Country & city brand towards foreign students atraction: a comparative case study between Portugal/Lisbon and Spain/Madrid

A Marca País e a Marca Cidade na captação de estudantes estrangeiros: estudo de caso comparativo entre Portugal/Lisboa e Espanha/Madrid

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Abstract: In the beginning of the 21st century started to grow the idea of economic competitiveness linked to the identity and image of territories. In 2007, Anholt introduced the competitive identity concept, postulating that each place, regardless of its size or economic development, has unique characteristics that allow it to be competitive in niche markets. In addition, Anholt developed models of Hexagon to measure the image of countries and cities. The City Brand Hexagon (2006; Anholt and Gfk 2015), that is used in this article, measures the cities´ reputation regarding Presence; Local; Prerequisites; People; Pulse; Potential. This last parameter includes the classification of places including study in higher education institutions. The other five criteria include assessments that are decisive in choosing the destination to study abroad. This article analysis the mobilization of the country and city brand to attract international students through a comparative case study between Portugal/Lisbon and Spain/Madrid that includes the observation of the official websites developed by these places to attract students from other countries, namely by checking which axes of the City Brand Hexagon are mobilized for this purpose. In addition, it is verified whether these sites, or other results, appear when introducing determined terms of reference in Google.

Keywords: place branding, Lisbon, Madrid, Portugal, Spain, study abroad, international student, public policy

Resumo: No início do século XXI começou a crescer a ideia de competitividade económica ligada à identidade e imagem dos territórios. Em 2007, Anholt introduziu o conceito de identidade competitiva, postulando que cada lugar, independentemente de seu tamanho e nível de desenvolvimento económico, possui características únicas que lhe permitem ser competitivo em nichos de mercado. O autor desenvolveu também os modelos dos hexágonos da Marca País (2005), da Marca Cidade (2006) e da Identidade Competitiva (2007), para medir a imagem externa dos países e das cidades. O Hexágono da Marca Cidade (2006; Anholt e Gfk 2015), utilizado neste artigo, mede a reputação das cidades em relação aos seis eixos seguintes: Presença; Local; Pré-requisitos; Pessoas; Pulso; Potencial. Este último vetor inclui a classificação das cidades enquanto lugares para estudar em instituições de ensino superior. Os outros cinco critérios envolvem avaliações que são decisivas na escolha do destino para estudar no exterior. Neste enquadramento, o presente artigo analisa a mobilização da marca país e da marca cidade para captar estudantes internacionais. A operacionalização da pesquisa faz-se através de um estudo de caso comparativo entre Portugal/Lisboa e Espanha/Madrid e engloba a observação dos sites oficiais destes locais para atrair estudantes de outros países, nomeadamente verificando que eixos do Hexágono da Marca Cidade são mobilizados para esse fim. Complementarmente, verifica-se se são esses sites, ou outros resultados, que aparecem no Google, quando se pesquisa o tema.

Palavras-chave: marca País, marca Cidade, Espanha, Portugal, Lisboa, Madrid, estudar no estrangeiro, estudante internacional, política pública

Introduction

In an increasingly globalized world, the reputation of a place — a country, a region or a city — is an asset that needs to be managed, namely through brand policies that include branding campaigns, in order to guarantee a distinctive positioning at national and international levels, and that this differentiation is perceived by internal and foreign audiences.

Various indexes and indicators demonstrate that a good image translates into socio economic gains, facilitates the internationalization of companies and the increases the exportation of goods and services, fosters tourism, attracts talent — including professionals, students and academics — and captures investors. Aware of this reality, more and more governments and local authorities have developed brand policies and promoted branding actions. Private agents have also sought to monetize the association with a good perception of the country,

region and/or city, to which the good performance of the actors contributes, in a logic of mutual benefit.

But the applicability of brand policies across an exponential number of locations has not been accompanied by theoretical developments. The issues of place brand do not yet have a robust theory, based on empirical evidence and comparative methodology (Gertner, 2016).

Seeking to make a contribution on these developments, this article analyzes the mobilization of country and city brand to attract international students, comparing Portugal / Lisbon with Spain/Madrid, namely by observing, on the official websites developed for attracting foreign students, which of the City Hexagon axes are shown. In addition, it is verified whether it is the mentioned sites, or other results, that appear when certain terms of reference are introduced in Google. In this sense, country/city brand policy is understood as follows (Quintela, 2020):

> Transversal, symbolic and instrumental policy that defines the identity and competitive advantages of a country, a region or a city, promoting a consensual image that distinguishes that place from its competitors in the global market, aiming do attract added value that generates socio-economic progress — such as increased exports, entreprises internationalization, foreign investiment (money, industry and services), qualified immigration (professionals and students), tourism growth (including residential), improving the reputation in international media and social networks, expanding the influence on world diplomacy and international organizations — and also working internally as a mechanism for collective mobilization, aggregating interests and strengthening self-esteem.

