) development. The goal of this article is to provide a 'tool' for the further enhancement of sustainable development in the vulnerable River Minho borderland. Following the theoretical proposition that branding strategies can contribute to economic revenues for rural dwellers, the central question in this article is: *How to develop a successful inner brand in the context of a geographically peripheral area facing severe ecological, social and economic vulnerabilities?*

The article shows the tension between conserving a landscape, keeping cultural traits and practices, and scaling up marketing initiatives. The challenge is to align people and interests around a joint inner brand, aimed at developing new markets, but also grounded in collective maintenance of vulnerable resources. Therefore, the article will identify some points of departure for designing such a process rooted in endogenous potential, based on a case study research of the River Minho estuary in the borderland of Portugal and Spain.

The next section describes the methodology for this research, which was carried out in the context of the EU project DeltaNet. Place branding experiences show that branding as strategy for territorial development or as planning tool can not only be successful, but also raise several complexities as will be described in the subsequent section refers to some other examples of place branding. The section after that introduces the three dimensions of the social construction of an inner brand, rooted in endogenous potential. Thereafter, the case study area is described in the following section. The challenges and possibilities of constructing an inner brand and designing the

process in the context of the case study River Minho are identified in the next section.

Thereby is emphasised the need for innovative knowledge supportive structures and policy frames facilitating place branding and the protection of vulnerable ecosystems in peripheral rural regions in Europe. Finally, the main findings are discussed the penultimate section and some conclusions are drawn in the final section on the contribution of these findings to our knowledge on place branding and the relevance for EU policy.

METHODOLOGY

This article documents case study research carried out in the River Minho estuary in the borderland of Portugal and Spain, in the context of the INTERREG IV project DeltaNet on the sustainable management of vulnerable ecosystems in Europe. This INTERREG project focuses on the interrelations between 'endogenous development', 'political-institutional' and 'economic relationships', and aims to translate 'grassroots dynamics' into an academic research agenda and policy formulation. Its research activities feedback 'co-produced' knowledge to the political and the grassroots level. Central in this case study research is the exploration of the connections between endogenous knowledge, the management of the natural environment and a new business model.

Case study research (Yin, 2003) provides context-dependent knowledge (Campbell, 1975; Flyvbjerg, 2006) that generates detailed insights about what is happening in the situations studied (Stake, 2000). The research methods encompass direct observations, analysis of written documents (articles in newspapers, farmers' magazines and on websites) and interviews that consisted of 'active and methodical listening' (Bourdieu, 1996). In the period from 2010 to 2012, six key stakeholders with different backgrounds (practitioners, governors and scientists) were interviewed, all people actively concerned about the ecological qualities of the case study area. In face to face, semi-structured interviews most of them *in situ* (Svendsen, 2006), the meaning of their practices was co-constructed (Heyl, 2001). These

interviews were recorded and transcribed and were accompanied by additional interviews and telephone chats completing and clarifying these interview materials. Further in 2011, three stakeholder meetings were organised, attended by about 15 people with different background each time. In 2012, a seminar was organised open to the public. This international seminar that focused on lamprey fishing, was attended by regional and local governors, researchers, ecologists and fishermen. The very important characteristic of this informal process so far is that stakeholders determine the speed of the process. As authorities have a bad reputation in this area, the people are very suspicious and sceptical about external involvement and steering by the government. The researchers have played a role in this area by designing how a branding process could be led by stakeholders. As a first step, they stimulated the development of awareness and an inner brand by bringing together stakeholders, describing the endogenous potential of the area and discussing the benefits and risks of branding with policy makers and key players in the area.

In addition, ethnographic-oriented experiences resulted in 'extensive' knowledge of the subject (ibid). Living and working in the research area (Fetterman, 1989) taught much about the daily life of the practitioners, and fed the case study research. The aim of the action-research has been this exploration, but also catalysing the possibilities of a 'future' branding strategy in the area and its related economic activities such as fish, gastronomic infrastructure, wine production, adventure sports, nature and landscape, ancient cities and villages, and cultural events.

PLACE BRANDING AS TERRITORIAL STRATEGY AND PLANNING TOOL

The issue of creating an inner brand based on endogenous capital has become relevant in the context of the European 2020 goals of smart, inclusive and sustainable development and the EU policy on territorial development. These reflect an urgency for 'place-based' policies and planning, and the generation of insights on how to

implement the place-based dimension (EU, 2007; EC, 2010a, b). However, till now very little is said about how to implement the much debated place-based dimension and whether is it just another pro-growth policy in Europe (Jauhiainen and Moilanen, 2011). In the globally oriented, growth-first and competitiveness model, places are described as 'winners and losers'. Bristow (2010) describes this as a 'place-less' discourse that lacks sensitivity to critical issues of context and place and the interdependencies between places and leads to an emphasis upon a relatively narrow route to regional prosperity, downplaying the potential for growth and development to be achieved through more diverse avenues (Bristow, 2005). Public authorities have familiarised themselves with business assumptions and techniques, which are aimed at tackling market competition. In this regard, place branding has become an integral part of economic development initiatives that are designed by regions willing to enter into this global game (Pasquinelli, 2010). Place branding experiences show that branding as a strategy for a territorial development strategy can not only be successful, but also raise several complexities:

