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The brand image of Galicia as a tourist destination in Atlantic Europe

ABSTRACT:

Which is the overview foreigners have about Galicia? Which territorial elements are identified by visitors who have come to our country? What is the foreign image of Galicia?

This dissertation is focused on the foreign image of Galicia as a tourist destination. The research hypothesis is developed from the previous questions, concluding that the brand identity *Galicia* spread abroad doesn't correspond with its brand image in other countries. In other words, this means that the things "*we do*" as a tourist destination are not "*what we get*" in reality.

First of all, there is no consensus among the different public administrations involved in the promotion of the brand identity of Galicia. Secondly, this brand is not compatible with the image of Spain as a tourist destination. Finally, as Galicia is in a process of social and territorial transformation, its brand image it's also changing. Our main goal is to identify the visions or impressions that foreigners have, and have had, about Galicia, as well as identify the key elements and attributes associated to its image abroad. For this, we have used a qualitative analysis method based on direct observation and perception through previous research and analysis. We have also used

the bibliography and qualitative assessment of Galicia as a tourist destination, inside and outside their territorial jurisdiction, through the actions developed by public and private actors involved in the foreign promotion of our country.

Keywords: Galicia, Europe, tourism, image.

INTRODUCTION TO THE BRAND IMAGE

The process of creating a brand image into our minds is a complex task conditioned by internal and external factors. Brand image is created by the actions developed by a group of individuals with a purpose (Heude, 1989) and, at the same time, it is the opinion formed by potential consumers of the products and services offered by an organisation (Valls, 1992), who are conditioned to take decisions by other consumers. Brand image is something intangible. It is an element created by the differentiation, comparison, self-identity and singularity of a place in relation to other brands (Costa, 2004). In the nineties, Kotler, Echtner and Ritchie focused part of their studies on this topic, directly linked with the identity and competitiveness of tourist destinations.

All brands are made up of symbols and logos, which are also their identity. These symbols or physical brands generate intangible feelings and opinions by the costumers. From this point of view, the mark precedes its image; but on the other side, public opinion is collected, by the government, business or associations, to create an attractive brand, symbol or logo according to its intangible image. Both interpretations are complementary (Santomil, 2011).

This identity, differentiation and singularity spread an image to the tourism market, where it is compared with other brands and tourist destinations. The outward

expression of a brand is brand identity and image, as they complement each other to create an added value in the market, with the goal of competitiveness.

Designing strategies for this goal is not an easy task. Tourism fairs, such as the World Travel Market in London, are good examples of how brand identity and brand image coexist. The relation *tourism – identity – territory* is alive in the market campaigns, where authenticity, singularity and differentiation are the main topics. On the other hand, tourism activity has an effect on the identity and the image of the territory and its citizens. So, it is essential to take into consideration the identity values in every market strategy and campaign.

I introduce the “secondary brand” and “co-branding” concepts, linked to the territory and destination image. The term “secondary” allows a relation of dependence with the main brand or “primary brand”. This main brand represents the roof under other brands are grouped, in different levels of self identity. In other words, co-branding means cooperation and a horizontal relation among the different brands. This discussion is adapted to cities, regions and countries to establish their tourism promotion, advertising and subsidizing projects.

The interpretation of a tourism brand as “secondary” or “co-brand”, at a local or regional level in comparison with the “national brand”, is modifying the market positioning of each destination.

As an example, we have analysed this relation in the thesis entitled “*The Foreign Image of Galicia in the 21st Century*”, for the destination branding “Galicia”, “Green Spain” and “Spain”. Is the region of “Galicia” a secondary brand of “Spain”? Or is “Galicia” co-branding a Spanish destination image?

This paper allows us to analyze the relation between Galicia and Spain as tourism brands and destinations, linked to the Atlantic and Mediterranean image to foreign

visitors and tourists. So, the main topic of this paper is connected to the tourist destination image of Galicia, this northern region located above Portugal in the north-western corner of the Iberian Peninsula.