Theoretical framework

P. Kotler, P. D. Haider and I. Rein (1993) introduced the term place marketing, applying to countries, regions, cities and other places. Moilanen and Rainisto (2009) consider that the concept has evolved according to the following three phases:

• The birth of place marketing in the first half of the 19th century, in the USA, when it sought to attract inhabitants of other regions and immigrants to the West Coast, for the gold rush in the promised land, which resulted into the prosperity of California;

• In the 1960s, with the beginning of research on the effects of the place of origin of products and brands on consumer behavior, initially focusing on the concepts of Made in and Country Of Origin and, later, Product Country Image and Country Equitity, themes that remain among the most analyzed in international marketing and measured in the indexes that evaluate the image of places (Papadopoulos, N., A. el Banna, S. A. Murphy and J. I. Rojas-Mendez, 2012);

· The current phase, which started in the 1990s, in which, on the one hand, the study of Destination Image/Branding was developed, concerning the relevance of tourism to the image of places and, on the other hand, the notion of economic competitiveness started to be linked to the identity and reputation of places. What Moilanen and Rainisto (2009, p. 5) call "strategic ´niche´ generation of place marketing" and aims to achieve competitiveness in niche markets to which the place can provide exclusive benefits. This concept is related to the competitive identity of Anholt (2007), who postulates that each country (region or city), regardless of its size and degree of economic development, has unique characteristics that allow it to be competitive in niche markets to which it can provide exclusive benefits[1].

· For the countries, regions and cities to be effectively competitive, it is necessary for international audiences to have that perception. There exist dozens of indexes for measuring the image of places, from different perspectives, but one of the most respected is the one developed through the Hexagon of Country Brand, and the Competitive Identity Hexagon, which gauges(m) the reputation of the countries in six axes: Tourism; Brands / Exports; Policies / Governance; Culture / Tradition; People and Investment, which includes attracting qualified immigration, namely professionals and foreign students. Similarly, Anholt designed an hexagon model to measure the image of cities (Anholt, 2006; Anholt and Gfk, 2015) on the following six axes:

1. Presence: the international status of the city, its familiarity/knowledge by foreign audiences, including in relation to the way it is governed, as well as the contribution to the globalized development of science and culture;

2. Place: perceptions about the attractiveness of the city regarding the pleasantness of the climate, urban cleanliness, parks and the architecture of buildings;

3. Pre-requisites: the city reputation related to quality of life, cost of living, accommodation, schools, hospitals, transport and sports facilities;

4. People: whether the habitants of the city are affable, welcoming and fluent in different languages and whether the foreigners consider that they would easily integrate into the community and feel safe;

5. Pulse: if there are interesting activities to fill the free time and how exciting the city is regarding new things to discover;

6. Potential: the perception of opportunities in the economic and educational fields

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1   Within this framework, Public Diplomacy also emerges. Public Diplomacy consists in the actions taken by public and non public actors (governments, local authorities, non governmental organizations, organized groups of citizens, among other agents) to cultivate public opinion in their countries and abroad (Anholt, 2007). Public Diplomacy has been instrumental to Soft Power (Wang, 2006), which isthe ability to get what you want by persuading others to adopt your goals (Nye, 1990 apud Fan, 2008).

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such as easyness to find employment and whether if it is a good place to invest or study in higher education institutions.
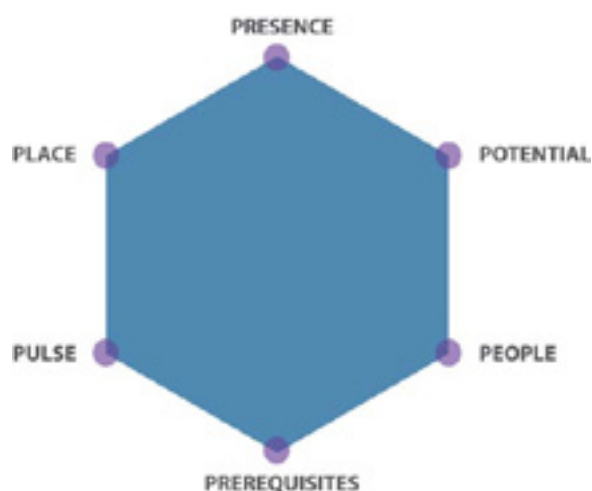

