

# Competition, Cooperation, Co-opetition.

## A conceptualization of the 'Network Brand'

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**Abstract** - Place branding relies on the assumption of inter-territorial competition which seems to be the overall approach to place management. Competition involves not only cities but also provinces, nations, states, villages and supra-national regions. However, there is room for sustaining that competition is not an exhaustive key for understanding regional development and, consequently, for interpreting place marketing and branding. Within the general frame of competition, regions and local areas may seek inter-territorial cooperation in order to enrich their offer and enhance their competitiveness. In this regard, a gap in place branding and marketing literature is identified and this paper contributes to filling it, by proposing a conceptualization of the "network brand". Assuming cooperation/co-opetition as a way to face inter-territorial competition, this research is in charge of answering to the following research questions. Firstly, to what extent network and network brand building is a pragmatic process i.e. inspired by market principles, rather than being a political process i.e. highly related to power game emerging within and among the involved territories? Secondly, to what extent the network brand is a "post-modern" brand? A secondary research was carried out by reviewing 12 inter-territorial networking experiences in Europe and US. Concerning the first research question, evidence suggests that, beyond a surface of pragmatism, there might be a political process leading to the emergence of a network brand. Moreover, there is a chance that in some cases a pragmatic approach to networking tends to turn into a political process by means of institutional spillovers, turning the network into a political arena. Concerning the second research question, the cases highlight two different strategies shaping network brand identity-building. While in some cases the network brand does take the shape of a post-modern brand by embodying the elements of a post-modern identity, in some other cases the network brand is built by referring to a "history in common" i.e. a past when the nodes of the network were all contained by well-defined and static borders, thus constituting a bounded place with its monolithic identity. As a matter of fact, risks and advantages characterise both network branding strategies. On one hand, the network brand relying on a post-modern identity has the advantage of promoting a novelty, thus providing the nodes of the network with a chance to consolidate a new image in an attempt to trigger a self-fulfilling prophesy of development. In this case, however, the brand risks being felt as "artificial" especially by insiders. On the other hand, the reference to the re-emergence of a dormant common identity which has always been "there" can be a source of legitimization for the network brand. In this case, though, one may argue that just the most active actors promoting contemporary networking might feel overlooked and even excluded by the invoked network identity.

### **Introduction**

Place branding debate refers to competition as necessary assumption to interpret branding and marketing practices within the framework of place management. "Marketization" became a sort of slogan symbolizing modernization of public management so that a "special cultivation of the institution of competition" occurred (Czarniawska 2002:83). Following a process of *mimesis* (Czarniawska 2002), competition is now

extended not only to cities but also to provinces, nations, states, villages and supra-national regions (Anholt 2010).

As a matter of fact, place branding is to be interpreted in light of globalization which has pushed public authorities towards the adoption of an entrepreneurial attitude to local and regional development. According to Kirby and Kent (2010), place marketing derives from the concept of “entrepreneurial city”. This is related to a notion of entrepreneurial governance which is characterised by sense of management and promotion, risk-propensity and profit motivation. There is much agreement on the notion of “neo-liberal shift” in public management (Harvey 1989). This triggered new routes of development according to which coalitions are sought among public and private actors, while the old style of policy-making is abandoned in order to maximize efficiency. In this frame, place branding is to be considered as “a marketing-led strategy of economic development” (Greenberg 2008), which translates business techniques and concepts into tools for public management. Strategic place marketing is, thus, deemed necessary to face threats – or to exploit opportunities – which are posed by global competition.

Globally cities, regions and nations compete in order to attract and retain human resources and capital investments. In Anholt’s point of view, competition is explained through the definition of a marketplace:

“A globalised world is a marketplace where country has to compete with country – and region with region, city with city – for its share of attention, of reputation, of spend, of goodwill, of trust. That places should look to the disciplines of the marketplace for inspiration about how to prosper in this world is entirely logical” (2005:119).

Globalization and the disappearance of frontiers for investments and credit have made the capacity of attraction of countries, cities and regions crucial to economic development (Lebedenko 2004). Consequently, some argues place branding is now inevitable for those geographies that do not want to be left behind (Gertner and Kotler 2004).

In fact, regions undertake place branding initiatives in the aim of entering a short-list of geographical areas that are considered as potential spots for localization by businesses and talents. To be an attractive place, there is a need for ‘doing and labelling’, that is improving reality e.g. services and infrastructures, and communicating the unique advantages of investing and living in the region. Regions and cities have to construct their own competitive advantage in order to position themselves in a ‘market of geographies’, an open inter-territorial competition space where new development opportunities might spill out.

As a consequence of its fast and global spread, branding has been significantly criticized for turning geographies in a “forest of logos, slogan and messages” (Power and Hauge 2008). In addition, newspapers

often proclaim that “public and private money is being thrown at the idea of place branding” (Harwood 2005). Some also argued it is just a convenient escape from substantial political projects (Olins 1999), hiding ineffective initiatives under brilliant logos. In fact, cities and regions often engage in a single part of the whole branding process, by launching catching slogans and simply designing new logos and promotional brochures (Ashworth and Kavaratzis 2009). Some challenges the idea that branding may support place development, while some warns about the fact that marketing and the underlying competition rationale might even worsen the “uneven development” (see Pike 2007; Pike 2009) on regional, national and global scale.

This project is in charge of furthering this discussion by assuming a different approach to development and branding i.e. cooperation which is to be intended as a way to face inter-territorial competition. This rationale will be presented in Section 1. Section 2 will attempt to rescale place branding issues by providing a framework composed of the concepts of place, space, border and identity. Section 3 will conceptualize the network (or inter-territorial) brand by means of an exploratory review of cases. Accordingly, the role of branding in the analysed cases will be highlighted. Section 4 will attempt to answer two research questions:

I. To what extent network and network brand building is a pragmatic process i.e. inspired by market principles, rather than being a political process i.e. highly related to power game emerging within and among the involved territories?

II. To what extent the network brand (or inter-territorial brand) is a “post-modern” brand?

Finally, Section 5 will reflect on the limitations of the paper and will suggest directions for further research.

### **1. Competition, cooperation, co-opetition: theoretical assumptions**

Beside its hegemony in a discourse on place branding, there is room for sustaining that competition is not an exhaustive key for interpreting either place marketing/branding or local and regional development. This discussion is not in charge of contributing to the debate fuelled by those who sustain that competition does not apply to countries (as - it is said - these cannot run out of business) and by those who claim territories compete just as firms do (see Camagni 2002). Rather, inter-territorial competition is here fully accepted in line with place branding literature mainstream. Nevertheless, on the basis of competition, we stress how regions and local areas may seek collaborations in order to be more competitive.

Cooperation is, thus, suggested to be included into a discussion on place management and branding. A relational perspective on regions and local areas is proposed since, on a cooperative point of view, the set

of relations among territories are of primary relevance. The place is conceived as a node within a network where opportunities can emerge and be favoured by development policies. Two or more nodes can, then, choose the strategy of sharing resources in order to exploit opportunities and pursue development goals. Accordingly, the rationale of cooperation is added to the one of competition in order to shed new light on place branding. In regard to local and regional development, this means to take into account those policies that seek economies of scale or scope and try to reinforce policy learning across regional and urban borders.

Since after 2008 crisis and during the ongoing economic downturn, looking beyond administrative borders for shaping development and branding strategies is even more salient. Because of a decreasing capacity of public authorities to mobilize financial resources, “maintaining or increasing the level of place branding is not politically easy in a recession” (Burghard 2009). At the same time, global economy is experiencing a shortage of private capital investment projects, while attracting talents seems to be even more crucial than before for the economy to recover. That is, inter-territorial competition is further increasing and place branding/marketing is likely to be even more needed than before. In this context, the chance of single towns, cities and regions to compete successfully is reducing because only the most “diverse economies” will have the possibility to win (Eisenschitz 2010). That is, one single place which is closed within its borders is likely not to be the optimal scale for competing and winning global competition.

Consequently, cooperation is a strategic option to be considered. In regard to place branding, this has been recently affirmed also by Osgood who states that “as funds for economic development become scarcer, cooperation can increase the scope of a campaign through the aggregation of resources” (2010:266). An example is the Greater Louisville branding initiative which succeeded in pooling US\$ 1.07m for launching and sustaining the brand (Osgood 2010). This would not have been possible outside the cooperative framework. As Kalandides claims,

“Prerequisite of a different city marketing concept would be a deep understanding of the interrelatedness between places. The consequence would be prioritizing cooperation and networks over competitive strategies” (2007:14).

