STAKEHOLDERS' PERCEPTIONS OF THE COMMUNICATION OF THE TERRITORIAL BRAND: THE CASE OF BRAGANCA

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ABSTRACT

Territorial marketing aims to build a long-term strategy to structure and communicate territorial offers and integrates several elements that are essential for successful implementation. The local community, from residents to firms, is a fundamental element in the success of this strategy. This paper analyzes the perceptions of different stakeholders regarding their involvement in the strategic process of marketing the municipality of Bragança (a historical municipality in the northeast of Portugal) as a tourist destination. This study employed a mixed methods methodology. In the first part (qualitative analysis), interviews were carried out with the different competent bodies in the promotion and communication of the destination and with the county's tourist entities. In the second phase (quantitative analysis), questionnaire surveys were conducted in the local community to complement the first part of the methodology. The results show little involvement of tourism entities in the construction and communication of the destination, as well as some gaps in identification with the destination. These results reinforce and justify the importance of the local community in marketing territories (which is fundamental), as well as the construction of a set of recommendations aimed at solving some of the problems found through the adopted methodology.

Contribution/Originality: This study explores a particular territorial brand and collects evidence on how its potential is suffering from a disconnect between the multiple stakeholders involved. The study complements previous research by drawing attention to the importance of alignment among the diverse territorial brand stakeholders.

1. INTRODUCTION

Through communication, destinations can disseminate their tourist attractions, their identity, and their products. It is also this form of interaction that, when properly used, arouses in the consumer the desire to know and explore a destination (Sebastião & Ribeiro, 2012). In the tourism sector, communication is performed by a diverse range of actors, from the local community and tourists to the public and private sectors (Sebastião & Ribeiro, 2012). Among these, local communities have been the target of greater investment by tourism agents

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because communities are in direct contact with the tourist and assume an increasingly active role in the communication of a destination (Correia, 2014).

Although the relevance and potentiality of the local community in the promotion of a destination are undeniable, Aitken and Campelo (2011) stated that "often, residents and the local community are left aside in the brand creation process (...)." Therefore, they do not participate in the implementation of the territorial marketing strategy (Kavaratzis & Ashworth, 2008), nor, in turn, in the brand/destination communication. Thus, given its importance, not exploring this actor can lead to evolutionary difficulties in the process of building a territorial marketing plan.

The implementation of an ideal territorial marketing strategy involves cooperation between all the different tourism agents. These agents participate in the construction and communication of the territorial brand, being an integral part of the destination offer (Adamus-Matuszyńska, Dzik, Michnik, & Polok, 2021; Correia, 2014; Correia & Brito, 2017; Kavaratzis & Ashworth, 2008; Zenker, Braun, & Petersen, 2017). A strategic plan that aims to promote a territorial brand must consider the connections with and between entities. All entities that are part of the local community must cooperate in defining the values and the image that the destination wants to transmit. Thus, the entire destination communicates as if it were one and conveys the same message (Correia & Brito, 2017). This allows a much faster and more substantiated evolution of a given tourist territory.

It is essential to address this issue, not only because it contributes to the construction of a more effective plan for the promotion of the destination, in which all actors are united, but also because stakeholders attribute value and meaning to the brand as a basis of its creation (Kavaratzis, 2012). Therefore, the research question that guided this study was: "How do stakeholders perceive the communication made by the entity responsible for the management of the Bragança tourist destination?" This research aimed to understand the involvement of these actors in the communication process conducted by the regional entity of tourism promotion of Bragança as a destination.

This paper is divided into seven chapters. The introduction contextualizes the theme and presents the research objectives. The second chapter comprises the literature review, which addresses the themes supporting the focal research problem. The third chapter details the adopted methodology, more specifically the research characteristics, the study objectives, the instruments used for data collection, the interviewees and respondents, and, finally, the analysis method. The fourth chapter synthetically presents the municipality of Bragança and, subsequently, the analysis of the results obtained from interviews and surveys is delivered in the fifth chapter. The sixth chapter describes the study's main conclusions, and Chapter 7 discusses the limitations and suggestions for future research.

2. DESTINATION MANAGEMENT

Excluding the Covid-19 pandemic years, the tourism sector has experienced significant growth in the last decade. It is a promising sector in the development and stimulation of local economies and contributes to poverty reduction through job creation (Balanzá & Nadal, 2003; Kotler, Bowen, Makens, García, & Flores, 2011). Also, it facilitates regional development by improving infrastructure and valorizing heritage. Recently, there has been an extremely positive rise in the importance of the tourism sector, making it more appealing and causing tourism destinations to become increasingly competitive with each other, both in the tourism offer they provide and the different resources they use to attract tourists. However, to achieve success in the industry, a variety of destination communication strategies must be implemented to "offer a truly unique value offer" (Costa & Azevedo, 2015). Territorial marketing is a basic pillar for the creation of these strategies, both for already consolidated and emerging destinations, to satisfy the consumer, ensure sustainable development, and position the destination in the global tourism market (Buhalis, Costa, & Ford, 2006). Marketing is increasingly used in the tourism sector, which, due to its competitiveness, requires the creation of strategies to differentiate each product and service (Kotler et al., 2011). Marketing contributes to the competitive positioning of destinations in the global market through each

region's authentic and differentiating factors, allowing them to stand out from the others (Kavaratzis & Ashworth, 2008).