Figure 1
City Brand Hexagon
Source: Anholt (2006); Anholt e Gfk (2015)

The index resulting from the Hexagon Brand City methodology derives from the application of a questionnaire on 50 cities among audiences in 20 developed and developing countries. Madrid and Barcelona are included in the assessment but Lisbon is not yet. However, this article does not aim to fill this gap, comparing the image of Lisbon to that of Madrid. This work intends to observe how each of the cities/countries uses each one of the six axes of the Hexagon of City Brand to promote the attraction of foreign students, since it is a research perspective that hasn´t been yet analyzed. To the development of this research, the City Brand Hexagon was considered more appropriated than the Country or Competitive Identity hexagons.

Nevertheless, the brand of the capital cities of Portugal and Spain appears linked to the brand of the respective country and is inseparable from it, in a logic of the umbrella country brand (Olins, 1989). The construction processes of Portugal Country Brand and Spain Country Brand were initiated in parallel, between 1999 and 2001. Twenty years later, Portugal Country Brand is managed through a tripartite public structure between AICEP Portugal Global-Agency for Investment and Foreign Trade of Portugal, dependent on the Ministry of Foreign Affairs; Turismo de Portugal, I.P.; and IAPMEI-Agency for Competitiveness and Innovation, both under the supervision of the Ministry of Economy and Digital Transition. To this dynamic is added the management of Portugal Sou Eu, by the Portuguese Business Association, Chamber of Commerce and Industry (AEP), with the involvement of sectoral partners, including associations, confederations and companies, and financed by structural funds from the European Union (EU) (Quintela, in press). The Spain — Global Spain Brand — is managed by a Secretary of State of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Unión Europea y Cooperación, created in 2018, also having a High Commission. As it is written in Wikipedia (2020):

Marca España is an initiative of Spain government and a state policy which aims to improve the image of the country abroad and among Spaniards. It began in 2012 and its efficiency resides in the medium and long term through the promotion of the foreign image of Spain in the economic, cultural, social, scientific and technological fields. In September 2018, the Minister of Foreign Affairs, European Union and Cooperation, Josep Borrell, changed the name to Global Spain. From then on, it is the Secretary of State for Global Spain who manages this policy. The project rests on three premises:

· Marca España is an inclusive project, far from political ideologies;

· Disseminates the positive aspects of Spain and spreads the image of a modern, innovative and talented country;

· Having a positive image as a country in the rest of the world influences the economic and social well-being of the population. Hence the importance of Country Brand.

In addition to this institutional management, both country brands have benefited, and have been benefited, from bottom up actions by stakeholders and civil society, which also happens in the Lisbon and Madrid brands, both managed by the respective city councils, and reinforced by branding campaigns developed by tourism institutions and resulting from alliances between public and private entities.

Methodology

The methodology used in this article is qualitative, based on the case study, as it allows an exploratory observation of contemporary phenomena, and an inductive analysis based on real data, enabling a micro interpretation, but which can be replicated in other framework (Bryman, 2012). In this context, a comparative approach is used between two case studies — the one of the Portugal Brand/the City of Lisbon Brand and the Spain Brand/the City of Madrid Brand.

The choice of these case studies, and their comparability, results from the following factors: 1) geography, since both countries form the Iberian Peninsula; 2) simultaneous brand building process in both countries; 3) community of speakers of the largest in the world, both in relation to Portuguese and Castilian; 4) accession to the EU at the same time, in 1986; 5) parallel integration of both countries in the Bologna process; 6) competition between the two destinations to attract international students.

This research aims to understand, through the contents of the official Spanish and Portuguese websites specifically designed to attract foreign students, which points of the six of the City Brand Hexagon — Presence; Local; Pre-requisites; People; Pulse; Potential — are

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mobilized. The official websites analyzed are those found. Namely: 1) Study in Lisbon; 2) Study in Portugal; 3) Study in Spain; 4) Studying in Spain; 5) Study & Research in Portugal. Since no specific website of studying in Madrid was found, the city is studied within the Spanish websites mentioned above.

