How do internal stakeholders relate with the place brand: the case of Porto and São João da Madeira

Como se relacionam os stakeholders internos com a marca local: o caso do Porto e de São João da Madeira

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Abstract: As the competitiveness of cities declines, residents move away, consumers spend less money and businesses begin to decline or close. The literature refers to the use of branding strategies to reverse this trend. Regardless of their size, cities have been adopting branding strategies to promote themselves, retain citizens, attract new residents and investors, compete for more tourists, get new investments, and job creators. According to the literature, there is a link between branding and multi-stakeholders through internal stakeholders as they are of key importance in the co-creation of place, brand co-creation and its long-term success. The aim of this research is to analyse how the internal stakeholders of two cities with different dimensions, located in Portugal — Porto and São João da Madeira — relate to the territorial brand. These cities were selected because they are recognised for attracting population, business, and tourism. To achieve this objective, an extensive literature review of territorial branding (place branding) management frameworks was carried out. A qualitative case study approach was pursued through 24 interviews with representatives of internal stakeholders conducted in both cities, targeting their most relevant internal stakeholders. The results demonstrate how the adoption of a place branding strategy influences the quality of life in the city, the level of involvement of its internal stakeholders and affects their relationship with local institutions. These results are thus very encouraging to develop further research and give clues to policy makers to adapt the necessary policy measures to meet the interests of cities. This paper contributes to knowledge by reinforcing the significance of the role of internal stakeholders in the territorial branding management process.

Keywords: place branding, internal stakeholders, brand engagement, brand equity, sustainability

Resumo: À medida que a competitividade das cidades diminui, os habitantes afastam-se, os consumidores gastam menos dinheiro e as empresas começam a decair ou a encerrar. A literatura refere a utilização de estratégias de branding para inverter esta tendência. Independentemente da sua dimensão, as cidades têm vindo a adotar estratégias de branding para se promoverem, reterem os cidadãos, atrair novos residentes e investidores, competir por mais turistas, conseguir novos investimentos e criadores de emprego. De acordo com a literatura, existe uma ligação entre a criação da marca e os múltiplos intervenientes através dos stakeholders internos, pois estes são de importância fundamental na cocriação do local, na cocriação da marca e do seu sucesso a longo prazo. O objetivo desta investigação é analisar como os intervenientes internos de duas cidades com dimensões diferentes, localizadas em Portugal — Porto e São João da Madeira — se relacionam com a marca territorial. Estas cidades foram selecionadas por serem reconhecidas por atraírem população, negócios e turismo. Para alcançar este objetivo, foi realizada uma extensa revisão bibliográfica dos quadros de gestão da marca territorial (place branding). Foi prosseguida uma abordagem qualitativa de estudo de caso, através de 24 entrevistas com representantes de intervenientes internos realizadas em ambas as cidades, dirigidas aos seus intervenientes internos mais relevantes. Os resultados demonstram como a adoção duma estratégia de place branding influencia a qualidade de vida na cidade, o nível de envolvimento dos seus intervenientes internos e afeta a sua relação com as instituições locais. Estes resultados são, assim, muito encorajadores para desenvolver mais investigação e dar pistas aos decisores políticos para adaptar as medidas políticas necessárias para satisfazer os interesses das cidades. Este documento contribui para o conhecimento, reforçando o significado do papel dos intervenientes internos no processo de gestão da marca territorial.

Palavras-chave: place branding, stakeholders internos, envolvimento da marca, equidade da marca, sustentabilidade

1. Introduction

City as a brand is a recent but widespread phenomenon. "Place branding has become a vibrant area of research and has receives increasingly widespread attention and recognition" (Chan, 2013, p. 236) and, for many years, "place branding has remained a rich and

complex area of research which has attracted the attention and the willingness of more and more researchers to explore in depth this field and understand it in order to contribute to the place branding literature and theory" (Berrada, 2018, p. 234). Places and their identities, their reputations and their images are, for Anholt (2010), a rich and rewarding theme. Branding assumed an important role across many disciplines, such as Architecture, Business Studies, Economics, Economic History, Geography, International Relations, Marketing, Media Studies, Planning, Political Science, Tourism Studies, Sociology and Urban Studies, as described by Pike (2011). As claimed by Oguztimur & Akturan (2015), city branding includes other disciplines such as marketing, architechture, city planning and tourism-based studies.