Along with an increasing competition, interdependence is rising among cities. Accordingly, Williams argues that “anticipating, responding to and coping with rapidly changing intra- and inter-metropolitan relations [by determining an adequate scale]” (1999:173) is crucial to designing appropriate urban marketing strategies for metropolitan areas. In addition, he clearly states that, in a metropolitan area, cities have to ‘behave’ as both competitors and cooperative partners simultaneously, thus implicitly suggesting the validity of co-opetition as an approach to development and, consequently, to marketing and branding.

Beside cooperation, co-opetition is worth of attention. As said, place branding is usually interpreted as a competitive, quasi-mercantilistic approach to regional and local development, but we agree with those scholars that affirm this is an “increasingly unrealistic or at least partially misleading [perspective] in the network-like co-opetitive scenario of today” (Bellini et al. 2010:91).

Co-opetition is a well-known concept in business network and business-to-business marketing studies. It refers to the benefits that firms may have from undertaking both cooperation and competition relationships with actors in the value chain (including competitors) simultaneously (Bengtsson and Kock 2000; see Nalebuff and Brandenburger 1996). In other words, this refers to a “hybrid behaviour comprising competition and cooperation” which leads to a strategic interdependence shaping a co-opetitive system of value creation (Dagnino and Padula 2002:2). Co-opetitive relationships are enacted by two types of interactions. On one hand, hostility characterises actors’ relationships due to conflicting interests, on the other hand “friendship” is part of their relationships since they have to pursue common interests and, accordingly, a collective action (Bengtsson and Kock 2000).

Although cooperative and co-opetitive schemes are fairly overlooked in place branding and marketing debate, a few scholars have taken into account the possibility to enrich the prevailing competition-based interpretation. Moilanen and Rainisto hint at cooperation by saying that a single city can need to be part of a “larger location” for place branding purposes, in order to reach a critical mass alluring the desired targets (2009:27). That is, place branding and marketing are not a zero-sum game inescapably (Anholt 2004 cited in Osgood 2010). Rather, branding can result in a positive-sum game where even those areas that are not capital cities can reach a critical mass by pooling their resources.

As Hankinson states, a place defined by its legal boundaries sometimes is not “a unique and meaningful product” (2001:129). This suggests that there is an opportunity for place managers to cross administrative boundaries “to combine two or more places together in order to provide a more attractive offer” (Hankinson 2001:130). According to Hankinson (2001), the Yorkshire Coast and the Shakespeare Country in the United Kingdom are two destination brands demonstrating the application of a cooperative strategy (2001) which in tourism promotion seems to be straightforward.

As recently said, there is a need to take into account a cooperative approach to place branding (Osgood 2010). Osgood refers to a literature gap which has been identified yet never filled in properly. Such gap is witnessed by Anholt wondering whether place branding is necessarily a zero-sum game (2004 cited in Osgood 2010), by Ikuta et al. lamenting a significant lack of attention to regional branding (2007 cited in Osgood 2010) and by Kavartzis and Ashworth stating a need to widen current understanding of inter-urban competition (2008 cited in Osgood 2010).

Concerning tourism in rural U.S., Cai (2002) underlines the need to achieve a critical mass across multiple communities, thus suggesting a cooperative approach to destination branding. We can argue that, while cities may be strong brands thanks to their richness in assets and diversity, those areas lacking of leading urban centres and characterized by minor economic patterns might struggle to be “on the map”. To attract and retain investors, visitors and talents, small and peripheral communities need sources of diversity in order to be capable of triggering economic revitalization.

So far this section has presented the main assumptions of this research. Beside competition, cooperation and co-opetition have to be considered in place branding analysis. Taking for granted global competition among regions, we stated that cooperation and co-opetition are possible strategies informing development policies and, accordingly, place branding and marketing. Now there is a need to distinguish between cooperation and co-opetition since not all regions and cities are engaged in horizontal competition. In fact, cities or regions can decide to cooperate to complement their offer on the basis of each partners’ competitive advantage in specific territorial functions. For example, a city ranking high for its industries and entrepreneurial potential can benefit from cooperation with surrounding towns offering good residential areas. These partners are not competitors but together they can allure workers and talents looking for jobs, high living standards and quality of life. This would be a pure cooperative strategy. On the other hand, an example of co-opetitive strategy can be the one pursued by two or more university towns or cities willing to strengthen their potential and their visibility by collaborating in the shape of a network. In this case partners are competitors but seek mutual advantages through co-opetition in the frame of a positive-sum game.

This discussion has focused on the importance of cooperation and co-opetition in order to exploit development opportunities. This seems to be a very pragmatic approach to place branding. However, beyond such pragmatism which refers to cooperation and co-opetition as possible strategies for being ‘on the map’, we should not forget that place branding is a political process intrinsically, rather than a mere pragmatic practice of place management. In fact, communication of place images is often used to shape policy agendas in an attempt to have control on the representation of the place, its past as well as its present and future (Bellini 2004; Bellini et al. 2010). That is, while some claims that “the adoption of market principles by institutions of urban governance is seen as a welcome form of pragmatism that must be contrasted with political ideology” (Eisenschitz 2010:82), place branding is likely to be political in nature, rather than simply pragmatic and managerial issue.

The politics of place branding is, thus, a relevant perspective of analysis. As place brands result from inter-organizational negotiations and consensus-building processes among local stakeholders (Kotler et al. 1999 cited in Theriksen and Halkier 2008), promoting, maintaining and enacting the brand implies “politicking”

Ooi (2004). Politicking is, in fact, defined as a negotiation process aimed at mobilizing support and consensus by creating a unique and appealing story about the place.

Along with a discussion on competition, cooperation and co-opetition framing a conceptualization of network branding, the following research question concerns the process leading to the emergence of a network brand:

*To what extent network and network brand building is a pragmatic process i.e. inspired by market principles, rather than being a political process i.e. highly related to power game emerging within and among the involved territories?*

## **2. Rescaling place branding: a geographical viewpoint**

This section will discuss the geographical notions of space, place, border and identity, which contribute to a conceptualization of the network brand. Traditionally branding has focused on “bounded” spaces, particularly cities, administrative regions or countries, that is spaces featuring well defined political and administrative borders. Differently, we suggest to take into account the rich stream of geography literature that considers place as not necessarily closed and fixed entity. This project attempts to argue that this alternative perspective benefits place branding, not only because it widens the field of research but also because it provides an analytical foundation to collaborative branding strategies which have been increasingly designed in practice.

### **2.1. Space and place**

In the following paragraphs we argue that space and place can be interpreted in a relational way so that flows of interactions fuzzily determine our unit of analysis. During the 1980s the notion of place as “fixed areal, self-contained, and more or less unique unit of sociospatial organization” was challenged by the concept of interspatial interconnectivity (Jessop et al. 2008:390). According to Jessop et al. (2008), four spatial turns have characterised geography debate, thus focusing on the concepts of territory, place, scale and network. This last refers to the concepts of interconnectivity, interdependence and to the definition of a space of flows, outlining the relational constitution of places.

Rarely place branding debate has reflected on the notion of place. Van Gelder (2008) sustained a shift from the so called “place 1.0” to the “place 2.0”. While place 1.0 has a discrete nature in political, economic, social and cultural terms, and is imposed by political *élites* deciding about the region, place 2.0 is the bottom-up result of interactions across communities acting according to ever changing needs and

purposes. Although the author does not refer to a spatial dimension of interactions, we consider the place 2.0 as an attempt to stress on relationships rather than on geopolitical borders in order to define the region. Though in a different vein, in place branding literature Govers and Go (2009) contributed to re-read the notion of place in an immaterial way according to the technological revolution concerning ICTs and information systems. We interpret Govers and Go's words in terms of a virtualization of place on the basis of emerging "imagined communities" which are characterised by an abstraction of time, space and social relations. According to these authors, such relations have been favoured by technology and differ from the more traditional relations featuring "immediate communities".