FOCUS RESEARCH

The first element I wanted to show is associated with the tourist destination image (Phelps, 1986, Gunn 1988; Echtner and Ritchie, 1991; Valls, 1992, Costa, 2004, among others). The territory projects an “identity” and not an “image” (Santomil, 2011). The image of a destination is created by the human mind and conditioned by multiple factors, such as the identity of the site, designed by the makers of the target market and what is absorbed and transferred by consumers. It is them who create the subjective image, which may or may not correspond with the identity of the destination. In this sense, statements like "Galicia spreads an image abroad ...” would not make sense in this interpretation. Galicia spreads an "identity" as a territory and gets an "image" created by visitors or tourists. Galicia designs a brand identity as a tourist destination, seeking competitiveness and differentiation with other destinations in Atlantic Europe. So “what we do” (inhabitants and the main actors for the promotion of tourism) corresponds with our identity. The image corresponds with "what we get", from public opinion and perception of consumers. Both topics, identity and image, are directly connected and it is impossible to modify one of them without modifying the other.

What "*we do*" is not in accordance with "*what we get*". This is the main hypothesis that represents our focus research in Galicia.

The three factors that justify this statement would be:

1. In the marketing process of the territory as a tourist product, the government, private companies and residents, either individually or collectively, design a specific identity. This brand identity should be the result of consensus and cooperation among the different actors involved in the marketing strategy. However, this does not happen in the case of Galicia. The conflict of responsibilities and difficulties, to join efforts, among different governments (local, regional, autonomous) makes the projection of a clear identity in the international market impossible. I believe that the existence of different political interests impedes a unification of efforts in the same direction or the achievement of the same goal. For example, the differences of political opinions in Galicia among councils, provincial councils, chambers of commerce, regional administration, state government and the European Union about the airports policy is locking the growth and competitiveness of Galicia as a major flying destination. The same problem is found when defining the brand image and identity of Galicia as tourist destination.



Example 1: Tourist logos of public and private entities in a state, autonomic, provincial and municipal scale.

2. The historical dominance of the “Spanish” brand, as a model based on the Mediterranean, and the creation of stereotypes, common to all regions as tourist destinations, is conditioning the foreign image of Galicia as an Atlantic destination.

The brand image of Galicia is not compatible with the brand image of Spain as a tourist destination, due to the antagonistic nature of the attributes associated with both destinations. This will not be possible until a diverse and plural image of Spain has been consolidated.

Nowadays, the subordination of branding of Galicia to the brand image of Spain, at an international level, implies that the identity and external image of Galicia do not correspond. This results in an attempt by Galicia to design its own identity on the basis of attributes associated with its Atlantic character that does not correspond with the attributes associated with the brand image of Spain as part of a Mediterranean stereotyped model: Hot vs. Cold, Wet vs. Dry, Green vs. Brown (Santomil, 2011).

3. A third factor identified is the existence of a process of territorial transformation, that modifies the attributes associated with Galicia as a tourist destination and, therefore, this affects its identity and brand image. We find ourselves in a period of demographic transition and socio-cultural transformation of the territory, such as landscape and the identity of Galicia (Ferrás, 1994; Rodríguez, 1997; Lois, 1996; Alonso and Lois, 1997; Aldrey, 2002). The gradual concentration of economic and demographic growth in urban areas, in contrast with the depopulation of rural areas of the interior modifies the elements that make up the brand identity of Galicia.

We are in a period of social transition and cultural transformation, conditioned by the globalization process which affects the local and regional identities. In the 1990s Galicia suffered an intense social and cultural change, which involved the progressive loss of their identity. This fact manifested itself in the reduction of Galician speakers, in the abandonment of the agricultural, livestock and forestry, the depopulation of the rural villages, in the oblivion of the oral and intangible heritage, the changes in the

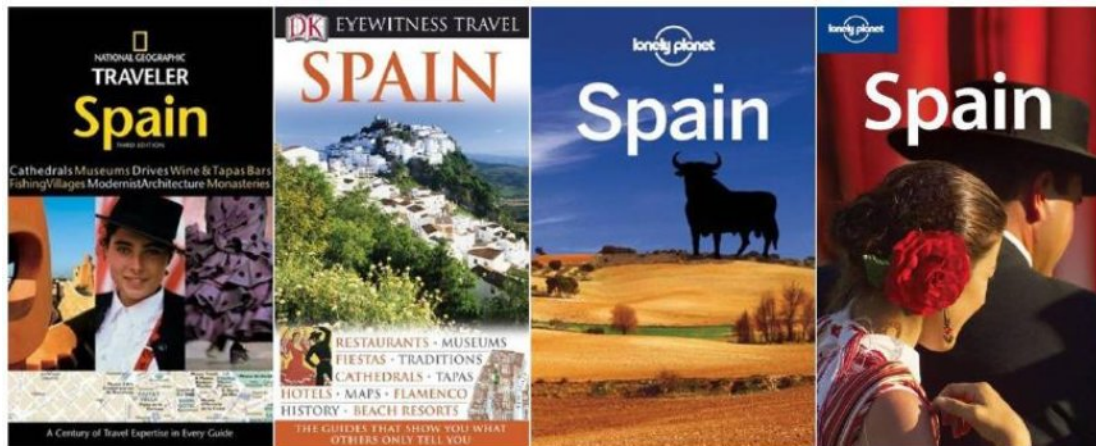
landscape and the architectural typology of rural and urban. So which is the identity or identities of Galicia abroad? What is the external image of Galicia? Does Galicia have an image abroad?, Does it correspond with what we get?

