

Branding a destination: facts and myths!

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Abstract:

Usually described as the place “where nature and sea join to meet history”, Sagres was the stage from where Portuguese navigators went to discover the world! Henry, the 15th century Portuguese adventurer prince, had the dream of discovering what’s beyond the blue vast sea. With this dream in his mind, and empowered by a adventurous vision of entrepreneurship, Henry the Prince founded a small town in the south of Portugal, nowadays called Sagres, where he studied topics related to techniques of navigation and funded and stimulated the building of special boats, the caravels (light sailing ships).

With the support of the Church and surrounded by a legion of men that were influenced by the enthusiasm of the Prince, in the 15th century, Sagres was the location which supported this auspicious adventure.

Till today, Sagres is embodied with a mystic atmosphere which is still visible in the heritage site and monuments, as well as in its unspoilt landscape. The town’s website describes Sagres as “a place of memory, where nature, the sacred and man «gave birth» to religious cults and historic and tourism myths”. Prince Henry is the hallmark of this small region in the Algarve, one of the main tourism destinations in Portugal.

Considering that a core objective of tourism places is to offer the best conditions for tourists to have great and memorable experiences, Sagres is a meaningful stage of human history, still lost in the past and yet claiming for its right to the future. Local authorities in charge of managing the place are challenged to build this particular tourism destination as a brand. And as such, it should develop around Prince Henry and the Portuguese Discoveries’ narratives, myths, and stories.

The chief objective of this research is to discuss the appropriate narrative or myth on which to develop a brand strategy to Sagres as a tourism destination in Algarve, Portugal.

Key words:

Tourism destinations, Branding tourism destinations, Mythologies, Tourism experiences, Cultural heritage.

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INTRODUCTION

The Fortress of Sagres is prominently located in Ponta de Sagres, southwest Algarve, Portugal. From its steep cliffs, constantly windswept, the visitor can enjoy a breathtaking overview of the coast, which includes the countless coves of Sagres, Cape St Vincent, and the vastness of the Atlantic Ocean.

The history and myths of Sagres are closely related with the Cape St. Vincent, which was for centuries the furthest point of the known world. The landscape, characterized by an astonishing and magnificent coast, high cliffs, strong winds and wild vegetation, generated over the time a sense of mystery and respect, inducing a mythical approach to the place.

Sagres is a major cultural destination within the main Portuguese coastal destination: the Algarve region. Algarve receives annually about 6 millions of international visitors, whose main travel motivation is to enjoy sun and beach. Sagres is the most visited location in Algarve: approximately 282,000 visitors per year (DRCA, 2011).

By contrast, reasons for visiting Sagres are essentially cultural, magnifying the trend of more diversified tourism consumption patterns. Increasingly tourists are seeking vacation experiences that involve the consumption of different tourism products in a given space and time context. In the Algarve region, a destination typically mature in terms of sun and sea tourism, Sagres is a place offering tourists a wide range of experiences of particular cultural interest, a special stage appealing to strong emotions, and inviting visitors to a regression journey into the times when the vast unexplored ocean stirred the imagination and pushed to the limits man's power to dream. The history, the sea breeze and the Prince's stories all coexist in a mythical space, most suited to the design of a creative and challenging scenario for the management of tourism.

Currently the marketing of places and tourist destinations uses brands as cohesive and integrated signs around which a communication strategy develops consistently, thereby supporting the visitor's memorable experience of the place, as well as the formation of a coherent image. For these purposes to be achieved, the branding of the place requires the collective recognition of its identity, which is conceptualized as a blend of every element and events connected to it, a meeting point between past and future. Brand and the place's narratives should be closely tied-in.

In fact, stories told by brands to consumers through marketing communications are important in establishing the individual's identity, as well as connecting him to a community identity. Expectedly stories are relevant to both brands and the audience. Brands are thus experiential and symbolic resources from which consumers construct narratives of identity of the places they visit.