The city branding concept follows also two approaches, marketing oriented and planning oriented, due to its interdisciplinary character (Oguztimur & Akturan, 2015): the first one presents city branding as a demand-oriented communication process and the later as brand strategies.

An extended literature review of place branding management frameworks was conducted to pursue this study. An exploratory qualitative research approach followed, by means of 24 interviews with representatives of internal stakeholders conducted in both cities addressed to their most relevant internal stakeholders. Due to the coronavirus pandemic, the already booked interviews suffered many changes and the constraints were managed according to the situation.

2. Place Branding Management

In this section we review the literature regarding place branding focusing on the most recognized frameworks. Firstly, the concept of place branding management is explained and then the frameworks are presented.

Place branding management has been a hot topic recently and discussed in the past decades by authors by means of several frameworks. Some of the most recognized in the literature are presented in this paper. The modern use of branding as a business tool can be found from about 1870 until the early 1900s, when use of grands became a widescale phenomenon (Blackett, 2003), by "determined firm owner-entrepreneurs and high-level managers" and towards consumer products (Low & Fullerton, 1994, p. 174). The branding theory that has emerged in 1950s "was initially developed in the context of consumer products" (Hankinson, 2015, p. 15). Factories were using brands "to indicate quality and origin" of manufactured goods and "to give the purchaser confidence" in products made of gold or silver (Blackett, 2003, p. 15). According to Hankinson (2015), after decades of working independently, these domains are now in convergence. The need to atract tourists lead cities into the search for the most adequate ways of "selling the place" in the 1970s. The following decade focused on the

best methods to manage the city and, simultaneosly, Philip Kotler introduced Marketing into the equation.

"The scale of adoption of branding has been breathtaking", states Blackett (2003, p. 20), considering that from a consumer goods confined activity for three-quarters of the 20th century, "now features in industrial and business-to-business sectors, the public and voluntary sectors, utilities and non-governmental organisations". And the new millennium gazed at the convergence of some disciplines, with Place Branding emerging (Hankinson, Rethinking the place branding construct, 2015).

The origins of place branding are well identified (Hankinson, 2015) in the studies of Stephen Ward (1998) and Chris Philo and Gerry Kearns (1993). And some authors, such as Ashworth, et al. (2015), consider «Selling the City», by Ashworth & Voogd (1990), and «Marketing Places», by Phillip Kotler et al. (1993), seminal books on place marketing subject.

An interdisciplinary analysis (Kavaratzis M. , 2004) reveals the existence of three phases of city marketing development: (1) fragmented promotional activities, (2) city marketing mix and (3) towards city branding. Kavaratzis (2004, p. 9) also identifies four different trends on place branding discussion: (1) branding nations, (2) "the nature and effects on cultural and entertainment branding on the physical and social character of places", (3) destination branding and (4) the concept of corporate branding applied to place branding.

Branding is the reason for the huge gap between poor and wealthy nations (Anholt, Branding Places and Nations, 2003). The place brand strategy should recognize that the main resource of most places is people who lives, and the things made and done in the place. Frequently, place branding is wrongly understood as place selling (Zenker & Braun, Rethinking the measurement of place brands, 2015). For Keller (2003, p.596), branding is based on abstract and intagible factors. All of those become part of the consumer's memory and will affect future interactions with the brand (Keller, 2003). Accordingly, Zenker & Braun (2015, pp. 212-213) define place brand as "a network of associations in the consumers' mind based on the visual, verbal, and behavioural expression of a place, which is embodied through the aims, communication, values, and the general culture of the place's stakeholders and the overall place design". These authors also argue that the place brand is the perceived image by the target audience from the communicated expression or the physical characteristics of the place. The measure of place brand effects is obtained through the willingness to stay in a place, the resident satisfaction or a positive place behaviour (Zenker & Braun, 2015).