GALICIAN BRAND IMAGE AS TOURIST DESTINATION

I ask myself about the touristic destination image of Galicia in the global tourist market. Perhaps we are facing an unknown place. From this point of view, the things that “we do” are unknown in the international tourist market. So, we have not obtained anything in relation with what “we do”. But, is this true?

Galicia is linked to the brand *Europe, Spain, Green Spain, the Way of St. James*, etc. But it does not have a brand image itself.

When I analyzed the tourism European market in my PhD, I found a stereotyped image of Spain, where all regional destinations like Galicia were grouped. The brand image of Spain is actually linked to a warm country, located in Southern Europe, where the sun and sand are the main attractive elements and the flamenco dancers and the bulls are examples of territorial symbolization. It is enough to see the portrait of some of the most popular tourist guides, like National Geographic, Eyewitness Travel or Lonely Planet to understand this.



Example 2: Tourist guides of Spain.

Focusing exclusively on the main tourist markets of Spain, these corresponding to European countries close to us such as Portugal, France, Italy, Germany and the UK, I found Galicia as a region located in northern Spain and more specifically in north-western corner of Spain and northern Portugal. Its peripheral location in a peninsular context gives some added value, in order to consider Galicia as a far territory, remote and distant from the mass tourism places of the Mediterranean coast. Galicia is also the ending point of the Way of St. James, being this a main attractive tourist path of Galicia and Green Spain, where the Cathedral of Santiago de Compostela and Finisterre are located.

From this point of view, the foreign tourist market recognizes Galicia just by mentioning the Way and the city of Santiago, but not vice versa. It has been said that Galicia should use the Way to identify itself in the tourist market. In this sense, the Way is not a unique product of Galicia, because it is shared with other northern regions of the Peninsula. This northern designation or “Northern Spain” is usually related to the Green Spain. This has a brand image differentiated from the rest of Spain, especially if we consider the attributes that characterize it, such as the climate, landscape, cuisine, its historical, cultural and artistic heritage would be.

Northern Spain or Green Spain (Galicia, Asturias, Cantabria, Basque Country) are linked to cultural tourism, landscape and gastronomy. Regional governments are making intensive campaigns in the European market to show the rich diversity of Spain different from the stereotypical image of the country. New promotional campaigns of Spain have been designed by Turespaña trying to enhance its internal diversity and variety of tourism destinations in Spain.

ATLANTIC EUROPE AND MEDITERRANEAN EUROPE

The establishment of “Green Spain”, as co-brand of Spain and not as secondary brand, requires changes in the tourism policy of Turespaña. The Galician Tourism Agency (Axencia Turismo de Galicia), created in 2012 has centralized the tourism campaigns of Galicia in the international markets, while the brand “Xacobeo” is promoting the Way of Santiago together with the pilgrims associations around the World.

Galicia and the autonomous regions of northern Spain are contributing to the brand identity of Spain as a tourist destination, especially as a cultural destination. It would, therefore, be able to modify the strategy including the internal plurality and diversity of Spain.