- The branding of Tuscany shows the tension between traditional protection of valuable rural landscapes versus innovation. In the River Arno Valley between Pisa and Florence, the Arno Valley brand aimed at supporting a high-tech cluster, although the region was fairly locked in a traditional self-image based on tourism, agriculture and traditional manufacturing. Behind a formal cooperative scheme, the local governments of Florence and Pisa arranged different agendas, leading to separate innovation brands (Pasquinelli, 2010).
- The branding of the county Devon in the United Kingdom revealed that a strategy aimed at destination branding does not automatically lead to a shared storyline for the region or to the development of new products and markets. Changes were missed here to align businesses around a collective agenda and integrate marketing initiatives for food (Food and Drink Devon) and tourism (Horlings and Kanemasu, 2010).

- The branding of West Cork in Ireland illustrates how a regional brand can be rooted in territorial capital. Food as well as tourism, such as four-star hotels, are marketed under the same 'Fuchsia' brand and are required to meet high standards of quality and services. Almost 200 local businesses are permitted to use the logo and take part in a West Cork LEADER marketing and development programmes, which also includes the training of entrepreneurs.¹
- In the Øresund region – surrounding the Strait of Øresund that connects Denmark and Sweden – the aim was to give the area 'a competitive edge' and communicate both material and immaterial dimensions of space in the brand. The process was successful in connecting all potentially profitable and significant objects and events of the region to the region. However, it failed in organising the commitment of the people in the marketing process (Pederson, 2004).

The cases showed that balancing different aspects of sustainability, the development of products and services rooted in territorial capital and organisation and alignment of stakeholders under a joint umbrella vision are key ingredients of a branding process.

From a sustainable development perspective, planning can be interpreted as a careful, territorial bound disclosure of endogenous development potential in which local actors – instead of degenerating (Baudry *et al*, 2000; Thenail, 2002; van der Ploeg, 2006; Paniagua *et al*, 2012) – use and improve resources such as food, fibre, clean water, nature, biodiversity and recreational space and relate these resources to (continuous changing) regional and global markets (Swagemakers *et al*, 2012b). In the adaptation processes fitting to this theoretical orientation, building alliances improves (the management of) the natural environment (Swagemakers and Wiskerke, 2010) and can lead to networks of entrepreneurs and citizens, which valorise local/regional assets and are rooted in social-cultural notions of regional identity (Horlings and Marsden, 2012). Such place-based trajectories reflect an overarching regional story line or vision rooted in territorial capital

(Swagemakers *et al*, 2012a), that is, 'the amount and intertwinement of different forms of capital (or different resources) entailed in, mobilized and actively used in (and reproduced by) the regional economy and society' (van der Ploeg *et al*, 2009, p. 13), which encompasses material and immaterial components and refers to regional intrinsic values that can be valued by consumers.

While from an economic viewpoint, often the demand side is questioned, modelled and/or made problematic, most crucial for a successful branding strategy seems the internalisation of the values and appreciations of potential visitors and/or consumers of locally produced food and services by rural dwellers (Pardellas de Blas and Padín Fabeiro, 2005). The elements of territorial capital like knowledge, resources, identity and social networks, however, are often differentially valued among stakeholders and, consequently, differently optimised (Swagemakers *et al*, 2012a). In developing a successful regional brand, people and communities therefore will have to cooperate and communicate the most promising culturally embedded values both internally (reproduce local knowledge and the territory) and externally ('access', for example, niche markets or receive payments for the production of public goods).

THE SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION OF INNER BRANDS

The development of an inner brand consists of three mutually strengthening processes (Árnason *et al*, 2009; Horlings, 2012): (i) increasing 'visibility' (referring to the awareness and identification of cultural values and markers), (ii) the development of new products and services (that is, place-based product innovation) and (iii) the reorganisation of activities (including regional governance and cooperation). These three processes are not consecutive steps but are intertwined and run parallel. The first aspect of developing an inner brand is creating awareness and the identification of *endogenous development potential* and a common understanding of this potential in terms of the most important attribute (s), the so-called 'cultural markers'. The range of

markers includes food, languages and dialects, crafts, folklore, visual arts, drama, literary references, historical and pre-historical sites, landscapes and associated flora and fauna (Ray, 2001). The challenge of branding is to market these cultural values and markers as 'competitive identity' (Anholt, 2008). Although the inclusion of people and communities is a pre-condition for the persistence of 'a permanent change of identity' (Pederson, 2004, p. 79), we should acknowledge that this is a complex and slow process, and awareness creation often brings along complex power issues (Kneafsy, 2000).