1. PLACE BRANDING

The process of marketing places involves three main stages: product identification, prospect market identification, and dissemination of relevant information on the product.

Product definition is a long and difficult process, and usually is the responsibility of local authorities and related stakeholders. Similarly, the identification of a potential market requires the implementation of complex tasks, such as segmentation and research on consumer behavior. Information management and communication are strategic in mediating the relation between the product and the market (Ashworth, 1988), in particular when it concerns positioning.

Most regions still conform to a marketing myopia attitude, and promotional actions are frequently cursory or a one-off effort. Communication is the most visible variable of the marketing mix, but also one of the last stages of the marketing management process, dependent on an unequivocal and coherent (re)positioning of the place's brand. Kotler

(1999:30) claims there is a big difference between implementing marketing actions and developing marketing strategies.

The process of residents' and visitors' image and expectations formation develops from symbols and visual icons (logotypes, colors, names, design and graphic elements), which are associated to a wide variety of information, either strategically disseminated to the different target segments (residents, firms, actual and potential visitors) or propagated by unofficial sources, beyond the control of the destination management organization.

Today, societies live in a transition era, from the service economy to the experience economy. Under this new business paradigm, competition and value focus on the continuous increase of product quality, or experience, from the consumer's perspective (Craik, 1995).

Given the composite nature of places, travel and visit to tourism destinations integrates feelings of exoticism related to particular and intangible experiences, in which emotions (fantasy, nostalgia, pleasure and pride) are key elements. While experienced differently by the resident and the visitor, activities linked to local culture are considered by the various audiences highly interesting and a source of enchantment (Ashworth, 1994; Timothy, 1997).

According to Boylan (2000:12), experience management has great implications in places' future and competitiveness, so it is expected a growing commitment towards experience continuous improvement. The tourist searches for a fantastic experience (Boniface and Fowler, 1996). Yet when purchasing one, (s)he pays for time enjoying memorable events in a memorable place (Pine and Gilmore, 1999).

In harmony with this line of thought, visiting a tourism destination is by itself a memorable experience. Even so the value chain involved in the delivery of such a product is maximized when the place becomes the stage of the visitor's experience in which entertainment and fun intertwine with local culture. Visitors expect to feel part of the place and are looking for simple, easy, and easily transmitted experiences, meaningful moments that meet expectations. As long as the experience is able to excite the senses, it becomes effective, because no matter how confined by the live moment, its value remains in memory.

Human being is a collector of memorable events and the visitor to its highest degree. When returning home, it brings back with you post cards of places visited, photographs and memorabilia, no matter how common objects may be. The purpose is to collect tangible artifacts, material witnesses to experiences lasting in memory. Collecting is a way to socializing experience and transmitting pieces of that experience to others – to companies, organizations engaging in an experience economy, it becomes a mean to entice the clients (Pine and Gilmore, 1999). Such products are purchased and consumed because assumedly represent pleasurable experiences. For residents, they are an opportunity to enhance the tourism multiplier effects, in fact a whole array of products connected to distinctiveness and local culture contributes to expand and intensify the memorability of the tourism experience. From the supply perspective, the process is about the diversification of the places economic basis, and the proposition of something more than beaches, natural parks, heritage and museums (Vinuesa, 1998; Pine and Gilmore, 1999; Urry, 1990; Urry, 1997).

Under a consumption culture, tourism is an industry that sells and promotes experiences and the visitor searches for authenticity while living tourism experiences. The search for authenticity is an answer to the standardization of the world that emerged from globalization. Visitors are appreciating more and more tourism destinations where authenticity is acknowledged a key feature. Currently, mature segments, holding higher education credentials, are particularly sensitive to authenticity issues. In a certain way, for the visitor, the search for authenticity is a reaction to the desire of rediscovering self-identity. In marketing terms, the distinctiveness of a tourism destination may be expressed through a Unique Selling Proposition.