On the basis of a relational ontology of geographies, we can build on loose notions of place and space. These allow us to include additional typologies of place into place branding discussion. Accordingly, we go beyond a "pre-given set of places, spaces or scales" and agree with Jessop when claiming that "new places are emerging, new spaces are being created, new scales of organization are being developed and new horizons of action are being imagined" (2002:179). Allen et al. (1998), then, claim the region is a series of open and discontinuous spaces which are constituted by social relationships. These develop in relation to specific purposes whose pursuit may push the relationships beyond formal boundaries (Allen et al. 1998). That is,

"regions only exist in relation to particular criteria. They are not out there waiting to be discovered; they are our (and others') construction" (Allen et al.1998:2).

Despite of many contributions sustaining this interpretation of space and place, we are aware of the difficulties in "thinking space relationally" since, although this has become a sort of common sense in geography, the deep meaning and nature of a relational space has never been well investigated (Massey 2004a).

According to Massey (2005), three are the assumptions for dealing with the concept of space. First, space is a product of interrelations, second, space is a sphere of multiplicity, third, space is always under construction. Particularly, the first two assumptions refer to relations as those "embedded practices" which spill out from global and local interactions. The third assumption suggests an ever changing space due to the continuous evolution of relations, thus imagining space "as always in process". In the same vein, Terkenly defines place as a "spatio-temporal intersection of a particular constellation of human relations" (Massey 1993 cited in Terkenly 2006:7). By introducing the variable of time, this definition supports a changing nature of space.

## 2.2. Border

Dealing with space and place draws attention to the notion of border. According to Paasi (2002), border and identity are the two sides of a coin since together they determine the “space of agency” and participation. Nevertheless, Paasi (2002) recognizes the increasing fuzziness of borders that nowadays do not succeed in isolating bounded social formation. Paasi also states that “regional consciousness” is not related to the borders reflecting governmental authority (2002). This does not imply that boundaries disappeared, but simply that they have changed their own nature. By interpreting Paasi’s words, we can say boundaries play now a new role. They no longer close and separate places, rather they do serve as links between spatial contexts by enabling cultural flows.

This change in nature is also witnessed by Amin who states boundaries are no longer necessarily territorial or scalar since

“the social, economic, political and cultural inside and outside are constituted through the topologies of actor networks which are becoming increasingly dynamic and varied in spatial constitution”(2004:33).

Put simply, boundaries still exist but they tend to follow the dynamic shape of networks. Amin (2004) makes the example of Padania (Italy) and the *Lega Nord* political party shaping it. This is composed of networking geographies which are involved into a narrative of cultural-territorial differences concerning Northern Italy in opposition to the rest of the peninsula. In this case the notion of border is crucial to defining the exclusivity of Padania identity, but at the same time there is no pre-given territory which physically contains it. Padania is certainly an entity with no fixed physical or administrative borders but while some politicians keep claiming that it does not exist, its cause seems to pervade political debate in Italy (Diamanti 2010).

Although on a socio-cultural and economic perspectives there is a chance to rely on loose, soft or porous borders, one could argue that the ‘exclusive’ effects of borders should not be overlooked. Even place branding literature affirms the strength of administrative boundaries (Hankinson 2001) and this is reflected by the fact that branding actions are mostly contained within administrative borders. The on-going relevance of boundaries is further supported in human geography. By analysing London and Cambridge identities and their strong international interconnectedness, Allen et al. (1998) argue the lack of importance of local authority boundaries in place identity formation, while coalitions of local political actors and residents do use the borders in order to protect their territories from external “invasion”. That is, borders are kept alive as much as possible by those stakeholders that have interests in maintaining a well-defined and self-contained place guaranteeing their power and, thus, their legitimacy inside and outside those boundaries.

To summarise the paragraphs above, borders seem not to be essential to the definition of a place that can be defined according to a relational interpretation of space. As we will better explain later, borders are not fundamental to the emergence of place identities because borders no longer work as closed containers of communities. However, there might be forces that are motivated to maintain borders e.g. political forces, in an attempt to prevent any loss of legitimacy.

### 2.3. Identity

Place identity is complex and controversial topic. To the ends of this project we will briefly discuss it in regard to its relation with place, space and borders. A preliminary definition is provided by Allen et al. saying that the regional identity determines a demarcation, a difference or discontinuity in regard to the other regions and, while open to constant reinterpretation, it is characterised by a “legacy of meaning” (1998:10). That is, identities signal a discontinuity within the global network, being a visible spot characterised by a different pattern of relationships. Just such discontinuity in this pattern makes the identity emerge and makes the region visible.

Inescapably, the interpretation of identity is to be linked to the notions of place, space and border. In order to position this project, we highlight two possible ways to read the triad space/place, border, identity. To be brief, we consider a “modern identity” as static (Massey 2004b), unchanging and insisting on a bounded space which is internally coherent and differentiated from all the rest which is intended as ‘otherness’ (Massey 2005). Along with this notion of identity, place is intended as a geographical territory “out there”, as something pre-given which is to be discovered and which is controlled and managed by local actors (Amin 2004). The modern identity is based on “the myth of spatial immanence” according to which there is a single and true reading of any landscape in the mental reconstruction of identities (Keith and Pile 1993).

This is related to the concept of authenticity which is increasingly taken into account in place branding. Authenticity is internally generated within a bounded place whose unchanging nature makes it the proof of ever or pre-existing identities (Massey 2005). Gilmore and Pine II (2008) suggest that, in contemporary society, authenticity is the only capable of providing a competitive advantage. In branding literature, although there is no widely accepted general definition, Lury (2007) suggests defining authenticity in relation to the source of value attached to a product (and so to a place). Such source is “the origin of something”, i.e. an individual, an event, an organization or place, whose *a priori* existence adds value and distinctiveness to the brand. In relation to this, culture is a vital identity component because it may provide elements of authenticity, uniquely attached to a place. In fact, culture is said a “promotional gift” (Anholt 2002) shaping a distinctive place personality (see Aaker 1997).

In contrast to the “modern identity”, “post-modern identities” are relationally constructed and highly mutable due to the ongoing negotiations and reproduction of practices in an unboundable space (Massey

2004b). In fact, cities and regions do not have “prescribed or proscribed boundaries” (Amin 2004) so that the unbounded space of negotiations and exchange impacts on the formation of identities. In addition, post-modernism implies a spatial turn which retakes into account the margin. In fact, the margin is said a space for opportunities and openness so that identities do develop in the margin, thus remapping post-modern geographies (Soja and Hooper 1993).

Also in the frame of a new cultural economy of space, post-modern forms of spatial organization are claimed. The new cultural economy of space, which is related to the cultural consumption in tourism and entertainment industries, reinterpret the emerging spatial patterns of relationship, thus leading to a geographical change (Terkenly 2006). That is, the renegotiation of space in light of culture and its use for economic purposes redefine geographies which, thus, necessarily go beyond historical borders in order to create a “thirdspace”, that is a space of flows and connections.

Two aspects are particularly worth of further notice i.e. the changing nature of post-modern identities and their multiplicity. As said, identities are in motion because of their relational construction. Since relationships – their intensity and type – can change, also identities tend to change. Massey (2005) provides the example of the city of Hamburg (Germany). Here an attempt to foster an urban identity change was made by favouring citizens’ re-imagination of the city. The aim was, in fact, turning the city into the “Gateway of the World” by making it more open and welcoming towards immigrants. By leveraging on existing practices involving citizens and the resulting relational capital, a shift in the imagination of the city was provoked, thus making (identity) change tangible. That is, identities follow a “process of perpetual rewriting” so that it is difficult to speak of “existing identities” as already constituted and fixed (Paasi 2002).

On the other hand, multiplicity is salient feature of post-modern identities. On a post-modern perspective, dealing with identities means to recognize their multiple fragments, as critical human geography states (Soja 1989). This approach lacks of certainty and clarity but it allows the empowerment of multiplicity, by fostering “the construction of combinatorial rather than competitively fragmented and separated communities of resistance” (Soja and Hooper 1993:189). Plurality and identity fragmentation are related to the coexistence of multiple identities and to the so called “heterotopic sense of place” (Amin 2004) which may enrich place branding debate.

This project refers to a post-modern perspective on geographies which allow us to consider space/place, borders and identity as the elements of post-modernity framing a conceptualization of inter-territorial brands. Post-modernity has already entered the debate on place branding by means of an analysis of the notion of brand co-creation “[which] transcends traditional geographic boundaries and assumes a post modernist affiliation identity” (Muniz and O’Guinn 2001 cited in Aitken and Campelo 2009). In order to further the knowledge on inter-territorial brands i.e. network brands, a second research question is:

*To what extent the network brand (or inter-territorial brand) is a “post-modern” brand?*

This question is to be answered in relation to an analysis of network brand identity in order to state whether or not this takes the shape of ‘post-modernity’ i.e. an ever changing identity, open to multiplicity, resulting from on-going negotiations emerging in the space of the network. This would be a contrast with place branding literature mainstream that, usually focusing on administrative borders determining the unit of analysis, tends to overemphasise spatial identities as closed, pre-determined and unchanging, repository of place uniqueness and authenticity.