In order to avoid this pitfall, people's needs have to be taken into account (Florida, 2008; Hospers, 2010) and the notion of a brand purpose is critical (Anholt, 2008). The process of the brand development is most often more relevant than the brand itself (Pasquinelli, 2010). In practice, this is, however, difficult to realise. Rural entrepreneurs are not always forerunners. This makes it all the more relevant to build on the innovation potential, the cultural values and endogenous capital that is already in place. A reluctance to change of rural entrepreneurs, institutional lock-ins, and competing visions and interests are only some of the difficulties in the practice of branding processes. Cases in the Netherlands, for example, showed how difficult it is to construct a shared storyline with different stakeholders and match these with the goals of governmental authorities (Horlings, 2012).

The second aspect of developing an inner brand is related to the *development of products and practices* that are territorially rooted (Pike, 2011). This requires a process of 're-grounding' in territorial capital. This re-grounding takes place at the level where endogeneity, that is, 'the degree to which a regional economy is grounded on regionally available (and regionally controlled) resources' (van der Ploeg *et al*, 2009, p. 8), can be managed and controlled. Place branding implies the process of identification of these resources (including the physical and social spheres of production) combined with new types of marketing strategies that result in externally derived added value to these regionally (re)produced resources (Horlings and Marsden, 2012).

Successful inner branding strategies depend on their 'geographical associations in place' (Pike, 2011), that is, the place-based 'prospects' (Rip and Kemp, 1998) associated with the provision of innovative products and services. Innovation can refer to institutional, organisational or market innovations. Here we refer to market innovations, the development of products and services, controlled by local people and that add economic value. A third aspect of developing a successful inner brand, therefore, is *organising* the inner brand by involving people and communities in a multi-stakeholder process supported by facilitating policy frames and strategies. Branding strategies result from the mix of mutually influencing structuring mechanisms (Giddens, 1984) with, on the one hand institutional and formal support, and on the other hand practitioners that operate in more informal networks. Organisational structures with more cooperative management mediate the application of external rules (for example, formulated in legislation) and/or coordinate social action and the necessary changes in (informal) rules and regulations (Zijderveld, 2000; Hospers, 2004) through which individuals 'achieve their own long-term self-interest' (Ostrom, 2000, p. 137). Hence, place branding represents 'complex territorial units in which historically grown entities are made up of people' (Hospers, 2009, p. 227).

In the next sections, it will be described how these three aspects play a role in the River Minho borderland; but first, this case study area will be introduced.

THE RIVER MINHO ESTUARY

Location

This section describes the case study area and the endogenous development potential of the River Minho in the borderland of Portugal and Spain (see Figure 1). The River Minho starts from the Serra de Meira in the northeast of Galicia, an autonomous region in the northwest of Spain. The river crosses the region southwest and ends about after 300 km in the Atlantic Ocean at the

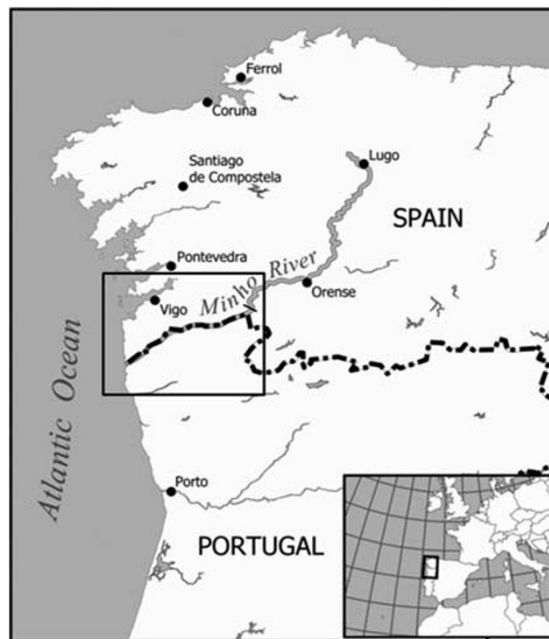


Figure 1: The River Minho estuary at the border of Portugal and Spain.
Source: Wikipedia (2012).

border between Portugal and Spain. In this article, we focus on the borderland, an area that coincides with the unique reproduction habitat of the lamprey fish species – *Petromyzon marinus* – distinguishing itself with other lamprey species. The reproduction habitat of this particular species (Mateus *et al*, 2012) is limited by the dam of the hydroelectric power plant in Frieira, at about 70 km from the river mouth (its location indicated with the small bar in Figure 1), the last part of the river runs parallel with the border between Portugal and Spain (the dotted line).

The area consists of 1401.2 km² and has 156 158 inhabitants of which about a third of the area and the population are situated in Spain (IGE, 2011; PT-INE, 2011). Although the different administrative levels within the region and especially between Portugal and Spain make the identification of demographic and economic characteristics difficult, similarities in orientation and development practice can be established as the sides of the river traditionally have been in close contact (Monteiro *et al*, 2002).