Destination management organizations are qualified to discover the distinctive and genuine attributes of the place. The marketing philosophy and methodology, in the sense that proposes an integrated and sustained approach (Hunt, 1975; Stabler, 1988; Illiwich, 1995;

Hatch, 1997) to the creation of a unique and distinctive identity (brand), is to play a key role in the management of places and their image.

1.1 Place Branding: Definition and Roles

Although a topic widely researched, discussed and tested in the business field, namely in the marketing literature, the adaptation of its conceptual framework to places as tourism destinations is a recent endeavor, both in theoretical and practical terms (Ritchie and Ritchie, 1998).

Aaker (1996), throughout the 80s and 90s, theorized the brand, and proposed models and methodologies adequate to the management of brands of consumption products. The author defined 'brand' as a name and/or a symbol (logo, trade mark, design) meant to identify the goods or services of a provider, or a group of providers, and differentiate them from competition. In turn, Blackett (2005) claims that it is a visual distinction made of the combination of any of the following elements: name, letters, numbers, a symbol, a signature, a shape, a slogan, a color, a lettering».

The brand is an abstraction of the destination's identity, i.e. what the destination intends to convey about itself to the market. It is a promise, an expectation embodying the concept of the strategic positioning of the place, but also a process emanating from consensus and mirroring the destination's composite character.

Ritchie and Ritchie (1998) claim that in spite of the fact destination marketing is a widely studied subject supported by a relatively stabilized body of theory in the context of destination management, the destination branding is a still neglected function. Some researchers argue that the variable 'Promotion' became so conspicuous that destination marketing eventually came to equate with promotion.

The role of the brand has been studied in terms of destination image (Echtner and Ritchie, 1991), i.e. in the consumers' perspective. Even so a brand plays a much wider and complex role. Tiard (1998) believes the process of branding the destination, related issues and problems do not differ greatly from those found in services. On the other hand, Park and Jaworski (1986) consider that the development of a theoretical framework on destination branding will contribute to the integrated management of the destination's overall reputation and identity, which in turn influence its capability to attract residents, visitors, and investors.

1.2 Creating Place Brands

The brand symbolizes a unique combination of the product's characteristics, specific elements that add value to and bestow on the place a certain meaning. More than differentiation, branding a territory aims at providing it an identity, a personality, a cultural world (Chazaud, 1998). Being so, the branding process should start with analysis of the place's functional dimension which exists in close relation with emotions concrete tourism experiences can stimulate. Inspired by this same notion, the BBDO Consulting (2004) supports the building of the destination brand as the integrated management of two key components: the functional values (basic and visible reality) and the emotional values of the brand (differentiating and unique elements on which functional attributes are grounded, that arouse feelings and positive perceptions).

In a globalized business environment, where fierce competition is currency, emotional persuasion is the key to success, and the real differentiating elements belong to the symbolic dimension. The fight for the consumer is fought, not through price, but through its heart and mind – these are the true territory of the brand, because more important than the product itself or its functional attributes is their positioning in the consumers' mind (Ries and Trout, 1993). Brands have the power to convey meaning and value to consumers, and signal quality and trust (Figure 1).