Place branding is a process that aims to enhance the place image through the experience of an authentic place identity and the change of mindsets of place consumers (Anholt, 2010). It differs from product marketing and corporate branding, even if a clear definition is not yet established (Chan, 2013) and is more complex than branding a product or service, mainly because the stakeholders and target groups are broader (citizens, tourists, public and private sector organization decision makers) and aiming for different benefits (Middleton, 2011). City branding

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emerges as "a sub-field of place branding and emphasizes the marketing and branding of cities to the residents (and potential residents) as a place to live, and to businesses as a place to invest" (Merrilees, Miller, & Herington, 2009, p. 362). For Kavaratzis (2004, p. 10), "city branding centres on peoples' perceptions and images and puts them in the heart of orchestrated activities, designed to shape the city and its future", and "managing the city's brand becomes the attempt to influence and treat those mental maps in a way favourable to the city's circumstances and further needs for economic and social development". A place brand must deliver value to its stakeholders, such as residents and local organizations, which pay taxes, invest and benefice from it (Hankinson, Rethinking the place branding construct, 2015).

Next, we will unveil the most recognized frameworks on place branding.

2.1. Place Branding frameworks

Here we present the most recognized frameworks regarding place branding.

Kotler, et al. (1993), argue that places must be projected in line with a business approach, excel in some way and think strategically. Therefore, they present a strategic market planning framework which considers the following dimensions: a) Place identity; b) Place products; c) Place buyers; d) Place selling.

Strategic place marketing contributes to a country's enhancement position in the global marketplace (Kotler & Gertner, Country as a brand, product, and beyond: A place marketing and brand management perspective, 2002). The authors argue that the country brand management must deal with different tasks, such as managing the image, attracting tourists and factories and companies: a) Managing the image; b) Attracting tourists; c) Attracting factories and companies.

Also, Rainisto (2003, p. 229) evaluated the most critical factors in place marketing by means of developing a theoretical framework focused on success, specially through branding. The concepts of place marketing, corporate marketing and success are defined in his study, and "the framework comprises elements related to the domains of marketing management and strategy". The author states that his study developed a new concept of Place Branding, considering that "places can be marketed as sophisticated as products and services, and places can be branded to increase value and attractivity of the location" (Rainisto, 2003, p. 232).

Rainisto's framework comprises several success factors: a) Planning group; b) Vision and Strategic Analysis; c) Place Identity and Place Image; d) Public-private Partnerships; e) Political Unity; f) Global Marketplace and Local Development; g) Process Coincidences; h) Leadership.

Kavaratzis (2004) proposes a city image communication framework that represents the beginning of a comprehensive study, and that distinguishes between primary, secondary and tertiary communication: Primary communication — related to the communicative effects of

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the city actions — *Landscape Strategies* — urban design, architecture, green spaces and public spaces in the city; *Infrastructure Projects* — accessibility and diversity of public facilities; *Organisational and Administrative Structure* — community development networks and citizen's participation in the decision making, and public-private partnerships; and *Behaviour* — vision, strategy, financial incentives, number and type of events organised in the city; Secondary communication — formal and intentional communication, like advertising and public relations; Tertiary communication — communication not controlled by marketers, like word of mouth, linked to the other dimensions as it depends in those marketing efforts.

Anholt (2006) developed the Anholt-GMI City Brands Index based on a hexagonal evaluation framework, which represents a different framework from the Anholt Nation Brands Index. The author considers that cities are simpler, smaller, and easier to generalize than a whole country. Therefore, the six dimensions of its hexagon are: The Presence; The Place; The Potential; The Pulse; The People; and The Prerequisites.

Trueman & Cornelius (2006, p. 12) presented the Place Branding Identity Toolkit, which "has refined the definition of city brands and revealed the importance of identity in establishing the nature of the brand". These authors argue that "brand identity is made of Presence, Purpose and Pace, as well as the immediate visual impact of the built environment" (Trueman & Cornelius, 2006, p. 11): Presence; Purpose; and Pace.