Economic potential

In the literature, the estuary is of economic importance for the region, with a great preponderance of tourism, fishing and agriculture activities (Sousa *et al*, 2005). Agricultural activities consist of subsistence agriculture based on maize and small family gardens and more industrialised modes of production of vegetables, fruits, flowers (sometimes in green houses) and wine vineyards mainly located on riverside terraces. Over the last decade, *wine production* has rapidly expanded, varying from traditional home produced wines to refined, and industrially produced wines with sophisticated marketing strategies. Important grapes are Albariño, Loureiro, Godello, Caiño and Treixadura. Especially Albariño white wine becomes more and more important outside the region, and thus important as economic driving force. The region is recognised as the world capital of young wines. Both Portugal and Spain have their own 'Denominación de Origin Protegida' (Protected Denomination of Origin), respectively, Vinho Verde (the villages of Melgaço and Monção) and Rias Baixas (Crecente, Arbo, As Neves, Salvaterra and part of Tomiño and O Rosal). In Galicia, the wine production is advertised through wine routes, which are promoted by the department of tourism of the Deputación de Pontevedra (the provincial administration).

Fishery activities are concentrated in Viana do Castelo (Portugal) and A Guarda (Spain). In A Guarda, the fishery sector (excluding commercialising activities that are categorised in the service sector) results in economic activity of about 32 million euros annually. The important fish processing industries are situated in Valença (Portugal). Next to these activities, river fishery activities are important, which consist of 'arts of fishing' specific for the River Minho estuary. Close to the river mouth, Caminha and Vila Nova are the most important fishery centres, but these face problems due to fragile structures for commercialisation. Although there is still an annual amount of 80 000 lampreys being caught in the estuary, there is a decrease in catching other fish such as salmon and eels, as Cobo (2010) mentions. Over the past decades, the economic

importance of the primary sector has decreased. Between 1991 and 2001, the agrarian work force has decreased by halve.

The most important *industrial hubs* in the region are in Vigo and Porriño (in Spain at about 30 km from the river). Although these hubs have created an environment for additional industrial activities in the River Minho borderland, at the moment these activities are under pressure due to the current economic crisis. The secondary sector benefits from processing industries linked to fish, vegetable and wine production (the Spanish riverside from the river mouth to Tui has a turnover of about 49.5 million euros). The tertiary sector encompasses *trading activities and tourism* in Portugal, especially spas, swimming pools and sport centres, which are owned by small- and medium-sized entrepreneurs and local governments and is growing in economic importance. Possibly, trading and tourism could benefit from the multiplier effects that the improvement of the natural habitat for migratory fishery species might bring.

Further, economic turnover is generated in the form of *energy production* by the hydroelectric power plant in Frieira, owned by the Unión Fenosa, SA. This is part of the Gas Natural group, having its headquarters in Barcelona and operating mainly in Spain, but also in Italy, Northern Africa and Latin America. For reference year 2009, the hydroelectric power plant in Frieira produced 401.303 MWh (Ministerio de Industria, Energía y Turismo, 2009). Calculating 50 euros per MWh, this stands for an economic turnover of about 20 000 million euros. For reference year 2010, a year with more rainfall, it produced 519 293 MWh (Ministerio de Industria, Energía y Turismo, 2009), which (if again calculating 50 euros per MWh) results in almost 26 million euros. However, the local population hardly gets benefits from it because the money flows out of the region. Influence over resources could be strengthened when benefits would be more equally shared among shareholders and rural dwellers or some of the profits were donated in a community fund – as, for example, is done on the Shetland Islands with the profits from oil drilling (Kanemasu and Horlings, 2010). These revenues

could then be used to strengthen the local economy by developing new markets, enhancing the attractiveness of the area, promotional activities and professionalisation of entrepreneurs (see, for example, the training of the ‘fuchsia’ brand holders in West Cork, described in the section ‘Place branding as territorial strategy and planning tool’).

Ecological potential

Downstream of this dam, the river runs freely and is characterised by granite rocks and small canyons (Martínez Cortizas and Pérez Alberti, 1999). The river and its bank contain rich natural and landscape values (Lorente and Sánchez, 2007), which are endangered by plans for the implementation of hydroelectricity plants in this part of the river. When implemented, the benefits would flow to enterprises outside the region (again Unión Fenosa) and meanwhile the habitat for the lamprey would be considerably reduced, and also the opportunity for the development of an inner brand based on local practices. Until now, an environmental impact study holds the implementation of a new dam that was planned in the 1970s (Simón Fernández, 1998). The plans, however, have been rewritten and now propose the implementation of three smaller dams with even a higher impact on the natural environment (Saborido, 2005).