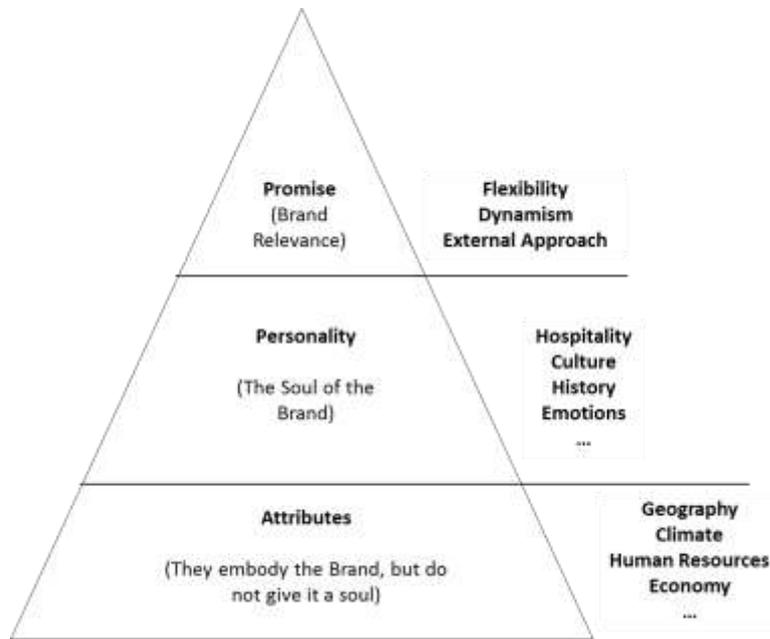


Figure 1: The Destination Brand (Adapt. from Carvalho F., 2002)

1.3 The Functions of the Destination Brand

Brand definitions found in the context of tourism destinations focus, on one hand, on traditional functions performed by the brand (namely, to identify and differentiate), and, on the other, on the promise, either explicit or implicit, of the essence of the tourism experience (a memorable one), which expectedly relates exclusively to a particular destination. At the same time, and given the fact that anticipation and memory are core components of experience quality, the destination should ensure the occurrence of future expectations of pleasure and excitement. In this respect, the brand also strongly contributes to the intensification of experience memories after travel.

A greater involvement in the consumption of tourism products during the visit is an effect of image formation from several sources of information and prior to experience. Tourists that recognize the brand will interpret the destination in a similar way (Ooi, 2004), because it contributes to the development of a consistent and meaningful sense of place (Olins, 2000).

The brand identity enables prospect consumers (viz. tourists) to connect images to the place, but also residents to strengthen their own image. The destination brand is a catalyst of the place's identity, inducing the formation of appealing images for different target segments (residents, business firms, and visitors) and, simultaneously the intensification of citizens' self-esteem and involvement in the building and management of the place's brand.

As claimed by Mommaas (2002), branding the destination is a way to impose order and certainty in a chaotic reality circumscribed by the composite nature of the destination. The brand means the opportunity for people, artifacts, and events to become part of a meaningful whole. In addition to differentiation, it is a source of identification, recognition, knowledge and communion.

A strong brand embodies the place's differentiating aspects (natural, historical, cultural, and human), a world of attractions and emotions which will lead to the formation of the desired image. Residents, businessmen, and tourists build their own experiences based on a coherent and consistent sense of place, i.e. the destination brand.

As reported by Cai (2002), the destination brand performs four main functions:

- To influence the audiences' perceptions of segments of the place through implementation of a coherent and consistent communication strategy
- To select the signature of the place as a product, i.e. to develop and propose the packaging of the product with the purpose of changing the place's image by association with desired and differentiating images
- To assert the place's identity and vision
- To convey signs of tourism experiences to allow audiences to anticipate the interpretation of the destination

By contrast, BBDO Consulting (2004) identifies the following functions:

- To provide information on destination values and offer
- To differentiate and positioning the destination
- To strengthen emotional relationships with consumers
- To attract business

1.4The Management of the Destination Brand

The relevance of managing strategically the brand in the context of tourism destinations stems from the combination of major contemporary challenges. Public governments and bodies, increasingly aware of a new social and business order, are committed to transforming their territories (consisting of multiple resources) into destinations (more than physical spaces, they are felt as stages of experiences, dreams, promises, escape...). The brand is the element that ensures consistency to a product that is, by nature, composite.

Elena Iliachenko (2005) equates the building of the destination brand to the integrated management of attributes involving three dimensions that which are part of the destination construct: culture (regional culture, language, identity, tradition - general and specific to the region), history (history of the region, historical development and influences, etc..) and nature (location, climate, landscape, geography, etc.). The aggregation and interaction between these three dimensions differentiate destinations among them (figure 2).