### **3. A review of network (or inter-territorial) brands**

#### **3.1. Methodology**

In the following sub-sections a review of networks and network brands will be presented, in response to the exploratory purpose of this paper. The selected cases do not represent a full list of networks experiences. This secondary research took into account those cases that either have received attention in literature (not necessarily in place branding literature, as highlighted in Table 1) or have been exhaustively explained in official documents, websites and practitioners’ viewpoints. This means that, when possible, academic materials were complemented by other sources.

#### **3.2. Overview of the selected cases**

This review gives a chance to understand what inter-territorial brands are and demonstrates the increasing relevance of such phenomenon. Sometimes it is a matter of strategic branding, sometimes network brands spontaneously (in an absence of strategic actions) spills out from inter-territorial networking, featuring either contiguous or less proximate areas. These networking areas may express a need to underline their interconnections in order to make their collaborative efforts visible.

Generally, there is a lack of analysis tackling inter-territorial brands. On the basis of such a weak insight, we undertook this research and do consider further empirical engagement unavoidable. Table1 shows a collection of relevant cases, their brief description and the related sources of data and information.

Table 1. Inter-territorial (network) brands

<i>Case</i>	<i>Description</i>	<i>Source</i>
Old West Country, New Mexico (US)	Cooperative branding across seven rural communities with cultural and geographical proximity. The OWC destination-marketing consortium works as an umbrella marketing organization for the whole region. It is considered as a good	Academic ( <i>destination branding</i> ): Cai 2002

	practice due to the positive results obtained in tourism sector.	
Waterland, North-Holland province, the Netherlands	A rural region composed of 8 municipalities. An area which mainly attracts Amsterdam residents for leisure and recreation.	Academic: Simon et al. 2010
Noordoostpolder, province of Flevoland, the Netherlands	Rural area composed of two municipalities. The lands were reclaimed from the sea around 1942. Inhabitants were "selected" to represent the whole Dutch society in the area.	Academic: Simon et al. 2010
Thames Gateway, South East England, UK	The largest regeneration plan in UK aiming at providing new jobs and houses by 2016. London Olympics will be located in the Gateway area. The area crosses three regions in South East England (London, Essex, Kent) and includes 16 local authorities.	Academic: Allmendinger and Houghton 2009 Official documents: Binks 2005; Bennett and Morris 2006; CABE 2006 Practitioners' viewpoint: van Gertler and Roberts (undated); English Heritage 2004
Cascadia, US-Canada	This is a city-region brand in the cross-border region of Pacific North America including parts of 7 jurisdictions (Northern California, Oregon, Washington, Idaho, Western Montana, British Columbia and South East Alaska). Cascadia has been promoted as an environmental-ecological brand.	Academic ( <i>place branding</i> ): Smith 2008
Open Cities	This is a project promoted by the British Council in partnership with cities all around the globe. The aim is producing a portfolio of best practice case studies of cities characterised by openness, and a set of guidelines for policies of migrants' attraction, fundamental driver of urban success. The example of "Madrid Global", which is a strategy for enhancing international positioning of Madrid, recognises Open cities as a great opportunity to communicate the leadership of the city in regard to openness and capacity to be international partner of the British council and the EU.	Academic ( <i>place branding</i> ): Mateo and Seisdedos 2010 Website: <a href="http://opencities.britishcouncil.org/web/index.php?home_en">http://opencities.britishcouncil.org/web/index.php?home_en</a>
HabitatMed – Euromedsys Interreg B Medocc, Mediterranean region	A European project aiming at providing a "region of origin" brand for businesses and designers in the furniture and home design industry belonging to Mediterranean regions. 12 regions from Italy, France, Spain, Tunisia, Algeria and Morocco were involved.	Academic: EuroMedsys (2007) Practitioners' viewpoint: VVA Valdani 2007
MiTo (Milano-Torino), Italy	This brand represents a cultural initiative "MiTo SettembreMusica" which is an international music festival involving Milan and Turin. These cities collaborate for synergies on the basis of a wider project aiming at promoting the axis Milan-Turin as "the best of Italy" in fashion, design, automotive, ICT, finance and eno-gastronomy.	Websites: <a href="http://www.mitosettembremusica.it/">http://www.mitosettembremusica.it/</a> ; <a href="http://www.netdiap.polimi.it/Lab/mito/index.htm">http://www.netdiap.polimi.it/Lab/mito/index.htm</a> ; newspaper on line archive: La Stampa. Official documents: Mellano and Rolando 2007
Baltic Sea Region	This is a region encompassing 11 countries featuring high differences in language, history and culture, economic and industrial structures. May are the challenges to be faced. Branding initiatives were undertaken under the supervision of Anholt's and Olins' consultancies.	Websites: <a href="http://nation-branding.info/2006/12/19/creating-competitive-identity-baltic-sea-region/">http://nation-branding.info/2006/12/19/creating-competitive-identity-baltic-sea-region/</a> ; <a href="http://nation-branding.info/2008/06/16/branding-baltic/">http://nation-branding.info/2008/06/16/branding-baltic/</a> ; <a href="http://eu.baltic.net/">http://eu.baltic.net/</a>
Cruise Baltic	Cruise Baltic is a cooperative brand building for the network in the cruise sector based in the Baltic Sea Region. The brand involves 26 destinations in 10 countries (in total 44 countries). The aim is improving the quality of facilities and coordinating international marketing.	Academic ( <i>destination branding</i> ): Lemmetyinen and Go 2010
Oresund	Oresund is a cross-border region involving Copenhagen area (Denmark) and Scania (Sweden), hosting 3.5 million inhabitants in total. The Oresund Bridge opened in 2000 and it is the flagship project symbolizing integration in the region. This is promoted as "Oresund – the Human Capital" offering good living, working and recreation. Oresund Network is in charge to steer the brand, while the Oresund Committee is the political platform propelling integration. Medicon Valley and Oresund Science Region are "sub-brands" concerning biotechnology and high tech industry development.	Academic: Coenen et al. 2004; Lundquist and Winther 2006; Hospers 2004; 2006 ( <i>place branding</i> ), Pedersen 2004 ( <i>place branding</i> ); Garlick et al. 2006; Berg and Lofgren 2000; Lofgren 2000; Berg 2000; Ristilammi 2000; Linde-Laursen 2000; Tangkjaer 2000

<p>Ruhr Metropolis, North-Rhine Westphalia (Germany)</p>	<p>This region encompasses 11 cities and 42 smaller municipalities working together for transformation through culture. This brand signals the shift from heavy industries and coal to a cultural economy. This has being strengthened by being designated a "European Capital of Culture" under the label RUHR.2010 ("Essen for the Ruhr 2010"), which has guaranteed further awareness of the region.</p>	<p>Academic: Kunzmann 2004; Krajevsky (2008) Websites: <a href="http://www.essen-fuer-das-ruhrgebiet.ruhr2010.de/en/home.html">http://www.essen-fuer-das-ruhrgebiet.ruhr2010.de/en/home.html</a>; <a href="http://www.ruhrmetropolis.com/index.html">http://www.ruhrmetropolis.com/index.html</a>; <a href="http://www.metropoleruhr.de/">http://www.metropoleruhr.de/</a></p>
<p>The Greater Louisville Area, US</p>	<p>Greater Louisville Branding Project is a regional branding measure in the US involving 25 counties across two states. According to Osgood (2010) this regional alliance can be considered as a successful regional brand.</p>	<p>Academic (<i>place branding</i>): Osgood 2010</p>

### 3.3. What is a network brand?

Although there are evident differences across the brand experiences shown in Table 1, we try to draw out statements that, emerging from one or more cases, contribute to the formation of an analytical framework for the investigation of network brands. Firstly, there is a need to provide a general definition containing all the chosen examples. Accordingly, we state that network brands are those labelling an institutional collaboration between two or among more governmental authorities, being local (involving municipalities e.g. MiTo and Ruhr Metropolis), regional (involving administrative regions e.g. HabitatMed) or national (involving countries e.g. the Baltic Sea Region). Clearly, the network brand covers a space “managed” by more than one single political and administrative elected authority and is related to cooperation undertaken on a voluntary basis.