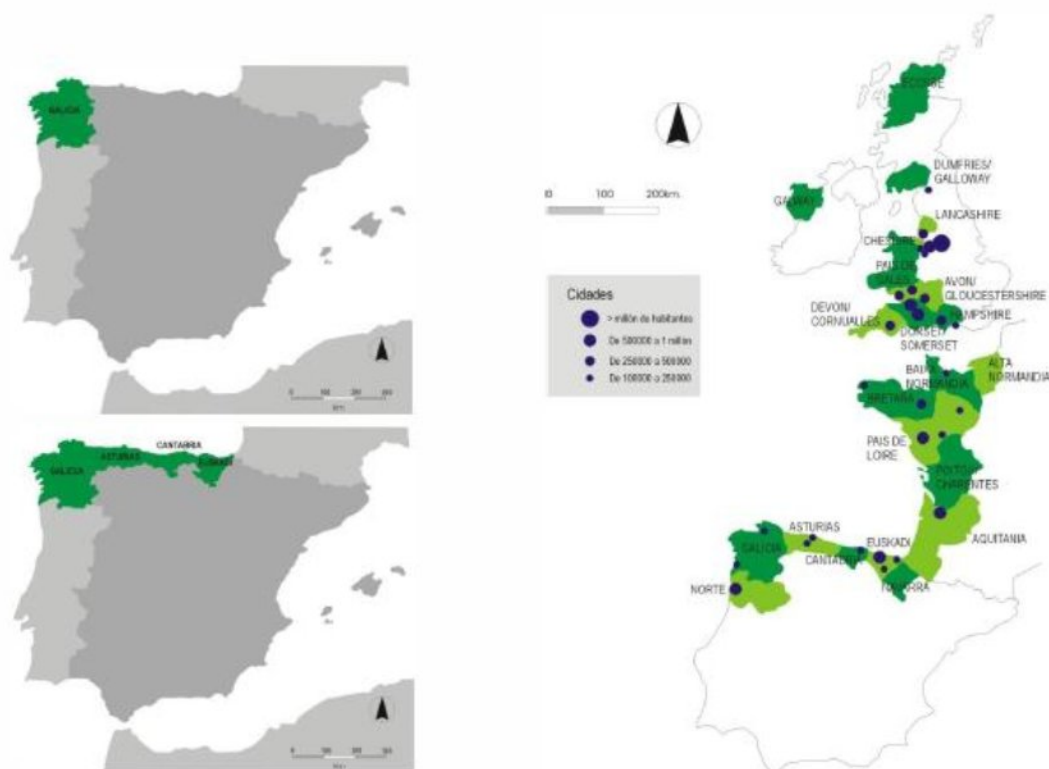
The regional government (Xunta de Galicia) in the use of its powers in foreign policy and tourism management in Galicia, designs promotional strategies in the international markets without the participation of the state government (Turespaña), even without indications about the co-branding “Spain”. This situation allows Galicia to manage its own brand as a tourist destination and hence their policy of

communication abroad. The negative aspect of this type of individual actions is derived from the unfamiliarity of Galicia in the international market, which would require the presence of the brand "Spain" to be recognized abroad. The positive view of this individual action especially lies in consolidated markets in Europe (Portugal, France, Germany, Italy, UK), where Galicia and also Santiago and the pilgrims' road are identified as a singular destination in Spain, away from the Spanish stereotypes linked with flamenco, bulls, sun and sand.

An alternative to promote Galicia overseas is alluding to "Northern Spain " and "Green Spain", but also in the context of " Western Europe" and " Atlantic Europe ", due to the similarities found between the regions in the European Atlantic coast, (especially between northern coast of Spain, Brittany and Ireland , which are different from other destinations in the Iberian Peninsula).

In the following conceptual map I accept the terms "Northern Spain" and "Western Europe" mainly to promote its geographical location (in the north of Spain, in the west of the Iberian Peninsula and the European continent).

However, the terms "green" and "Atlantic" are used to explain the main features linked to the territory, as the green landscape and the proximity to the Atlantic Ocean, which anthropological and geographical attributes have explained the establishment of the concept "Atlantic Europe " (Ferrás 1994; O'Flanagan, 2001).



Example 3: Galicia as region in Northern Spain, Green Spain and Atlantic Europe. (Santomil, 2011)

The interpretation of Galicia as a tourism destination located in “Atlantic Europe” would make sense overseas or in intercontinental promotion campaigns, mainly in America, by using the brand “Green Spain” for the European tourist market, where we can also find the term “Atlantic Spain”. Anyway, Galicia assumes a dual brand identity as destination. On one hand, it lies in the Mediterranean context, in which the whole of Spain is included. On the other hand, it is clearly situated in the Atlantic context, which characterizes the people of the western facade of Europe.

So, where can we locate Galicia? To be honest, and in my humble opinion, the most sensible thing seems to locate it half way through. This means that Galician brand identity shares aspects of both destinations and that its image also includes this duality. Galicia is not Ireland. Galicia is not Andalusia. Galicia is a landscape similar

to other regions in Atlantic Europe (climate, culture, heritage, folk-lifestyle, gastronomy,...) but with common elements to the Iberian Peninsula and Southern Europe, both Spain and Portugal. This is a fact that I have seen in the analysis on the brand identity and image of Galicia in the tourist market, through local tourist guides, travel literature, tour-operators programs and local souvenirs (Santomil and Lois, 2012). As an illustrative example, in Galicia we can find souvenirs representing the bull and the flamenco, coexisting with Celtic symbolism, miniature replicas of the bagpipe, Celtic music, etc. So, in which context do we locate the brand Galicia?