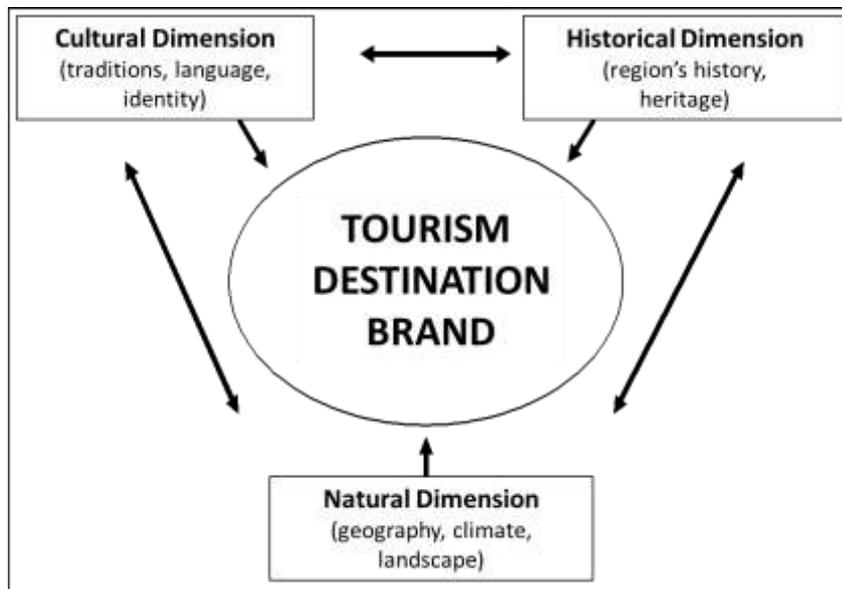


Figure 2: Tourism Destination Brand (Adapt. from Iliachenko, 2005)

To mark that is distinctive and unique, the brand should focus on the most important attributes, the more easily assignable to the specific characteristics of the region with respect to its culture, history, and natural features.

As stated by Ooi (2004) a destination brand campaign concerns more than just communicating positive messages; in fact, it involves sustaining the brand, product offer and delivery, and the mobilization of local and international support. The process, based on an integrated approach, incorporates the vision of destination actors, stakeholders of the tourism sector, the business community, the residents and tourists.

2. SETTING

2.1 Sagres, the Place and its History

In *Guide to Portugal* (1927), Raul Proença described Sagres in the following way: "Sagres, for an educated man, is adequate for 3 days of concentration and fancying" (Proença, 1927: 312).

Located in far southwest of the European continent, for approximately 3 millennia, the region of Sagres was one of the boundaries of the 'Known World' (figure 3). For peoples coming from the eastern Mediterranean, as Phoenicians, Greeks, Carthaginians, Romans and Arabs, who generally sailed along the coast, *Cabo de Sao Vicente* was the threshold of navigation westward, before entering mare incognitum. For this reason Sagres was also known as *Finis Terrae*, i.e. the *End of the World*.



Figure 3: Cabo Sao Vicente

The Fortress of Sagres was built in the 15th century by Prince Henry for defensive purposes (Figure 4). It has been several times reconstructed in the 16th, 17th, and 18th centuries, following for instance the attacks of Francis Drake, English pirate, or the great earthquake that took place in the year 1755. It comprises the Church of *Our Lady of Grace*, which has a facade dating from the 16th century, the famous Wind Rose and several artillery weapons used to defend the beaches of Tonel and Mareta.



Figure 4: The Fortress of Sagres

In the 15th century, Prince Henry's activities and businesses in Algarve, related to politics and the Portuguese Discoveries led to the foundation of *Vila do Infante*. Through the centuries, the location was interchangeably known by the names of *Vila do Infante*, *Sagres*, and *Sagres Fortress*.