Focused in destination marketing, Hankinson (2004) distinguishes four main streams of brand conceptualisation: brand as communicators, brand as perceptual entities, brand as value enhancers and brand as relationships, all intertwined and not independent of each other. The author also divides place marketing into two domains — urban planning and tourism and vacation marketing — considering that each one takes a different approach. In his relational network brand, the place brand is represented by a core brand and four categories of brand relationship, which are dynamic, get stronguer and evolve over time: Core brand; Primary services relationships; Brand infrastructure relationships; Media and communications relationships; and Consumer groups relationships.

More recently, the same author presented a new framework, a holistic model of the destination brand management process. Hankinson (2007) finds five guiding principles of destination branding management derived from the corporate brands literature, considering that there are sufficient similarities between these two categories: Strong, visionary leadership; A brand-oriented organisational culture; Departmental co-ordination and process alignment; Consistent communications across a wide range of stakeholders; and Strong, compatible partnerships.

Kavaratzis (2009) argues that some the above frameworks differ in several respects but that it is possible to find strong similarities, leading to an integration proposal (Annex A). The author groups those similarities into eight categories as components of an integrated approach to city brands management: Vision and Strategy; Internal Culture; Local Communities;

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Synergies; Infrastructure; Cityscape and Gateways; Opportunities; and Communications.

Considering that our purpose is to analyse how the internal stakeholders of two cities with different dimensions, located in Portugal — Porto and São João da Madeira — relate to the place brand, the next subtopic is dedicated to defining the internal stakeholders.

2.2. Stakeholders

Freeman (1984) was one of the first authors do define stakeholders. In the late 1970´s he developed a broad definition of stakeholder as a group or an individual with the capacity of affect or to get affected by any achievement of the organization's goal (Freeman, Strategic Management: A stakeholder approach, 1984). According to this author, to achieve success organizations must provide value to their stakeholders — all the relevant groups and individuals — who also help determine the success or the failure of the organization. The importance of the stakeholders is not the same, that is why they can be divided between primary and secondary ones (Figure 1). In the first category we can find those groups or individuals that are, somehow, dependent financially from the success of the organization, such as employees or suppliers. Secondary stakeholders that impact or are impacted by the organization must be involved, but can be on a later moment (Freeman, Harrison, Wicks, Parmar, & de Colle, 2010).

Figure 1
Creating value for stakeholders
Source: Freeman, et al. (2007),
cit. in Freeman, et al. (2010)

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Kotler, et al. (1993, p. 18) argued that the biggest challenge of place marketing is to strengthen "the capacity of communities and regions to adapt to the changing marketplace, seize opportunities, and sustain their vitality". And for that they considered four main target markets for place marketing: **Visitors** (business visitors, tourists and travellers); **Residents and Workers** (professionals, skilled workers, wealthy individuals, investors, entrepreneurs and unskilled workers); **Business and Industry** (heavy industry and entrepreneurs); and **Export Markets** (other localities within the domestic markets and international markets). Like any other product, urban place marketing begins with identifying the city's target groups, its customers. Van den Berg & Braun (1999, p. 993) define customers as inhabitants (to whom "the city is a place to live, work and relax in and a supplier of a wide range of facilities like education and health care"), companies (to whom the city "is a place to locate, to do business and to recruit employees") and tourists and other visitors (to whom the city "offers a combination of culture, education and entertainment").