Concerning governance great variety was found. Sometimes governance consists in collaborative schemes led by public actors like in the cases of Waterland and Noordoostpolder, where small rural municipalities arrange a cooperative scheme. Sometimes private-public partnerships are settled in order to build on the contributions of a wide range of actors like in the case of the Old West Country, where a consortium composed of public and private actors effectively works as an umbrella destination marketing organization (Cai 2002). A unique example of public-private partnership, which is reaching high degrees of coordination and cooperation, is the Greater Louisville Community Branding Project which is “a coalition of civic leaders including state governments, economic development, the corporate and philanthropic communities, educational institutions, and cultural entities” (Osgood 2010:267).

Governance can reach very high level of complexity, as Thames Gateway demonstrates. In line with an arrangement of “meta-governance”, Thames Gateway regeneration project involves three government regions, three sub-regional partnerships (Thames Gateway London, Thames Gateway South Essex, Thames Gateway Kent Partnership), two urban development corporations, one urban regeneration company, six local partnerships, the Olympic Delivery Authority for the Olympic Park and, finally, 16 local authorities located in the Gateway (Allmendinger and Haughton 2009). Collaboration can also be undertaken by

Regional Development Agencies (RDAs) as in the case of the 'Northern Way' in UK, which was not included in the table because of high uncertainty generated in 2010 by British government abolishing RDAs. In this case, three RDAs started operating not according to regional borders but according to networks of transports and market flows, thus aiming at developing Northern England (McLeod and Jones 2007).

In some cases an institutional thickness characterises the network space. Oresund case highlights that a strong "institutionalization" can characterise network development. Hence, the Oresund Identity Network is in charge of branding and communicating the emerging region, the Oresund Committee represents the political platform taking care of the region-building process (Hospers 2004), the Oresund University is a network of eleven universities within the region, collaborating for strengthening their international competitiveness and pushing forward the Medicon Valley and Oresund Science City projects (Garlick et al. 2006), and the Oresund Business Council groups regional industrialists (Berg 2000). This proliferation of 'networks within the network' is in line with the open-house organization pursued, a "loosely coupled network organization" where inclusiveness and participation are sought (Berg 2000).

As said, collaboration across administrative borders tends to be undertaken voluntarily. However, policies and incentives from higher levels in the governmental hierarchy may push towards cooperation. For example, in Italy the national law 267 (18/8/2000) states that the "*Unione dei Comuni*" is an institutional framework that can be established by two or more municipalities, in order to help especially small towns to develop a shared and more efficient management of territorial functions and public services. This law allows regional authorities to define incentives and dedicated funds to boost inter-municipal unions<sup>1</sup>. Furthermore, in the case of Oresund project, European Union exerted some influence (Pederson 2004) and, according to Hospers (2006), European funding was crucial to starting the cooperation. In fact, the European Union backed the Euregion and celebrated it as best practice to be followed for the construction of a European open space and a new enlarged market (Linde-Laursen 2000). Also in the case of Cruise Baltic destination (network) brand European funds played a role and, as Lemmetyinen and Go (2010) affirm, when the funding program was over, both private and public partners kept being willing to continue their cooperation.

### **3.4. Why do network brands emerge?**

We can draw indications about aims and motivations pushing local, regional and national authorities to undertake cooperation and, consequently, network branding. Multiple typologies of network branding are shown in Figure 1. This witnesses the relevance of network brands which are quite diffused both in the shape of sectoral branding e.g. to attract visitors or to support exportation, and in the shape of integrated place branding. For example, the regeneration plan of Thames Gateway aims at tackling the decline of the

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<sup>1</sup> [http://pers.mininterno.it/unioni\\_comuni/index.php](http://pers.mininterno.it/unioni_comuni/index.php)

area by improving housing and creating jobs so that, beside the integrated approach which brands the area as a place to live and work, much emphasis is put on the goal of FDI attraction which is deemed potentially beneficial to the whole South England (see Binks 2005; Bennett and Morris 2006).

Figure 1. Place branding matrix

Function \ Scale	Nation	Regional	Local	Inter-territorial
Destination branding				Old West Country, Baltic Sea Region, Cruise Baltic
Place of Origin (export)				HabitatMed, Baltic Sea Region
FDI promotion				Thames Gateway, Baltic Sea Region
Culture & Entertainment Branding				Open Cities, MiTo, Ruhr Metropolis
Integrated place branding				Waterland, Noordoostpolder, Thames Gateway, Cascadia, Oresund, Rhur Metropolis, The Greater Louisville

The most frequent reasons at the basis of cooperation and network branding are the following. In the case of the Old West Country the rural communities sought a critical mass since single small villages have too few attractions. Cai (2002) said that, only by packaging together a network destination, associations can be steered in visitors' minds. This is not an issue only for small rural communities. Assuming a different scale, Erki Peegel who is director of the marketing unit of Enterprise Estonia, claimed that the promotion of the brand 'Baltic Sea Region' is fundamental for country's performance in different areas e.g. investments, tourism and exports, since Estonia is small and, thus, has limited resources (Collier 2008). In this regard, network brand offers the chance to reduce costs for international marketing. This was the goal of Cruise Baltic, together with the aim of further improving the quality of facilities and services, so that the cruise sector was offered as a single product (Lemmetyinen and Go 2010).

The network is sometimes considered as the appropriate space for planning. This is claimed in regard to Thames Gateway since actions focus on the space of opportunities rather than following administrative borders (Allmendinger and Haughton 2009). The 'network as space of opportunities' is also the rationale for MiTo collaboration. The project is rooted in the past and, particularly, in late 1980s when the two northern industrial poles in Italy, Milan and Turin, started declining and the rising unemployment in traditional sectors pushed towards looking at cooperation as a way to re-launch growth (La Stampa 8.10.2004; Mellano and Rolando 2007). Furthermore, cooperation is also deemed a means for reaching an appropriate size, as shown by the case of Oresund. In fact, the cross-border region was seen as the scale for competing internationally with the regions of the Blue Banana (Hospers 2004).

The network is also chosen for propelling transformation and change. Rhur Metropolis brand is conceived and communicated as a network mobilizing resources for change. The shape of a network is also confirmed by Rehfeld who defines the region as a “polycentric urban agglomeration” (1995:89). As Krajevsky (2008) states, it is important to remember that Rhur in North Rhine Westphalia was one of the most important industrial areas in Europe, going through an intensive structural change since 1980s. That is, historically linked to heavy industry and coal which experienced a tough decline, the region “has undergone a major transformation and is changed from a grey industrial area into a modern and trendy culture metropolis”<sup>2</sup>. According to Krajevsky, “a conglomeration of post-modern leisure facilities and creative experience economies has established in Rhur Valley” and is based on leisure and tourism industries as well as on technological innovation and service sectors (2008:1). This “cultural” transformation was stigmatized by the European Cultural Capital designation in 2010<sup>3</sup>.

According to the “flexible functional boundaries” theorized by Kunzmann (2004), the transformation is labelled as “Rhur” and is fuelled by increasing towns willing to cooperate and to capitalize on regional culture and its economic potential. Actually, Rhur Valley economy “is still formed by coal, steel and heavy industry” but an image change has been triggered (Krajevsky 2008:2). This same aim of propelling change and transformation is at the basis of the Greater Louisville brand that, with the slogan “Louisville: Possibility City”, is succeeding in counterbalancing the regional image of “old south” i.e. slow and behind the time area (Osgood 2010).

In regard to international cooperation of regions, the aim can also be fostering international relations of local and regional systems. There is a need to promote openness and capacity to interact and collaborate internationally for local and regional systems which increasingly have to move and grow in a global market. Currently, the economy is characterised by fast international flows of information, people, goods and capitals so that territories have to deal with such global context (Bellini et al. 2008). An example of “decentralized co-operation” was put in place by the Interreg program “Euromedsys” which was also the framework for working on the idea of the “Mediterranean identity” for the ‘habitat’ industry. Concerning this industry, HabitatMed brand was aimed at creating synergies in the field of design, production and identity-building for the Mediterranean partnership (Bellini 2007), thus confirming the potential role of branding in supporting international cooperation projects.