However, the earliest references to the history of Sagres are closely tied to *Cabo de Sao Vicente*. Antiquity writers ascribed to the place a sacred character which is patent in the Latin name *Promontorium Sacrum*, i.e, the *Holy Cape*, in Roman times especially dedicated to the worship of Saturn. A later religious significance emerged in the 8th century, linked to the worship of the Christian martyr *Sao Vicente*, whose relics are assumed to have arrived by sea at that time. The Muslims has by then invaded the Peninsula, and the purpose was assumedly to preserve the relics from destruction by taking them to a secluded out-of-the-way place.

Prince Henry was a great supporter of nautical crafts and knowledge, having thereby asked his brother, the king D. Duarte, for a place to start a town adequate to the support of seamen and protection of ships, a proper place the restore of supplies (Figure 5). In consequence, the village of Sagres was founded in 1460.



Figure 5: Prince Henry, the Navigator

Although he never sailed himself, Prince Henry became known as "the Navigator" because of his support to the Portuguese Discoveries. In Sagres, he welcomed scholars from Europe and beyond: Christians, Muslims and Jews, all of them wise men interested in navigation, cartography and ship building. This group of men constituted the *School of Sagres*, becoming in due time a very important learning institution in which creative thinking led to the development of navigation tools, such as the astrolabe and the cross-staff (already in use by the Arabs), and the building of innovative ships adapted to long distance sailing.

2.2 The Myth

Involved in mystery and an aura of respect stimulated by an awe-inspiring landscape, Cape St Vincent is a unique location, loaded with symbols of mythical nature. The existence of the Nautical School of Sagres is an issue widely debated in Portuguese historiographical studies. The claim lacks sound evidence, and developed mostly as a consequence of the intention of British writers and historians to promote the person and action of Prince Henry. However, since the beginning of the 20th century the view of a nautical school founded by him, which would join scholars from various parts of Europe with the purpose of obtaining and gathering extensive information on scientific fields, such as geography, astronomy and cartography, is now outdated.

The *Nautical School of Sagres* is one of the greatest myths of Portuguese history, being an effect of highly debatable interpretations of ancient chronicles. Based on the assumption that Prince Henry summoned a Catalan cartographer to have him at the service of the kingdom of Portugal, many have considered (to start with Damiao de Gois in the 16th century), that there must have been in Sagres, Algarve, a nautical school founded by Prince Henry, circa 1417. The school, which was believed to be a prominent center of nautical craftsmanship, would have been the cradle of great explorers, such Vasco da Gama and Christopher Columbus.

But the myth itself takes us to classical antiquity: according to scholars such as Pliny and Strabo, pilgrims would come and visit this *Promontorium Sacrum* to pay homage to Saturn and Hercules, deities connected to the sea.

Cabo Sao Vicente is a place of worship since the Neolithic period. In the 4th century BC, Greek authors reported religious ceremonies involving libations and the banning of human beings during the night as it was a place visited by the gods.

Heading to the Cape, consulting and paying vows to the gods were rituals asked from all sailors who challenged the sea, believed to be inhabited by terrible monsters.

3. BRANDING SAGRES

The strategy of branding must start from the destination's own identity hence the first stage of the process consists in the examination of what is truly original and unique in a given territory. Recent trends show public and private organizations are concerned exclusively with the way territories are perceived (image assessments, for instance, mirror such concerns).

Targeted communication develops from a clear positioning strategy, which is also consistent with the competitive advantages of the place. "The ability to create and maintain a strong brand image depends partially of ensuring consistency of all communications related to the brand. It is a management function not only to guarantee consistency in brand positioning over time, but also that each element of the marketing mix contributes to the strengthening of this positioning" (Moutinho, L., nd). Communication is the variable of the marketing strategy of the destination whose main function is to communicate the specific benefits of the place, which are determined from an analysis of the differentiating attributes of the destination from the point of view of the target consumer. However quite often the brand building process becomes hostage to a set of tangible and intangible attributes so-called 'traditional', but in fact excessively similar to those found in many other places and destinations. Brand positioning

and communication are, under these circumstances, particularly difficult to successfully achieve.