Comparing corporate brands with destination brands, Hankinson (2007) identifies the external stakeholders as shareholders, suppliers, distributors, government agencies, media, education and arts, "who over a long period of time can have a profound influence on the brand image" (Hankinson, 2007, p. 245). Braun (2008) agrees with the four core customer groups framework — residents, visitors, companies and investors — but considers that, for certain cities, it could make sense to expand it with commuters, students, export markets and intermediaries, which are in a second ring.
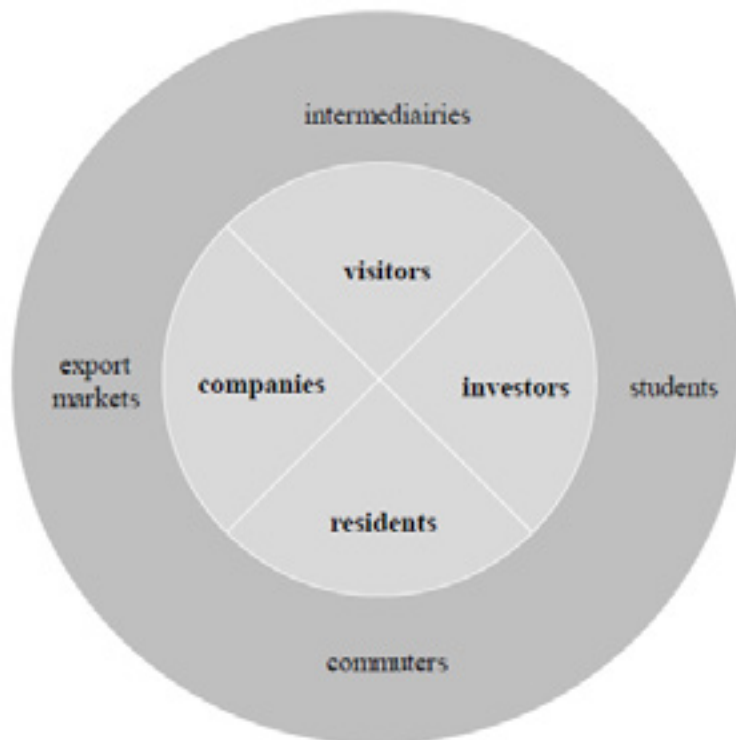
Figure 2
The customers of a city
Source: Braun (2008)

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Zenker & Braun (2010) consider that the target groups in recent marketing practice are more specific and complex, and customers are not only different in terms of place brand perception but also in their place needs and demands. The authors claim that conflicts and synergies are inevitable between those needs and demands of different group targets.

Table 1
Different Target Groups for Place Marketing

Visitors	Residents and Workers		Business and Industry	
	Internal	External	Internal	External
Business Tourists	Creative Class	Creative Class	Civil Service	Investors
Leisure Tourists	Skilled Workforce	Skilled Workforce	Investors	Companies (sectors)
...	Students	Students	Companies (sectors)	...
	...	...	...	

Source: adapted from Zenker & Braun (2010)

Beckmann & Zenker (2012) added to the above framework (Table 1) a final stakeholder group, composed by the media, from travel books to in-flight magazines, TV, daily newspapers and others, as "media strategies are helpful in raising awareness among target populations to what a city has to offer" (Avraham, 2004).

When stakeholders possess enough information and understand the reasons behind a place brand strategy, and that it's compatible with their own goals and share the same vision, they can be "reasonably engaged and involved" (Stubbs & Warnaby, 2015, p. 105). These authors identify some of the different stakeholders related to place branding as: a) Residents; b) Politicians; c) Governmental Organizations; d) Promotion Agencies; e) Infrastructure and Transport Providers; f) Cultural and Sports Organizations; g) Businesses; h) Academic Organizations and Schools; i) Religious Organizations.

Stubbs e Warnaby (2015) also describe several stakeholders' classifications available in the management literature: a) Primary stakeholders — individuals or groups that are essential to the wellbeing of the organization; and secondary stakeholders; b) Voluntary and unvoluntary stakeholders — according to their choice of interaction; c) Potential to threaten or cooperate with the organization, in four key types: the supportive stakeholder; the marginal stakeholder; the non-supportive stakeholder; and the mixed blessing stakeholder; d) According to the main levels of interaction: inevitable interactions; necessary interactions; and desirable interactions.

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The stakeholder involvement in the place brand process has got a positive impact in the effectiveness of branding in the public sector. When the stakeholders are involved in branding it results in a clearer brand concept and contributes to increase the ability to attract new inhabitants, visitors and companies (Klijn, Eshuis, & Braun, 2012). As different stakeholders have different perceptions of the city brand (Merrilees, Miller, & Herington, 2009), with each one aiming to maximise the benefits and conflicting with others (Buhalis, 2000), literature suggests that there is a link between branding and multiple stakeholders (Merrilees, Miller, & Herington, 2009), as internal stakeholders groups are of key importance for brand co-creation and its long-term success (Konecnik & Petek, 2012). Research in place branding also suggests that collaboration, participation and the role of stakeholders in the branding process is an increasing subject of investigation (Ilczuk, 2019). On the same pace, we find the Braun (2008) city consumers' target groups framework an easy and flexible tool to work with. We identified several interviewees from each target group (Annex B).