On the basis of the statements presented so far, it seems that pragmatism is the overall approach to interpreting cooperative experiences and, accordingly, network branding. However, the sources used for this review provided contrasting arguments. Certainly, as reported in the case of Thames Gateway, because of the rationale of catching new opportunities for development, an apolitical and technical decision-making

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<sup>2</sup> <http://www.ruhrmetropolis.com/>

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.essen-fuer-das-ruhrgebiet.ruhr2010.de/en/home.html>

is sustained and deemed unavoidable for the creation of a “new institutional geography” where “what works best” is chosen (Allmendinger and Haughton 2009). According to Berg and Lofgren (2000), in the case of the Oresund region-building process was pushed and sustained by industrialists who were certain of the economic opportunities in the space of the network. The authors reflect on the weak political interest in a network project since “who wants to be a politician in a region that does not exist?” (Berg and Lofgren 2000:10) on an administrative and political viewpoint.

However, the Oresund experience was also interpreted in a different way. According to Lundquist and Winther, the project was led by a political rhetoric and propelled by expectations emerged through “political ambitions and wishful thinking of key actors than through analysis of the economy” (2006:115). Another interpretation consists in looking at Oresund region-building as neither political nor market-driven process. In contrast, it is said to be “an ongoing amalgamation of interests (political, social and economic), ideas (visions, fads and fashion) and collective intentions (manifests, pacts, partnerships, and agreements)” (Berg 2000:57). This seems to be reflected in a bottom-up approach where actors participate on the basis of “a statement of belief in the region” rather than on the basis of calculated economic and social pay-offs (Berg 2000: 58).

Pragmatism and political approach can also be linked by causality. In the case of Cascadia, Smith (2008) analysed the brand on a historical perspective. The author found that, although the “enviro-branding” - which stresses the ecological and environmental profile of Cascadian network - was designed to improve regional economy, subsequently this led to the definition of trans-boundary environmental policies in the Pacific Northwest. That is, branding region for pragmatic purposes e.g. exploiting opportunities in environmental economy, can drive processes of institutionalization and can affect political agenda until shaping policy-making.

### **3.5. What partners for cooperation?**

Looking at the nodes of the network i.e. municipalities or administrative regions, what is the criteria shaping a partnership? This means to reflect on similarity and complementarity, in order to understand what is the likely basis for creating synergies within an inter-territorial network. In relation to Section 1, we are in charge of discussing on the extent to which networking implies a pure cooperation among partners willing to face the competition with outside regions and, in contrast, on the extent to which networking implies partners’ co-opetition due to an ongoing competition among them. This means to reach further insight into the nature of network brands.

Despite of a lack of explicit reference to this issue in the analysed materials, we make an attempt to build on the information available about the cases in Table 1. In the case of the Old West Country, Cai (2002) argues a “principle of similarity” among partners in light of similar composition of their natural and cultural

attractions. A degree of homogeneity also features Cruise Baltic brand partners where all destinations offer services and experiences in the cruise sector on the basis of an agreed brand performance and joint values (Lemmetyinen and Go 2010). In these two cases, the involved tourist destinations operate in a frame of competition since all of them have to attract the same target. However, they chose to collaborate to pursue a positive-sum game, thus defining a co-opetitive strategy.

Differently, in the Oresund region, complementarity seems to be dominant. Although there is no explicit reference to this issue, Hospers (2006) refers about a mutual interests of Copenhagen municipality and Sweden. In fact, Copenhagen had to develop its metropolitan area to compete with the other metropolises of the Blue Banana, while Sweden had to re-launch the economy of Scania, a peripheral and poor region in the south border of the country, by linking it to Western Europe. In Scania there has been the so called “regional panic”, according to which border areas and local corners have been investing much to transform themselves into attractive regions and to allure national attention (Berg and Lofgren 2000). In line with such complementarity, while Copenhagen area is “urban” and cosmopolitan, Scania is “rural” and offers high quality of life. The Oresund, thus, is “a mix of soft and fast”, an alternative to the overstressed style of global metropolises (Lofgren 2000).

In relation to the distinction between cooperation and co-opetition discussed in Section 1, in the Oresund one could hypothesise a pure cooperative framework. However, in contrast to the destination branding cases above, in this case this issue is quite controversial. In lack of any dedicated research focusing on this point for the Oresund, we cannot say there are no elements of co-opetition since this network tackles many multifaceted aspects of regional development and cooperation and co-opetition are certainly mixed up. Clearly in tourism marketing, it is easier and more objective to distinguish co-opetition from cooperation on the basis of a marketing plan that well defines ‘supply’, ‘demand’ and competitors.

Co-opetition is explicitly mentioned in relation to MiTo. The analysis of the newspaper archive “La Stampa” proves an explicit reference to co-opetition alongside the process of collaboration between Milan and Turin. Competition is evident among the two industrial poles in Northern Italy, a competition which is now extended to the domain of cultural economy (La Stampa 27.10.2009). At the same time, there is a set of common problems in need for a collaborative response and, in this regard, a positive-sum game is claimed. However, this has not been effectively translated into policy-making so far (La Stampa 17.10.2004; La Stampa 27.10.2009).

Concerning partners’ compatibility is, however, a different matter. Beyond geographical proximity, a cultural proximity is claimed in the case of the Old West Country and the Oresund. Put simply, cultural proximity refers to the capacity to work together on the basis of a shared set of values and sensitivity to same problems. In the case of the Oresund, Denmark and Sweden are said to have much in common,

meaning history, culture, language and similar economies characterised by small and open markets (Hospers 2004). However, significant barriers have been represented by regulatory differences between the two national jurisdictions, due to the cross-border nature of the network (Hospers 2004).

### **3.6. How do network brands emerge?**

Network brand is interpreted as a piece of a puzzle representing a cooperative/co-opetitive experience. Concerning Thames Gateway, the consultants Olins and Jones (cited in CABE 2006) affirmed this regeneration project consists in a “placemaking” i.e. the generation of a place (region) which is intended as a process of meanings attachment to a space i.e. a network space. This process needs to get through two phases which are, first, the building of coalitions and, thus, of a network of collaborating actors and, second, the naming and nurturing of the spirit of the place. This is so relevant that, as Bennett and Morris (2006) reported, a poor sense of place and a weak sense of community in Thames Gateway have been challenging the attractiveness of the whole area. Similarly, Berg (2000) argues the region-building process develops across the phases of involvement of actors, imaginative creation of regional imagery and emergence of collective enthusiasm and spirit.

This is a matter of identity-building in the space of a network. In the case of the Baltic Sea Region, the presumption for branding strategies is that there is not “a Baltic identity” yet, while this can only emerge along with the evolution of the region as a proper network of services, policies and concrete actions (Baltic Sea Region 2006). In relation to the Oresund, the identification of a process is controversial due to a series of “improvisations” and “experimentations” (Berg 2000). For example, in 1999 the Oresund brandbook was published, thus witnessing the big emphasis on identity-building. The birth of the region was invoked (The Birth of Oresund 1999 cited in Berg and Lofgren 2000), even though the region “does not – yet – really exist!” (Berg and Lofgren 2000:7).

From the analysis of the cases in Table 1, two models of network brand identity-building emerge i.e. a linear and a non-linear process. On one hand, we can infer from the Oresund case that inter-territorial networks are likely to emerge from a non-linear sequence of making, acting and naming. Since the beginning of the process iconic infrastructures e.g. the bridge and other flagship projects, were built in order to root the idea of an emerging region in people’s minds (Berg and Lofgren 2000). The bridge was said to make the cooperation “credible, visible and tangible” so that the volatility of relationships across the border (relationships among companies, universities and institutions) would have been counterbalanced (Berg 2000).

Not only the built environment but also the natural one can provide a suitable symbology for regional identity-building. This has been sustained concerning the river Thames, its estuary and the parklands in Thames Gateway (CABE 2006). In regard to the Oresund, events have played a key role in attaching

meanings to the region, thanks to their persuasive power and symbolic intensity which have shaped episodes of the Oresund narrative (Berg and Lofgren 2000). According to Ristilammi (2000), event management in Oresund concerns the “orchestration of attention” and the creation of a positive feeling of expectations for the future of the region. By the way, Thames Gateway will host 2012 Olympic Games and this is expected to improve the sense of place.