The Mediterranean micro-climate (Martínez Cortizas and Pérez Alberti, 1999) in the borderland allows the production of citrus fruits, olives and characteristic wines. The islands, river beaches, river forests, marshlands and dunes at the maritime area (up to 3 km from the river mouth) are the habitat of numerous species and vegetation. Wetlands are registered in the Inventory of Galician Wetlands (the third most important in Galicia). The river banks are subject to Natura 2000 regulations (Domínguez García *et al*, 2012a) and the river scores among the best of all rivers in the Peninsula regarding water quality, which is used as a reference for the implementation of water directives in other rivers (Domínguez García and Simón Fernández, 2012). The rich biodiversity is protected by several schemes

(differing in Portugal and Spain) but above all by local nature organisations.

Our conclusion so far is that the endogenous potential of the area encompasses fish, biodiversity, wine and the related possibilities for gastronomy and tourism, as bases for developing an inner brand. The articulation of this development potential in the region remains, however, limited until now.

BRANDING THE REGION

We have described earlier that the development of an inner brand consists of three mutually strengthening processes (Árnason *et al*, 2009; Horlings, 2012): (i) increasing ‘visibility’; (ii) the development of new products and services (that is, place-based product innovation); and (iii) the reorganisation of activities (including regional governance and cooperation). We will apply these aspects in the case study area and explore what the possibilities are for branding the estuary and its related economic activities such as fish, gastronomic infrastructure, wine production, adventure sports, nature and landscape, historic cities and villages, and cultural events.

Increasing visibility

Several stakeholder groups identify and protect ‘cultural values’, thus contributing to the visibility of endogenous potential, especially in situations where these markers are linked to specific products and practices such as touristic arrangements. For example, the Asociación Naturalista Baixo Miño (ANABAM) monitors and protects bird life in a Special Protection Area (SPA) close to the river mouth. Among its educational activities are a visitor centre, walking routes along the spots with endangered bird species, observation towers and guided tours. Located half-way to the river dam are the Natural Park of Monte Aloia with walking routes, water mills and an outstanding nature quality and the SPA As Gándaras de Budiño: 700 ha of marshland where migratory birds nest.

There is an urgency for further improvement of economic activities based on the availability and reproduction of elements of this vulnerable

environment. The River Minho itself is a habitat for the European eel (*Anguilla anguilla*) and the reproduction habitat for salmon (*Salmo salar*) and lamprey (*Petromyzon marinus*). Lamprey is an important cultural marker and potential bases for an inner brand. Therefore, the recognition of different practices of lamprey fishing is relevant for the further protection of the vulnerable river environment. The lamprey (see in Figure 2, the image on the right) is a primitive fish with hundreds of millions of years of history (Janvier, 2007) that, like salmon, is born in continental waters, grows up in the ocean and returns to the river in order to reproduce (after which it dies) (Araújo, 2011). From January to May, it is fished and eaten as fresh product and as a gastronomic specialty sold in restaurants in the region. Next to being cooked, it is also conserved as a smoked fish and sold in shops and restaurants all year around.

Detrimental factors for the lamprey population are, however, the use of pesticides and fertilizers in productive agricultural practices and the water management in the River Minho. The management of the barrier in Frieira is related to the other barriers in the River Minho, which are opened and closed based on the optimisation of hydro-energy production. This water management practice results in differences in water levels of metres of height. Consequently, lampreys swim into the zones in the river that within the next hours fall dry again. These are the factors that affect and further endanger the lamprey’s habitat conditions, and consequently the lamprey’s potential as the marker for product innovation and ecosystem coordination in the River Minho area. These different factors also endanger the importance of other migratory fish species for the regional economy.

Upstream and downstream, the ‘arts of fishing’ lampreys differ with various sustainability effects. When heavy rain falls in January, the lampreys enter in their thousands into the river. At that moment, hundreds of fishermen in the mouth of the river position their small boats and ‘lampreeiras’ (large nets that hang in the current) and hold the lampreys from swimming upstream to the reproduction areas. Upstream, lamprey is fished in a ‘more traditional way’ using so-called



Figure 2: Controlling a ‘butrón’ (traditional nets) fixed in ‘pesqueiras’ (human-made stone-walls) on lamprey (*Petromyzon marinus*) nearby Melgaço and Arbo.

‘butrones’ (nets – fykes – with a cubic or round entry) that are fixed at ‘pesqueiras’: small granite, centuries old human-made stone-walls at the side of the river stream (see Figure 2). The river runs freely through small openings in the walls where the nets are fixed, and lamprey is caught passing on its way upstream to reproduce. This fishing method is closely intertwined with the cultural way of life of the fishermen, and the fishery quotas belonging to the family-owned ‘pesqueiras’ are regulated by ancient rules that are respected among the different fishery families. From this point of view, the traditional fishing method using the ‘pesqueiras’ is more sustainable than the intensive way of fishing downstream with the large nets. It is the departure point for the development of an inner brand in which the reproduction of lamprey is safeguarded and the vulnerable river environment takes a central place.