Table 2
Braun's customers target groups of a city

Core customer groups		Secondary customer groups	
Visitors	Leisure visitors, business visitors and professional visitors (Beckmann & Zenker, 2012)	Students	Van der Berg & Russo, 2002; Braun (2008)
Companies	Civil service, companies (sectors) (Beckmann & Zenker, 2012)	Commuters	Kotler (2002), Rainisto (2003), Braun (2008)
Investors	Local and external (Beckmann & Zenker, 2012)	Intermediaries	Event promoters and organisers, real estate brokers (Braun, City Marketing: Towards an integrated approach, 2008)
Residents	Employees in the city, employees elsewhere and not employed (Braun, 2008) Skilled workforce and creative class (Beckmann & Zenker, 2012)	Export markets	Target markets of place marketers (Kotler, Haider, & Rein, 1993) Outside investments and export markets (Rainisto, 2003) Potential investors (Braun et al., 2003)

Source: Braun (2008)

This case study research aims to evaluate the place brand management in two different environments: two cities of different dimensions, both from the same metropolitan area.

The research question defined is "how the internal stakeholders of two cities with different dimensions, located in Portugal — Porto and São João da Madeira — relate to the place brand?"

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Propositions were developed to answer this research question considering the adoption of the Kavaratzis (2009) framework because it is an integrational proposal that takes into account insights from the previous frameworks.

Propositions:

P1: The stakeholder involvement in the place brand process has a positive impact in the effectiveness of branding in the public sector (Maheshwari, et al., 2011; Klijn, et al., 2012; Eshuis, et al., 2014);

P2: Different stakeholders have different brand image perceptions (Merrilees, et al., 2009; Fitchett, 2005; Friedman & Miles, 2002);

P3: Internal stakeholders are of key importance for brand co-creation and its long-term success (Hankinson, 2007; Konecnik & Petek, 2012; Gyrd-Jones & Kornum, 2013; Vallaster & von Wallpach, 2013):

P4: The internal stakeholders, namely residents, are the most important target market for place branding managers (Braun, et al., 2010; Kavaratzis, 2012; Klijn, et al., 2012; Zenker & Erfgen, 2014).

To find cues to answer these propositions, we developed an interview protocol designed with twenty questions (Annex C). We expect to find cues, in the statements, of the relevance of the internal stakeholders in the city brand manager strategies (Klijn, Eshuis, & Braun, 2012), although different groups of stakeholders might have distinct brand image perceptions (Merrilees, Miller, & Herington, 2009). It is also expected to find cues of the important role of residents (Kavaratzis, 2012) and the significance of the stakeholders' role for brand co-creation (Hankinson, 2007).

In the next section we outline the methodology used in this research.

Methodology

Considering the research question and the propositions of this research a qualitative approach based on two case studies was adopted. The city of Porto is a big urban area with 237 591 inhabitants, and it is one of the oldest cities in Europe, with a historic centre classified as a World Heritage Site, since 1996 by UNESCO. Known worldwide by its famous Port Wine, the city preserves a remarkable historical heritage, mixed with modernity such as public buildings like Casa da Música or Serralves Museum. On the other hand, São João da Madeira is a small urban area with 21 713 inhabitants, known for its strong industry, mainly footwear and hat making. Old industrial buildings welcome now creative industry companies on a small but green city. Both cities are from the same metropolitan area, in Portugal, separated by less than 20 km.

Based on the literature (Yin, 1994; Yin, 2018), an exploratory case study was pursued following the next case study protocol:

Table 3
The Case Study Protocol

An overview of the case study	Mission and goals; case study questions, hypothesis, and propositions; theoretical framework, and literature research.
Data collection procedures	Data collection plan; expected preparation prior to fieldwork.
Protocol questions	The questions and the potential source of evidences for addressing each question.
Tentative outline for the case study report	Format for the data, use and presentation, and bibliographic information.