I understand that in a global and strongly competitive market, it is essential to specify the actions of territorial marketing in the European Union. The Way reflects a message for inclusive and pro-European regions, where Galicia exists as a European tourist destination located in northern Spain and the western end of the continent at the same time.

THE DISCUSSION OF RESPONSIBILITIES

The foreign tourist policy of Spain is redistributed in Autonomous Communities, with their own responsibilities in tourism and foreign promotion. Galicia can develop individual actions to promote its own products in the foreign tourism markets and to establish diplomatic responsibilities to spread its own brand identity abroad. These actions are visible in tourism fairs, where the Galician Tourism Agency is involved in promotion campaigns of Galicia, and *Xacobeo* is promoting the St. James Way or Camino de Santiago, together with other regional governments in the European Union, demonstrating with this the progressive decentralization of responsibilities and competences in the Spanish State.

At a regional level, the tourist management of Galicia is distributed in provinces and councils. The existence of different entities, all of them having administrative responsibility in the tourism promotion, reveals an uncertainty of competences that causes the continuous overlap and duplication of administrative and promotional actions. A clear example of this overlap is the tourist promotion of Galician “*concellos*”, “*deputacións*”, “*consorcios*”, “*mancomunidades*”, chambers of commerce and associations made abroad. They all have their own brand and promotion strategy, as an example of co-branding to take part in fairs and festivals.

The management and promotion of the “Camino de Santiago” materializes this conflict of competences, where the state administrations, regional, provincial and local associations, among others, take part in the brand identity and image of this tourist product. This should not be a problem, whenever all entities participate in the promotion as a coordinated group of co-branding. Unfortunately, I identify different strategies, individual actions, political confrontations and lack of cooperation that make difficult to join actions. They are also extensible to other tourist destinations, both at a national and regional level, as I have identified in the annual participation of Galicia in the International Tourism Fair (FITUR), where the brand Galicia is diluted among provincial or regional organizations located in a hall without apparent cohesion.

Cooperation is a must among all organizations involved in the promotion of tourism in Galicia, with a coordinated co-branding strategy, especially if we have a look at the territorial marketing strategies on the Internet. This would allow the unification of efforts and would improve effectiveness of promotional activities abroad, as the “Camino de Santiago” and other tourism products in the country.

Far from being a weakness, the decentralization and existence of different entities promoting tourism in Galicia could be a strong point for improving competitiveness (only if they work together in co-branding).

The activities developed by the Galician Tourism Agency could be an example of coordination and branding, working as single administrative entity with the regional and local governments.



Example 4: Galician Tourist Brand with green and blue colours.

On the other hand, political competitions between local and regional governments are locking the development of common strategies that affect the management of tourist destinations and their branding campaigns. The conflict of competences and responsibilities arouse in the negotiation of air routes with low cost companies, which were trying to connect the three Galician airports to other parts of the European Union. From 2010 to 2013, there has been constant confrontation among the different entities participating in the Committee of air routes in Galicia. Local government, regional and national institutions like AENA are still arguing and missing the opportunity to create a coherent map of destinations, to facilitate the arrival of visitors from its main tourist markets.

Something similar occurred with the brand “Xacobeo” during the first decade of the 21st century, where changes have been done depending on the political colour of the regional government.



Example 5: Brand “Xacobeo” from 2006 to 2010.

To conclude this paper I would like to highlight the difficulties found in Galicia to design a brand identity among the different public administrations and also, the efforts made to develop a coordinated branding and management strategy (Santomil, 2011b).

On the other hand, the brand image of Galicia is conditioned by specific social and territorial transformations. This makes us think about the different identities of Galicia, which hinder the realization of a country identity. And, what is more, the consolidation of a particular brand image in the context of regional, national, European and international level.

Once again, this demonstrates that the image of the country is in constant changes and varies according to them. Therefore, the attributes associated nowadays to that country do not need to be the same to those in the future. But to review and reuse those attributes, future generations in Atlantic Europe, can always check the existing literature, brands and policies on this topic.

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