In addition, it is observed if are these specific official sites, or other official sites and which (of universities? Ministries? Administration?), or unofficial sites and with what typology (advertising or recruitment agencies for foreign students; media; social networks) that appear when the following search terms are entered into Google: "Estudar em Portugal"; "Estudar em Portugal para estrangeiros"; "Estudar em Lisboa"; "Estudar em Lisboa para estrangeiros"[2]; "Study in Portugal"; "Study in Lisbon"; "Estudiar en España"; "Estudiar en España para extranjeros"; "Estudiar en Madrid"; "Estudiar en Madrid para extranjeros"[3]; "Study in Spain"; "Study in Madrid". Based on this selection of analogous terms, we observe the first 10 results that appear, as they are generally the most widely read on the various devices. The choice of the internet — official and unofficial sites — and the Google search engine, is justified because they are the main means of searching for information worldwide and for allowing equity in the comparison between the two cases.

Study in Portugal/Lisbon and study in Spain/Madrid

When you text "Estudar em Portugal" in Google, it directs to advertising platforms and recruitment agencies aimed mainly at the Brazilian market. "Estudar em Portugal para estrangeiros", on the other hand, directs you first to the website of the Portuguese Foreigners and Borders Service (SEF), followed by articles in the media and advertising. When writing "Estudar em Lisboa", one accesses mainly to media, although the University of Lisbon (UL) website appears. However, by placing "Estudar em Lisboa para estrangeiros", you will find SEF again, the UL and the New University of Lisbon (NOVA) websites, media and advertising.

In the Spanish case, both "Estudiar en España" and "Estudiar en España para extranjeros" send to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Unión Europea y Cooperación, followed by advertising. "Estudiar en Madrid" refers to media, advertising and to the websites of the Universidad Complutense de Madrid (UCM), the IFM Business School (Universidad de Nebrija) and the Universidad Carlos III de Madrid. "Estudiar en Madrid para extranjeros" runs for media, advertising, StudyinSpain official website and UCM website.

From this data it can be inferred that, with regard to the allusion to the country, Portugal

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2   Meaning in English study in Portugal; study in Portugal for foreigners; study in Lisbon; study in Lisbon for foreigners.
3   Meaning in English study in Spain; study in Spain for foreigners; study in Madrid; study in Madrid for foreigners.

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only provides official information if the word "foreigner" is placed. In addition, it does not direct to any specific official website for the target audience. Thus, advertising and the media can be considered to prevail. In relation to Lisbon, there is some presence of public universities websites.

Regarding Spain, there is a greater prevalence of official information from the Ministry. Despite publicity and the media also have a strong presence, especially when Madrid is introduced into the equation, which also highlights the Spanish capital´s universities and shows the StudyinSpain website, which doesn´t happen in the Portuguese case.

When "Study in Portugal" is placed on Google, the first result is the official Study & Research in Portugal website, followed by advertising and the Study in Portugal Network (SiPN)[4] website. The term "Study in Lisbon" also highlights the official Study in Lisbon website, followed by advertising and the websites of the University of Lisbon (public) and University European (private).

When inserting "Study in Spain", as in the Portuguese case, you are referred to official websites — studying-in-spain and studyinspain — followed by advertising, but unlike Lisbon, the search for "Study in Madrid" only directs you to advertising and recruitment platforms for foreign students.

Through the analysis of the official sites of Portugal/Lisbon and Spain/Madrid mirrored in figure 2, it can be considered that all mobilize the six axes of the City Brand Hexagon. All give equal importance to the Pulse vector (entertainment), the Study in Portugal and the Study in Spain are the ones that give more relevance to the Prerequisites (quality of life; cost of living; accommodation), valuing a concept of country brand, although the Lisbon city brand is also evident at this point.
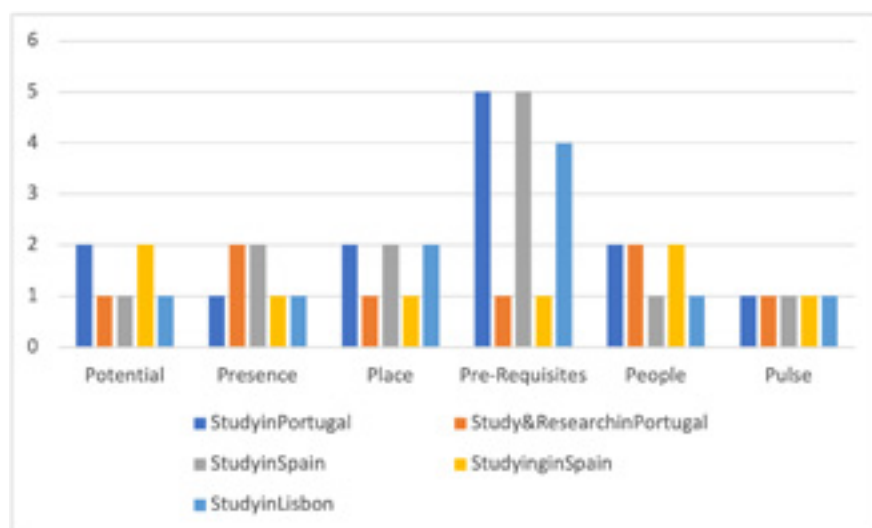

Figure 2
Comparison of the official websites of study in Spain/Madrid and Portugal/Lisbon
Source: Produced by the author for this article

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4   SiPN is a network of the Luso American Foundation for Development that recruits North American students to study in Lisbon universities for a semester.