On the other hand, Lemmetyinen and Go (2010) who described the Cruise Baltic brand building refer about a more linear process composed of three temporal phases i.e. initiating, integrating and identification, which are signalled by the achievement of subsequent levels of cooperation i.e. functional, relational and symbolic. The initiating phase is often led by dominant network actors which are capable of propelling cooperation. However, at this stage all the other actors realize the advantages of collaboration increasingly, thus achieving a functional level of cooperation. When actors reach coordination, the integrating phase starts, thus leading actors to share experiences within the network and contributing to a common brand identity-building. Consequently, the identification phase starts. At this stage, partners identify the brand as crucial part of their alliance. Accordingly, the symbolic level of cooperation makes participants conceive the brand as distinct entity, thus developing commitment towards it.

Is the emergence of a shared identity possible in the space of a network? The case of Berlin seems to support it. If we consider Berlin as the result of cooperation policies and branding between East and West Berlin (Colomb and Kalandides 2010), we see that a new shared identity involves the two communities, crossing the border previously signalled by the Wall. This was possible by means of improving the mood of Berliners as belonging to one single community (Kalandides 2007; Colomb and Kalandides 2010).

Concerning the Oresund, in 1998 Professor Wichmann Matthiessen, one of the chief proponents of the cooperative project, said that the Oresund can succeed in becoming a proper “region” thus experiencing “a development comparable to that of the Berlin region” (Berg 2000:81). Similar hope is expressed for the Thames Gateway by suggesting that “very different places within a region can build a strong relationship with each other and define a shared identity” like in the case of San Francisco bay, which is here considered as a successful “lively (...) and post-industrial” brand (CABE 2006:19). A single brand is also the goal of the Greater Louisville branding project which attempts to develop one single integrated platform for messages, communication and for leading any future development in the area (Osgood 2010).

However, a shared network identity does not necessarily imply an erasure of nodes’ individual identities. In regard to the Old West Country, the birth of a shared identity is the result of a consistent image building for the whole area but, at the same time, each village keeps affirming its own identity within the framework provided by the shared brand (Cai 2002). Moreover, the case of MiTo seems to suggest that a sub-set of values featuring the partners can be transferred to the shared network brand, while partners maintain their strong individual identities. In fact, while Milan and Turin brands manage their own values through urban

branding, MiTo brand seems to contain those values concerning excellence in art, music and, generally, culture. In the case of the Thames Gateway, beside the goal of fostering a new shared identity, it is proclaimed that there is no attempt to reduce multiple identities within the network to one single identity (CABE 2006). Furthermore, the need for brand flexibility was reported in the Greater Louisville brand development. Such flexibility has been deemed a basis for reaching agreement among diverse stakeholders which are allowed to personalize their individual slogans provided that these do not clash with the brand essence (Osgood 2010).

Moreover, the emergence of a regional identity is to be analysed on two distinct points of views i.e. from inside and from outside. For example, in the Oresund case the network is seen from the outside as a region projecting a unitary and well-defined identity, while weak is its perception from inside. In fact, the Oresund network has been internationally perceived as a place for investments so that new firms have been settled and employment rate has jumped up, especially thanks to the FDIs in medical technologies (Hospers 2006). Especially in 1995-99, the Oresund scored much higher growth rate in comparison with the rest of Denmark and Sweden (Hospers 2004) and this economic discontinuity in space was a valid signal for the identification of the Oresund as a region. But, while this can be enough for outsiders and international investors, this is not sufficient to make residents feel the existence of a new region.

According to Hospers (2006), the Oresund Euregion “is not reality 100% yet”, and this is demonstrated by a lack of enthusiasm shown by inhabitants who seem not to visualize the region in their daily life in the Oresund. The author witnesses a sort of “irritation” for the “artificial region” where substantial barriers still exist e.g. high fees to cross the bridge and regulatory differences. Beside this, Pederson (2004) argues a failure since a lack of democratic participation to the branding process has prevented residents from feeling part of the project (in contrast with the widespread strong commitment affirmed by Berg in 2000). According to Pederson, branding was driven by consultants concerned more about delivering a global brand (i.e. meaningful to outsiders) than about designing an internal marketing strategy. This is said “the Oresund paradox” since, being often defined as place branding best-practice, actually it has created little enthusiasm among insiders (Hospers 2004).

On the contrary, the case of the Greater Louisville suggests that, by means of a constant involvement of the community “at every step of the brand development process” (Osgood 2010), the brand can reach legitimacy so that the regional brand becomes a “community brand”. The branding team succeeded in such involvement not only by exploiting the sense of pride, responsibility and ownership felt by the multiple communities living in the Greater Louisville area but also by fostering it through a customer relationship management programme (Osgood 2010).

### 3.6.1. The role of place branding in network building

In light of Section 3.4. it seems that, in network formation, branding can play a significant role. According to Hospers, place branding is one success factor in the Oresund experience because branding contributed “to plac[ing] the region on the map” and to making it “familiar” in Europe (2004:276). This is true despite of an impossibility to define the Oresund as place branding best-practice, also in light of the evident mismatch produced between internally-perceived identity and international reputation. Moreover, by comparing Waterland and Noordoostpolder, Simon et al. (2010) stated that professionalism in promoting the area made the former popular, while the lack of consistent branding made the latter brand fade away, thus provoking a “disappearing region”. That is, by talking about the network, by naming and labelling it, the region might come to existence (Berg 2000).

The issue of naming can be considered as relevant part of network branding, differently from city, region and country branding, as sustained by Anholt (2010 editorial). As already stated, “emerging regions and regional aggregations formed on the basis of cross-border relationships” are good “candidates for change” along with a re-branding process including the introduction of a new name for the area (Gertner and Kotler 2004:56). For example, the Old West Country brand name offered a chance to overcome limitations given by names of single towns and villages. This “new” brand name contributed to the enhancement of the network brand equity which was much higher than the one of individual town brands (Cai 2002).

Another important issue arises in regard to network brand strategies. That is, part of the experiences under scrutiny seems to refer to the past and to a common history in order to justify the existence of the network and its identity. Differently, part of the network brands affirms a completely new identity which is born in contemporary networking rather than in a forgotten past.

On one hand, Noordoostpolder refers to the past and the old lands existing since before new lands were reclaimed from the sea (Simon et al. 2010). Then, the Mediterranean brand HabitatMed was conceived as spontaneous result of a common history and culture involving regions on the Mediterranean sea (VV Valdani 2007). According to Hankinson (2001), several locations forming a conceptual entity can rely on historical events to strengthen their shared identity rather than on current reality.

On the other hand, the Oresund was “evocated” as “something new rather than [as] something dormant” (Berg 2000:88) since the “joining forces” across the borders determined a new entity. Also the Orespeak which is the rhetoric or narrative sustaining the Oresund birth celebrated the idea of progress, openness, dynamism, transformation and melting pot (Berg and Lofgren 2000) whose novelty seems to be the intrinsic justification of the whole project. According to Berg and Lofgren (2000), the debate in Oresund has deeply focused on the dialectic between “new” and “old”. However, the result is that the Oresund brand emphasizes the creation of a region “with the help of fantasy and imagination” (Berg and Lofgren 2006),

rather than the celebration of “real” and “authentic” values coming from the past. There was a “values transportation” transferring identity elements from Copenhagen e.g. active, eventful, experience city, and Sweden e.g. creativity, communicative, knowledge-based, to Oresund. However, change seems to be the prevailing idea alongside the trans-national and trans-cultural merging and mixing process (Lofgren 2000).

Branding the “novelty” seems to be the rationale of the Greater Louisville brand (Osgood 2010). Brand strength is, in fact, said to be the capacity to make it visible what the region currently is, rather than referring to a stereotypical regional image mainly determined by a lack of information on the area and by an overemphasis on the past.

According to the available sources, the old/new issue seems to be relevant also to the Thames Gateway case. On one hand, “The guide to the future Thames Gateway” defined the network as “the space of novelty” where “new houses, roads, railways, offices, factories, parks must all feel new, and help new things happen” (CABE 2006:13). The Thames Gateway is seen as the opportunity to reinvent the identity of the area as a whole by restarting from scratch. In contrast, in 2004 the English Heritage report stated that the Thames Gateway is not an “artificial region created in 21<sup>st</sup> century”, rather its historical heritage witnesses this area is the “cradle of innovation” of England since it saw, for example, the first long-distance electric power station, the first industrial papermaking and the first dock railway in the country (2004:4).