Source: Adapted from Yin (2018)

Regarding the selection of the stakeholders we decided to interview the stakeholders according to the framework of Kavaratzis (2009) for this author is one of the most recognized in the literature of place branding. From each city (Porto, and São João da Madeira) we interviewed the following stakeholders, as a sample of the place brand internal influencers, according to the framework of Kavaratzis (2009), as the author groups the previous frameworks similarities into eight categories as components of an integrated approach to city brands management:

Table 4
The interviews

STAKEHOLDER	GROUP	INTERVIEWEE
Companies	Public Sector	Brand manager
	Private Business	CEO
	Private Business	CEO
Investors	Local Business	CEO
Residents	Worker in the city	Citizen
	Worker in another city	Citizen
	Unemployed	Citizen
Students	Student in the city	Citizen
	Student in another city	Citizen
Commuters	Worker from another city	Citizen
Intermediaries	Event promoter	CEO
	Real Estate agent	CEO

Source: authors

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The data was collected by convenience choice according to the roles of the interviewed and the availability to participate in this study that took place mostly during the COVID emergency stage. Semi-structured interviews were developed and programmed to be conducted between late February and May, but the coronavirus pandemic forced us to do some adaptations and an online inquiry was also developed, with open questions, to provide richer insights than a questionnaire.

Finally, the interviews were conducted between July and September. Only seven interviews were obtained from São João da Madeira, and six from Porto because of the holydays season. The face-to-face interviews were conducted online, through the cloud-based video conferencing service Zoom.

In the next section the main results are presented.

3. Research and Findings

This case study research aims to evaluate the place brand management in two different environments: two cities of different dimensions, both from the same metropolitan area.

To answer the research question "how the internal stakeholders of two cities with different dimensions, located in Portugal — Porto and São João da Madeira– relate to the place brand?" propositions were developed and the framework developed by the Kavaratzis (2009) guided this purpose.

To find cues to answer these propositions, we developed an interview protocol designed with twenty questions (Annex C).

The coronavirus pandemic that affected the world since the beginning of 2020, and reached, officially, Portugal on March 2nd, disturbed the programmed interviews. Several institutions and individuals cancelled or postponed the meetings. Due to the social distance rules implemented in Portugal, we had to find new interviewees and, at a certain point, to elaborate an online inquiry, to facilitate the answers from the identified stakeholders. This procedure was conducted always by phone, online meetings and through the web. Only one interview was conducted face-to-face.

The selected city brand managers admitted the relevance of the stakeholder involvement in the place brand process. For the Porto's brand manager, "everything we do is for the city, including all stakeholders". "The business community is very important" for the city brand, citing "the start-ups as a good example", he added. In São João da Madeira there is "a great associative power", proved by "three fire stations", "school clusters that are quite dynamic", "the Santa Casa da Misericórdia", "the sports associations and ADS with more than 1000 athletes", and the industries of shoes and hats, referred the brand manager. Nine interviewees stated that the city values are shared among the members of their communities.

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Five of them point "the city hall" as the main responsible for the task of promoting the city values and vision, and the others attribute such assignment to the "manager" or "the boss", "the population" as a whole, or "local teachers". Most of the interviewees also consider that the communication from the place brand managers are related to the city vision. Interviewee 3 declares that "authorities ensure the city preservation and citizens wellbeing", and interviewee 6 agrees and mentions that "the sense of security is one of the symbols of the city". The stakeholders more involved with the city have a better image of its brand and make more positive remarks about it. They also contribute more to the effectiveness of the brand. The investors and the businesspeople that have direct connections to the City Hall showed a better understanding of the values and proposals of the city, and its goals were clearer. On the other hand, businesspeople with no contact with the City Hall, demonstrated not knowing most of the answers to our questions. In line with these statements we can conclude that there are cues to accept Proposition 1 stating that the stakeholder involvement in the place brand process has a positive impact on the effectiveness of branding in the public sector.