By story-telling, the ‘pesqueiras’ can become mediators through which the interrelations between economic activity and the management of the natural and landscape values are made visible, are communicated and get appreciated. This contributes to a joint inner brand, as well as increases the attractiveness of the area for visitors and/or consumers from outside the region. However, these culturally valuable objects are endangered and under threat of disappearing. Under the current legislative frames, the ‘pesqueiras’ can be destroyed by the authorities

as they might hamper policy objectives that aim to boost the regional economy and defend public interests by means of installing new hydroelectricity plants. By destroying the ‘pesqueiras’, fishermen would lose their fishing sites and consequently lose the possibility to fish lamprey in a traditional way.

The development of new products and services

The rich biodiversity and outstanding beauty of the borderland, the fishing activities and the gastronomy linked to lamprey and the production of local wines are important cultural markers in the case study area that can add economic value to the region. Place branding is not only the marketing of what already exists, but also raises questions ‘what a place wants to be’. How can innovation be stimulated and new products and services be developed rooted in territorial capital?

The challenge here is to include a variety of existing as well as new groups and stakeholders and connect different identities under an umbrella brand that is distinctive and not vague. Although we have to acknowledge that branding always excludes groups of people to some extent (see Pederson, 2004), the process should at least be conscious and transparent. The fishermen downstream, for example, might at first feel being excluded from the development of an inner

brand based on traditional fishery practice, but might be attracted to practices that offer a higher price per lamprey, as in the case of new, innovative marketing strategies developed by colleague fishermen downstream. Both the lamprey caught upstream and downstream can be sold under the brand in restaurants in the region, marketing these cultural values and markers as 'competitive identity'. Of course, such an orientation restricts more conventional food suppliers, but it does not exclude them as long as they are local providers and are willing to adapt and contribute to the strengthening of the brand. The protection and the reproduction of the natural environment is the basis for the orientation of the process and the inclusion of new groups and stakeholders.

The provision of such 'place-based' products and services can be extended to more regular regionally-based tourist attractions such as outdoor activities – especially rafting in the canyons, kayaking and mountain biking in the surrounding mountains – and walking routes (in the SPAs and Natura 2000 areas more in general). The three adventure companies in the region attract thousands of clients on an annual base, their activities related to the River Minho. The form and structure of the 'pesqueiras', for example, create exciting rapids for rafting. Apart from the many possibilities in the small villages in the region for hosting guests in rural lodgings, there are other tourist attractions that could be developed further, such as the small towns of A Guarda (its small harbour and Celtic ruins), Tui (its cathedral), Caminha (with its nice village square) and the medieval town of Valença. The outdoor activities, rural lodgings and the attractive cities and medieval villages represent platforms for story-telling on the history and current use of the 'pesqueiras': as antique stonewalls in the riverbed, they relate to a lifestyle of the past that continues and might evolve in the nearby future, related to 'new' markets and opportunities for the inhabitants of the River Minho borderland.

Recently, a series of initiatives have been taken. For example, in the river mouth, fisherman Benito Guerreiro has initiated a different way of making a living out of fishing and started selling lamprey

labelled and with an internet application telling about by whom and at what date the lamprey has been caught, and guaranteeing the buyer the quality of the fish in terms of blows (resulting from the nets). Too often, lamprey is sold too cheaply. By selling lampreys for a better price (mainly to restaurants), Benito and his associates are prepared to make a living out of catching less numbers of lampreys.

The village of Arbo is promoted as 'the capital of the lamprey', mainly resulting from local initiatives that are supported by the municipality, and thousands of people visit Arbo to eat lamprey. This brings the opportunity to brand the River Minho's natural and landscape values and the related products and service to a wider public. However, many of the people visiting Arbo to eat lamprey stay away from the river itself and the archaeological route at the river bank. Till now, changes are missed to motivate visitors to stay overnight and visit vineyards of the wine route and combine their stay with a visit to Portugal. Although people are attracted to the area by the lamprey and the accompanying gastronomic tradition, these dynamics do not yet lead to wider socio-economic impact for rural dwellers in the area. Such impact can be created by strengthening the horizontal cooperation between entrepreneurs of different sectors.

A promising starting point for the development of such cross-sector markets is the cooperation between the lamprey museum and local restaurants. The municipality of Arbo, as institutional agent, has established agreements among wineries to sell locally produced wines to the visitors of the museum (selling point located at the museum). It also encourages visitors to eat lamprey in the village's restaurants. Combined with drinking a glass of locally produced wine and the other gastronomic specialties this generates, although at a small economic scale, multiplier effects important for the local economy. Such cooperation creates space for linking place-based activities, from where coherence and synergy can be built, beneficial for all stakeholders. Until now, these initiatives are not being connected to a formalised and organised branding process.