To conclude a discussion on the role of branding in network building, we have to take into account the significant problems that network brands are likely to face. In fact, there is evidence confirming that borders do challenge the network and, accordingly, the credibility and sustainability of the brand in the long run. Borders represent, in fact, administrative and regulatory barriers that might impede network progress (McLeod and Jones 2007), while a lack of planning tools and policy-making for the inter-territorial scale along with a lack of homogeneous and comparable data and statistics can weaken collaborative initiatives (Mellano and Rolando 2007).

In addition, it seems that the network brand might suffer from a lack of authority and legitimacy all along its development. Concerning the Oresund, Berg and Lofgren (2000) affirm that such lack determines a process characterised by ambiguity, uncertainty and complexity. In fact, legitimacy is exclusively provided by the success of single steps of the Oresund project. The example is the success of the bridge that since 2000 evidently improved the number of contacts (commuters, business contacts, collaborations...) between the two sides of the region. Does this mean that single failures in the development of a network will challenge further progress?

This is not discussed in the available materials, but Berg (2000) explicitly speaks of “fragile legitimacy” which depends upon the acceptance of the project and of single initiatives. This implies that branding strategies may contribute to the development of a network, just by fostering its acceptance. However,

network branding cannot be the ultimate solution. In this regard, it is worth reporting that the Oresund development is said to be stagnating because of a delay in political decisions removing regulatory differences within the network (Hospers 2004). This delay has been a barrier against the credibility of the Oresund brand. That is, the emergence of a sustainable network brand is always related to a synergy between “doing and labelling”.

#### **4. ‘Network brand’ conceptualization**

On the basis of the above arguments, we will try to answer to the two research questions on the ‘network brand’, thus contributing to its conceptualization. The first research question concerns the extent to which network and network brand building is a pragmatic process, rather than being political. As stated above, we deem pragmatic a process that is inspired by ‘market principles’, while we deem political a process that is much related to ‘power games’ within the political arena.

In this regard, there is much evidence sustaining pragmatism at the basis of networking and the emergence of network brands. In fact, the search for critical mass and an appropriate size to face global competition, the reduction of marketing costs, the exploitation of growth opportunities, the reference to a network space as the one triggering transformation and change and, finally, the internationalization of territories (in case of cross-border cooperation), are reported as the main reasons at the basis of inter-territorial networks. In support of this thesis, there is also a ‘theoretical’ lack of political interest in regard to networks and network brands since they do not coincide with administrative and political units and, thus, they are not an arena where to earn political consensus.

At the same time, we cannot exclude a political nature of the process leading to network and network brands. As stated above, behind an inter-territorial networking project there might be “political ambitions” and a political rhetoric which are far from a pragmatic rationale. We hypothesise that, beyond an agglomeration of local interests pushing towards networking, political gains and consensus building within the involved territories are determined. In addition, we should not overlook power games among the nodes of the network, especially in presence of a dominant node willing to gain power and leadership within the network.

Furthermore, there is room for arguing a link between pragmatism and political rationale by relating to possible political spillovers of a pragmatic process of networking. That is, as a consequence of a pragmatic network steering, the space of the network might become a political arena by means of a process of

institutionalization that assigns accountability and legitimacy to the network in regard to specific functions and sectors of policy-making.

The second research question concerns the extent to which the network brand can be defined as 'post-modern'. This definition was summarised by stating that the network brand is post-modern when it relies on a post-modern identity. In this project, identity is said post-modern in relation to specific characteristics i.e. ever-changing, open to multiplicity, resulting from the on-going negotiations emerging in a network space.

In relation to multiplicity, much evidence confirms a likely post-modern identity at the basis of a network brand. Firstly, we referred about the possible coexistence of the network brand together with individual partners' identities. This is relevant in regard to branding strategy design and the possibility to reflect on an articulated brand architecture (Ashworth and Kavaratzis 2009; Dooley and Bowie 2005), rather than in terms of a monolithic identity. Secondly, multiplicity is confirmed by the multiple fragments of network identity emerging from the review of cases. On one hand, we referred to different network identities perceived by insiders and outsiders, on the other hand we reported about different network identities promoted by different stakeholders which might have either 'progressive' or 'conservative' expectations from the network brand, as demonstrated by the Thames Gateway case.

However, concerning the ever-changing and continuously negotiated identity, it seems that the network brand does not take the shape of a "post-modern" brand necessarily. In fact, when the "new" prevails and an original network identity seems to emerge, there is room for speaking of a post-modern brand which is the result of ongoing negotiations within an unbounded space. To further sustain this, the network is defined as a "soft space" featuring "fuzzy boundaries" (Allmendinger and Haughton 2009) or, generally, a not well-defined area whose borders continuously change (Hospers 2004). Astonishing is what reported by Berg (2000) about the University of Kiel in Germany which applied to become part of the Oresund University network. A brand stretching over a network made of flexible borders and open space seems to fit our definition of post-modernity.

Nevertheless, a network brand can also rely on a static and unchanging identity, when the "old" prevails along with the necessity to affirm the existence of a common history in the past when a bounded place (with its own identity) used to contain all the territories in the network. This is in line with most place branding strategies which tend to overemphasise closed, pre-determined and unchanging spatial identities as repository of place uniqueness and authenticity.

These are two different strategic approaches to designing and fostering a network brand. Both show advantages and risks. On one hand, the network brand relying on a post-modern identity has the advantage of promoting a novelty, thus providing the nodes of the network with a chance to consolidate a new image

in an attempt to trigger a self-fulfilling prophecy (Bellini 2004) of development. As said, in this case the brand risks being felt as “artificial” especially by insiders. However, there is room for sustaining that an appropriate brand management inspired by relationship marketing principles can help to overcome this type of risks (see Osgood 2010). On the other hand, the reference to a common history and a shared past for all the nodes can be a source of legitimization for the network brand, relying on the re-emergence of a dormant identity which has always been “there”. However, in this case one may argue that just the more active actors promoting contemporary networking might feel overlooked and even excluded by the invoked network identity.

## **5. Research limitations and conclusions**

This paper stated that, beside the assumption of inter-territorial competition, cooperation and co-opetition are viable strategies for local and regional development and, accordingly, for branding. Cooperation and co-opetition have been only marginally considered in place branding (Kalandides 2007; Bellini et al. 2010; Cai 2002; Hankinson 2001; Moilanen and Rainisto 2009). These rationales allowed us to introduce the network brand into the debate. Being the unit of analysis for our discussion, the network brand was defined as covering a relational space “managed” by more than one single political and administrative elected authorities, seeking cooperation on a voluntary basis. Beside this definition, we attempted to conceptualize the network brand according to the geographical notions of place, space, border and identity.

A secondary research reviewed 12 inter-territorial networks, thus providing information and data for a conceptualization of network brands. Particularly, the review aimed at answering to two research questions. The one concerning the extent to which network and network brand building is a pragmatic process rather than a political one, the other concerning the extent to which a network brand takes the shape of a post-modern brand.

The first research question was answered by highlighting that, beyond a surface of pragmatism, there might be a political process leading to the emergence of a network brand. Moreover, there is a chance that, in some cases, a pragmatic approach to networking tends to become political process by means of institutional spillovers turning the network into a political arena.

The second research question was answered by highlighting two different strategies shaping the network brand. While in some cases the network brand does take the shape of a post-modern brand by embodying the elements of a post-modern identity, there is a chance to build a network brand by referring to well-defined and static borders, bounded place and, accordingly, to a static and monolithic identity, mainly

coming from the past. As a matter of fact, there is room for sustaining risks and opportunities in relation to both strategies.

This paper has limitations. In fact, the arguments in this paper were drawn from sources of data and information that were not designed for a discussion on the concept of 'network brand'. This, in fact, is proposed by this project. Accordingly, we suggest considering the content of this paper as exploratory, raising working hypotheses rather than universal statements. Moreover, we built on the analysis of cases at very different scales. We are aware of the fact that issues regarding inter-municipal brands are different from those regarding those brands that label cooperation among countries. In particular, we drew lessons from the Oresund case whose cross-border nature inescapably has much influence on the network. In addition, we included cases of destination branding e.g. the Old West Country and the Baltic Cruise. We believe that, though being network experiences, they present a lower degree of complexity in comparison with "integrated brands". However, our attempt was to reach an analytical insight into cooperation/co-competition as possible rationales for place branding, thus providing a framework for further research on network brands.

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