The place brand manager of Porto pictures the city as work and investment friendly, but with special care for the more needed. Porto "has policies for attracting investment and talent", because "cities can attract talent by the way they are organized and the quality of life", said Interviewee 1. São João da Madeira's place brand manager considers "the strong industrial brand that is at the origin of our council emancipation", and "innovative industries" as the main attributes of his city. "Our wealth, our comfort, our services, our facilities come from that industrial strength". On the interviews we may observe different reflections of these images, according to each stakeholder. Interviewees 3 and 10 praise "the innovation goal" of São João da Madeira, and Interviewee 4 agrees and also adds "the entrepreneurship" as a visiting card for the city. Interviewees 7 and 8 state that Porto have a "limited vision" and "without content", but interviewee 9 mentions "the environmental sustainability". Therefore, even though there is a vision, and efforts in its message to reach all stakeholders the same way, there are notorious perceptions due to the degree of involvement, or of agreement with the followed policy. The interviewees also recognized different characteristics which identify the city, naming those more relevant for each stakeholder. We can state that there are enough cues to accept Proposition 2, for different stakeholders showed different brand image perceptions.

São João da Madeira's interviewees are clearly proud of the prestige of their industry and its innovation. And the ones from Porto recognize the importance of tourism. All of them, nevertheless, identify several internal stakeholders' groups which embody the vision of the city: "Companies", "businessmen", "local associations", "educational structure", "church", "museums", and "sport clubs" are named as important local stakeholders that represent the values of each city. This positive attitude towards the internal stakeholders' groups is in line with Proposition 3. Therefore, we can accept Proposition 3, that states that the internal

stakeholders' groups are of key importance for brand co-creation and its long-term success.

Finally, the content analysis of the speeches also shows that city brand managers care about the residents of their cities, although it was not possible to find enough cues that confirm that they are the most important target market for these cities. City brand managers concentrate a lot of their time on attracting investment (companies and jobs). Education comes immediately after, also in connection with the labour needs from companies. And thirdly, green areas and environment needs are pursued by the brand managers. Porto aims to attract and retain young talent, and to offer good quality of life at affordable prices. São João da Madeira rides the industrial tradition and inputs innovation and modernity, aiming the environmental sustainability. The strong personality of both cities contrasts with the futuristic look that both authorities seek to have. The touristic boom in Porto may have slowed down, due to the coronavirus pandemic, with financial consequences — a 2 € per night tax must be payed by each tourist since 2018 — and the consequences are not yet to imagine. The bet of São João da Madeira in technological start-ups and in the education seems more consistent with the industrial background but only future will confirm this gambling. Analysing the whole of these aspects, we can conclude that there are cues that that make us believe that all the decisions are made having in mind the residents, but none of the city brand managers stated clearly that they were their primal concern. "The municipal citizens" are the main target for Porto, including "all those that live, work and are in the city", said the brand manager of Porto. São João da Madeira "works for the people, and everything we do is just instrumental", said the brand manager. "We want to enlarge the value of the territory and the population", he stated. For the people, the city invests in "good educational, leisure, and sports services". In line with the statements there are not enough cues to accept Proposition 4. This can be related to the fact that the brand managers do not distinguish among internal stakeholders, or to the smaller weight of residents, therefore more neglected by the city authorities (Berrada, 2018).

4. Conclusions and limitations of the research

The main purpose of this paper is to understand how the internal stakeholders relate with their cities' brand, as well as if the city brand managers care about the different groups of stakeholders that coexist in the city.

The exploratory qualitative nature of this study, its modest sample, and the number of interviews cannot guarantee the generalisation of the results, yet the generalization is not the purpose of an exploratory research… That might be the next step…

The two cities of this study have strong personalities, and their history is filled with success moments. Porto and its highly successful commerce. São João da Madeira´s independence due to its strong industry.

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The results of this research are very encouraging to develop further research and to give cues to the policy makers to adapt the necessary policy measures to fulfil the cities interests. The role of the internal stakeholders is widely recognized, and city brand managers seem to be addressing their main policies having towards those that live, work, study and invest in their cities.

This study is important by utilizing a multiple case study, infrequent in this field of research, although the lack of some of the interviews affected, evidently, the results. The study should be continued and completed with the remained interviews.

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