However, when detailing the analysis, we find other observations, as presented in Tables 1 and 2, that show on the five sites the sub-axes included in each axis of the City Brand Hexagon.

Subtitle:

a) http://www.studyinlisbon.pt/

b) http://studyinportugal.net/

c) https://www.study-research.pt/

d) http://www.studyinspain.info/en/

e) https://www.studying-in-spain.com

Table 1
Comparison of the official websites of study in Spain/Madrid and Portugal/Lisbon

	Presence			Place				Pre-requisites					
	Science	Culture	Govern-ance	Climate	Cleanli-ness	Architec-ture	Parks	Quality of life	Cost of Living	Accom-modation	Schools Hospitals	Transport	Sports facilities
a				✓			✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓
b				✓		✓		✓	✓	✓		✓	✓
c	✓			✓				✓					
d		✓		✓		✓		✓					
e				✓				✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	

Source: Produced by the author for this article

Table 2
Comparison of the official websites of study in Spain/Madrid
and Portugal/Lisbon

	People		Pulse	Potencial		
	Affable	Fluent in foreign languages	Entertainment	Study at universities	Work	Invest
a	✓		✓	✓		
b	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
c	✓	✓	✓	✓		
d	✓		✓	✓		
e	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	

Source: Produced by the author for this article

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The following observations can be extracted from the tables above:

1) Although all sites denote the Presence axis, what prevails in this is familiarity/knowledge by foreign audiences. The contribution to globalized development is only highlighted by Study & Research in Portugal, in relation to science, and by Study in Spain, regarding culture;

2) In Place, all sites highlight the climate, a Spanish and a Portuguese mention architecture and only Lisbon values green spaces;

3) In the Pre-requisites, prevails the quality of life, followed by the cost of living and accommodation, aspects highlighted mainly on the Portuguese websites of Lisbon and Study in Portugal, which are also the only ones that draw attention to the sports facilities. The Lisbon website does not disclose the city's transport network;

4) As for People, all emphasize the affability, hospitality and ease of integration of foreigners, in a safe environment, especially emphasized by Portugal, as with linguistic proficiency, although the Spaniards highlight, similarly to the Portuguese, the expansion of their language in the world and its value for the global job market;

5) In the Pulse, there is an appreciation of tourism, leisure and entertainment as strong attractions for both places;

6) Regarding the Potential, all the sites focus on the quality of higher education, but only one Portuguese and a Spanish site refer to the possibility that students may come to work in local companies (startups, SMEs) or multinationals, after graduating. No website encourages investment or entrepreneurship (in the future).

Limitations of the research, conclusions and future investigation

Like any study, this article is not without limitations. However, the gaps in this investigation may serve as a theme for future research on the question of the attractiveness of territories for capturing foreign students, thus seeking to produce scientific knowledge to support decision making, for an adequate design of policy measures and branding strategies.

This work did not analyze, for example, the influence of word-of-mouth, nor of family and friends in choosing the destination to study abroad based on the reputation of the country and/or the city. It would be interesting to deepen the knowledge about these and other perspectives of analysis of the phenomenon of the country/city brand in the capacity of attracting international students, as well as their fixation as future residents, qualified employees or entrepreneurs.

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It would be also important that the City Brand Hexagon started to measure perceptions about Lisbon, especially in the Potential point, where the perception of cities is integrated as good places to study in higher education institutions, to work or to invest.

Even so, this analysis allowed to extract the observations that were presented throughout the text. As a final note, the following can also be added:

i) Portugal highlights Country and City Brands but Spain focus more on Country Brand, having a institutionalized country brand policy and giving a better idea of study abroad as a cluster for exportation;

ii) Both places give greater relevance, as distinctive factors, to the Iberian hospitality, entertainment facilities, tourism, climate and quality of life than to the valorization of science, knowledge, talent, entrepreneurship, democracy and environmental sustainability, thus contributing to continuous prevalence of an image of touristic destinations of Portugal, Spain and its capital cities.

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