The brand management at destination level requires an overall approach in order to convey a believable and consistent positioning. The need to focus on critical success factors diverse actors (residents, but also tourists, investors and entrepreneurial) appreciate demand supplementary attributes capable of adding value to the core product. From a destination branding perspective, differentiation goes far beyond the boundaries of geography and climate.

However, in addition to the historical and cultural values of places, the branding process should encompass myths and other intangible aspects of cultures that increase the opportunities of living memorable experiences.

A myth is a "traditional story about heroes or supernatural beings, Often Explaining the origins of natural phenomena or aspects of human behavior" (Woodside et al, 2008, referred by Moscardo, 2010: 44). As cultural phenomena, myths are constructed, deconstructed and transformed according to social goals, intellectual interests, and mainstream interpretations of history, beliefs, legends, and stories. As such, they constitute a cultural hallmark of places.

Like other differentiating aspects of places, myths are an integral part their identity and, as such, are key elements to the building of the brand, contributing to a clear and strong positioning, memory of the place and positive word-of-mouth of experiences lived in it (figure 6).

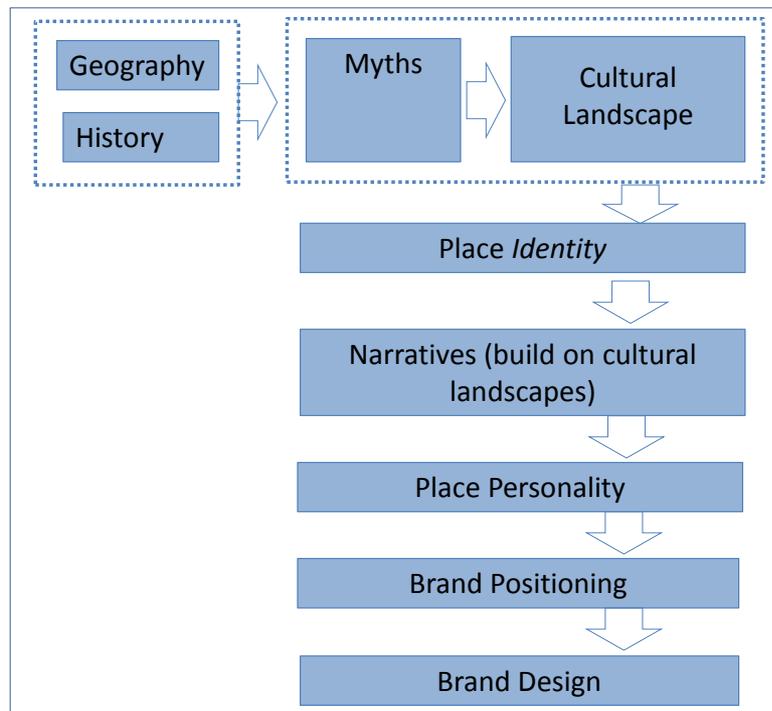


Figure 6: Creating Place Brands: a Conceptual Framework

The concept of experience is strategic to destination branding. In addition to the notion of a stage where exciting experiences take place, the development of a new brand generates expectations in visitors powerful enough to differentiate the tourism product and memorability. The brand should serve as umbrella to all myths, magic and enchantment, assisting in the process of reviving history.

Thus, history and myths must join to form a new project of a brand in which narratives play a key role during the visit to this place. All these elements are meant to emerge as a unifying

signal capable of attracting people, differentiating the offer and promoting creative knowledge (figure 7).