Reorganisation of activities

The development of niche innovations can be stimulated by the careful construction of new networks of producers and consumers that can strengthen the natural environment and regional economic progress (Domínguez García *et al*, 2012b). In 2010, a process was started to disclose the potential for endogenous rural development in the case study area. Within the context of the EU INTERREG project DeltaNet stakeholder meetings, semi-structured interviews and an international congress on the river's ecological management were organised, mainly involving people actively concerned about the ecological qualities of the river, its estuary in particular.

Until now, the brand has been developed mainly informally, without any specific articulation or definition of branding as marketing strategy. Departure points for the further development of the inner brand are the creation of different stakeholder networks, anchored in activities for nature protection, gastronomic festivals and touristic activities. Information on the new marketing strategy of lamprey, for example, has been provided to the public in local newspapers and to the bulletin of the national television (youtube.com/watch?v=mP2cdyMTfoE).

The implementation of the new hydroelectricity plant has raised entrepreneurial protests. One of the wine producer groups so far has played an important role, based on their argument that artificial lakes highly impact on the climate conditions and result in fog, causing a drop in the quality of the wine produced in the area (Saborido, 2005). This motivated the wine producer group to bring a hold to the planning of more hydroelectricity production as single-oriented economic activity in the River Minho, and created manoeuvring space to develop a more diverse offer of products and services in the River Minho.

Nonetheless, there is a lack of structural support for the further development of the brand and the integration of stakeholders into the process of inner branding. The regional government's response till now is supporting the business interests of companies like Unión Fenosa and developing legislation that endangers

important elements of the inner brand such as the 'pesqueiras'.

DISCUSSION

Theoretically, the development of an inner brand demands multi-stakeholder involvement. From an endogenous actor's perspective (Long, 2001), the natural environment, and therefore the River Minho borderland, is subject to continuous adaptation processes (Holling, 2001; Stagl, 2007; van der Ploeg, 2008). Differences in viewpoints, actions and practices (Long, 1997), especially the mutual interrelations of knowledge and experience in actor worlds (Callon, 1986) determine a continuous process of adjustment (Long, 1992, 2001), whereby learning is a socially constructed (Raedeke and Rikoon, 1997) and negotiated process (Long, 2001). New behavioural patterns or social configurations are best developed in niches (Kemp *et al*, 1998; Hoogma, 2000; Knickel *et al*, 2009) in which actors learn about limitations and requirements of innovative practices and connect them with existing knowledge and behaviour (Hoogma *et al*, 2002). Although network members learn individually through their interaction in and outside the group, they also contribute to collective learning at a higher, social level, resulting in the successful mainstreaming of niche innovations (Geels and Schot, 2007). Often the knowledge structure and policies are disconnected from these 'hidden' innovative practices. However, if carefully managed by 'informed', knowledgeable actors, the up-scaling of niche innovations can result in the provision of innovative, place-based products and services. The very important characteristic of the informal process is that stakeholders determine the speed of the branding process. This is especially relevant in the River Minho estuary where there is scepticism and suspicion towards the role of external authorities.

While the strengthening of the natural environment and regional economic progress also require policy strategies supporting promising grassroots dynamics (Swagemakers *et al*, 2012b) and stakeholders (besides the

ecologists, for example, also fishermen) and some representatives of the public administration were present, the need for stakeholder involvement has not been incorporated in regional policy support programmes yet. Although overcoming the differences in interests is crucial for a successful place branding strategy, the objectives of such a branding process conflict with interests of the powerful União Fenosa multinational. These interests withhold the autonomous regional government from supporting locally developing innovation of the regional economy.

The bottom-up dynamics that are identified and described are not yet connected to a formal branding process. These dynamics are, however, identified here as interesting points of departure that should be included in a branding process as they protect and reproduce the vulnerable river environment, and result in economic activity and benefits for rural dwellers. Although opinions regarding the lamprey differ, stakeholders themselves gradually realise they have a shared interest: to protect the species from detrimental factors that might endanger its future survival. The active members of the local fisherman associations in Arbo and Melgaço are more and more aware of this and interested in getting their 'pesqueiras' recognised as cultural heritage. Further, noticing that the numbers of lamprey in their area decrease, they have become critical towards the regional authorities that seem unable to create the conditions for sustaining the lamprey population. With every political change, new people in powerful positions enter the rural regional arena, creating a situation in which under-qualified and inexperienced administrative workers 'control' the complex management of fishery activities. A regional platform of stakeholder groups with equal negotiation power and influence – for example, organised in an environmental or area based cooperative – and aimed at protecting the vulnerable river environment could provide a context for the improvement of democratic decision making and sustainable development. Although such forms of co-creation of policy programmes have been supported over the past decades in different parts of Europe (OECD,

1998; Ray, 1999; Wiskerke *et al*, 2003), Spain has not oriented its policy to the construction of the so-called environmental cooperatives.