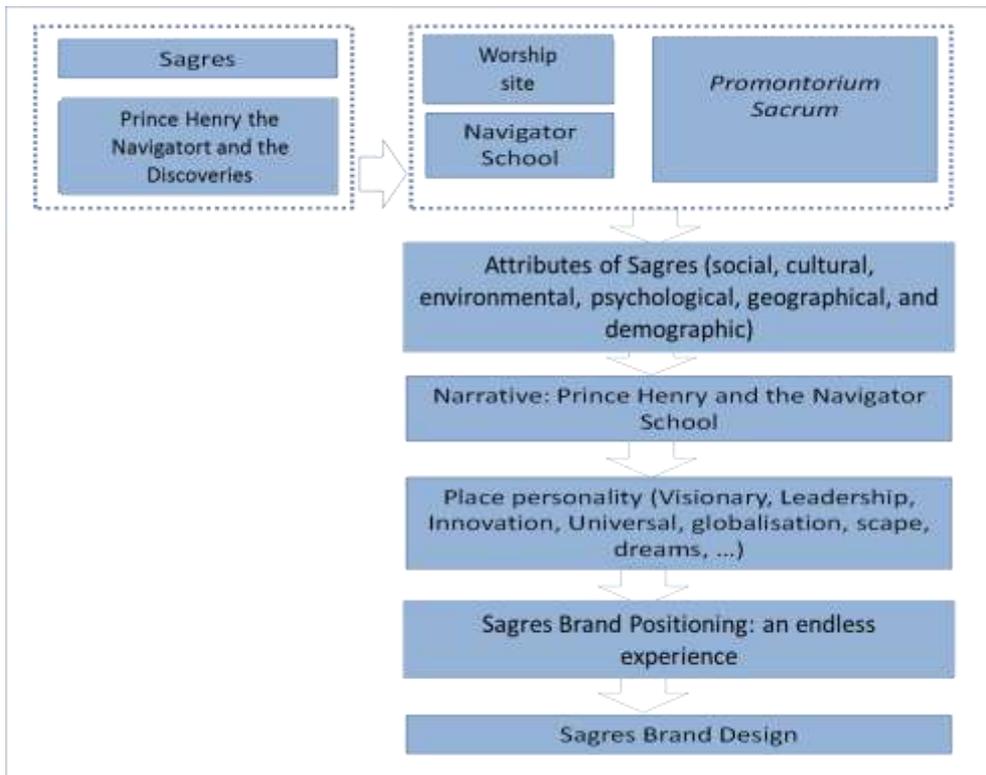


Figure 7: Sagres Brand Positioning

This framework aims at representing the brand's strength in capturing the place's identity, informing visitors and creating the opportunity for personal enrichment through a meaningful mixture of fiction and reality. Then the place itself becomes the scenery of live events closer to the power of the individual's imagination, and tangible elements, such as games, props, costumes and so on, are then the most obvious stimuli to both the senses and the mind.

The stage is already in place ... what is required now is the development of a narrative, which can be understood as the proper context to trigger emotions, so that people can stroll by themselves, while imagining, conceiving, musing, writing poems, enjoying the wind, the silence, the untamed force of nature, the sound of the sea, the view from far and away.

CONCLUSION

As products have responded to increased competition through the adoption of sophisticated models and integrated approaches to management, places, especially tourism destinations, in face of changing and highly competitive environments, the emergence of globalization, and consumer sophistication, have developed new visions on their meaning as products but also new management philosophies.

The marketing of places naturally arises in this context as an appropriate methodology to identify the need for differentiating attributes adapted to target segments, position destinations in terms of tourist experiences, and communicate them as a brand.

The brand, developed as part of an integrated process of marketing the destination, is the link between the various specific products comprised in it, while ensuring consistency in communication to tourists.

Creating a brand identity so powerful and consistent that mere exposure to its logo or product generates, automatically and not consciously, dimensions of identity relevant to consumers is one of the key objectives of modern branding. On the other hand, in what concerns cultural destinations, it is of particular importance that branding develops in a unified way. Associating the brand with an inspiring narrative about the place is a key issue for tourists to enjoy and memorize the experience of the visit.

In this case study it is argued that Sagres history and myths are the foundation of the place's branding, the source of visitors' involvement, fancying and experience co-creation.

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