Different from the traditionally fishing villagers upstream, fishermen in the river mouth have a strong economic interest: they almost earn a living off their fishing activities, but they fish too intensively, as has been described before. This raises the key questions how existing self-regulatory schemes for the fishery activities can be included in the management of the landscape, and which supporting policy measures are needed. These questions have not been answered sufficiently yet, but should be answered in stakeholder meetings in the next phase. The challenge in the next phase is the coordinated governance of the vulnerable environment in the River Minho area, focusing on the formalisation of a regional brand for the River Minho borderland in which lamprey serves as cultural marker and point of reference to which many other interests and business activities can be related. Gertner (2007) states in the context of branding and governance that 'public administrators and politicians need to understand their redefined roles in the new economy. They must learn and develop new skills to adjust to a market- and customer-oriented approach to social and economic development' (p. 7).

The lamprey fishing practices are an important element in the connective storyline for the further development of the brand. Its history and habitat conditions together with the importance perceived by local people and communities make it an attractive product. The already initiated re-grounding of patterns of production and consumption of lamprey seems a first promising step, which should be followed by linking this with other products and services in the region that contribute to a successful 'umbrella strategy', which different actors can connect to. Thereby the unique 'pesqueiras', like other fishing traditions in the arms of the River Minho, need to be valorised in a sustainable way. Inherited and exploited by families, 'pesqueiras' are not only a way of producing but also representing a lifestyle with cultural qualities.

CONCLUSIONS

Branding strategies are at the centre of mutually reinforcing endogenous development processes: the identification of ecological development potentials and the successful marketing and control of resources such as food, fibre, clean water, nature, biodiversity and recreational space, adding value and distributing economic benefits among stakeholders. Successful branding strategies involve interaction processes among local people and communities in which endogenous resources are managed and controlled in new forms of institutional organisation, often operational in more informal networks. When these 'promising' dynamics are 'taken up' and incorporated in supportive structures and/or policy frames and strategies, this might result in the establishment of a regime in which the protection of such a vulnerable ecosystem is 'organised' by its economic exploitation, based on self-regulation of producers. The identification and interpretation of cultural values and markers is a starting point in adaptive processes oriented to the sustainable management of rural resources.

This article has illustrated the tension between conserving a landscape, keeping cultural traits and practices and scaling up marketing initiatives. The intention in the case study is to develop a brand based on the protection of natural resources where the social organisation of the area determines the speed of the process. The research in the Minho River estuary shows a layered conflict between inhabitants and authorities, between different fisheries practices downstream and upstream, and between ecologists and sustainable fishermen on the one hand and the interests of the hydroelectricity company on the other hand. The challenge is to build an inner brand and coalitions between the fishermen and between entrepreneurs and ecologists resulting in a reorganisation of markets on the basis of collective maintenance of natural resources. We have identified points of departure for such a process rooted in endogenous potential.

In addition, these dynamics fit in relevant EU policy frames. Complying with the OECD 'Green Growth Strategy' (OECD, 2011) for the next decades implies solving environmental problems

while simultaneously creating economic benefits and human welfare, objectives that have been taken as EU position (Refsgaard and Bryden, 2012). Place branding seems a promising trajectory for places to adapt to these policies, generates insights how to implement the place-based dimension and to distinguish their places from others and enhance competitiveness by following an endogenous approach. However, for such a territorial strategy, it is not sufficient to form networks and rely on local initiatives. In order to add value and enhance place-based innovation, new cross-sector markets and arrangements have to be developed rooted in the endogenous development potential of the area. Furthermore, quality products (sold at higher prices), professionalisation of entrepreneurs and collective maintenance systems for the vulnerable area have to be realised.

The findings of the case study research in the River Minho estuary furthermore illustrate the need for a supporting knowledge structure, new inter-sector relations and policy frames and strategies that facilitate the constitution of an inner brand. The initial phase of this transition trajectory shows so far that adventure activities – rafting – in the River Minho and traditional fishing activities at first sight perhaps seem conflictive, but in fact are interrelated economic activities: one depending on, benefitting from and strengthening the other. These practices of niche actors conflict with the practices and the interests of others, such as those who want to implement new hydroelectric power installations. To unlock this situation, the formal knowledge support infrastructure and public administration have to recognise and facilitate the innovative practitioners as knowledge brokers and enable the integration of formal and informal knowledge domains in the management and the marketing of the region as tourist destination.

The case study research contributes to our understanding how place branding – as a means to create place distinctiveness and attractiveness – can be combined with an endogenous approach to enhance the protection of vulnerable peripheral areas. Scaling up marketing initiatives and incorporating these in policy frames and strategies

on place branding and the protection of the vulnerable environment of the River Minho might benefit both the rural economy and the reproduction of its features: the identified endogenous development potential.

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NOTE

- 1 Information based on a knowledge-exchange excursion organised by key-players in the Dutch region Green Forest and the UK region South Downs, in the context of the European project Lifescape – Your Landscape (see also www.fuchsiabrands.com/).

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