The territorial management of a destination comprises several key elements:

- The tourist destination, defined by the World Tourism Organization (2019) as a "physical space with or without administrative and/or analytical boundaries in which a visitor may stay overnight" .
- The entities responsible for the management of tourism destinations (Destination Marketing Organizations or Destination Management Organizations; DMO), one of the main agents responsible for the destination's communication.
- The destination brand.
- The stakeholders, i.e., the set of various actors that act in a particular destination.

Robson and Robson (1996) and Kavaratzis (2017) highlighted some actors that constitute the stakeholders related to the destination at the tourism level, such as local businesses, customers (whether residents or visitors), the media, tourist offices, the physical environment, and the tourism industry, among others.

2.1. Stakeholders' Roles in the Tourist Destination

This vast network of stakeholders adds value to the destination and plays crucial roles in it, although these roles have not yet been the subject of much scientific study. This is because most studies have focused only on visitors and investors, neglecting residents (Mohamed, 2019). Some authors (Kavaratzis, 2017; Magnoni, Valette-Florence, & De Barnier, 2021; Stylidis, 2018) consider this element – residents – one of the most important elements in a tourist destination. It is therefore important to mention the different roles that stakeholders play in the tourist destination to better understand their importance; these roles are illustrated in Figure 1.
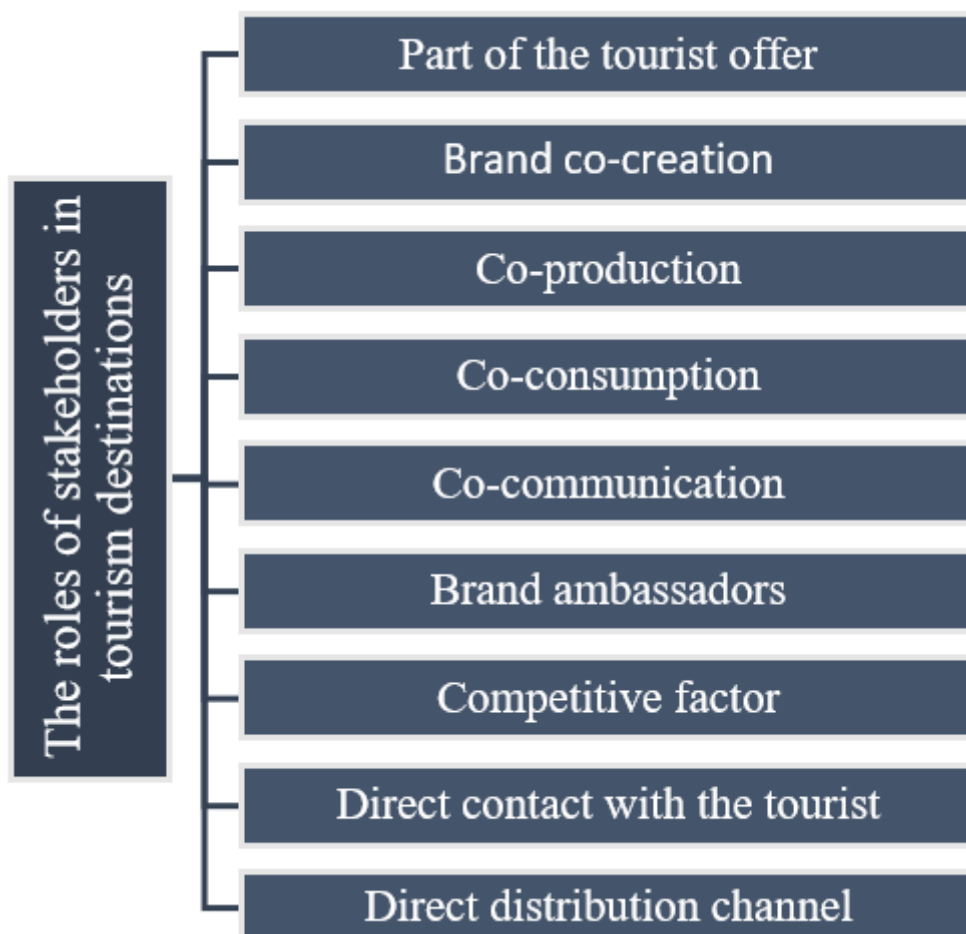

Figure 1. The different roles of stakeholders in the tourism destination.

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First, it is important to mention that the diverse network of actors that are involved in the destination is part of its tourism offer (Braun, Kavaratzis, & Zenker, 2013). This network is mostly composed of entrepreneurs and small and medium enterprises, which contribute to the economic gearing of the destination (Correia & Brito, 2014; Kavaratzis & Ashworth, 2008).

As part of a destination, the local community consumes, produces, and communicates its territorial offer. This multiplicity of actors participates:

- In the co-creation of the destination brand, giving it a touch of authenticity. That is, the community gives the brand a set of meanings and attributes, contributing to its identity (Aitken & Campelo, 2011; Strandberg, Styvén, & Hultman, 2020).
- In the co-production of the destination (Braun et al., 2013; Hankinson, 2007), in the sense that they produce the tourism offer.
- In the co-consumption of the destination, since locals also consume the territorial offer (Ashworth & Voogd, 1994; Choo, Park, & Petrick, 2011; Hankinson, 2007).
- In destination co-communication, because they communicate the territory (Correia & Brito, 2017). The local community functions as an uncontrolled source of communication, and therefore, through different means, it communicates the territorial offer daily.

In addition to this, the community is considered the destination's brand ambassador (Braun et al., 2013; Mohamed, 2019; Stylidis, 2018; Zenker et al., 2017). Locals transmit their perception of the brand identity to tourists since they are on the front line when it comes to direct contact, and consequently, a perception of the quality of the destination is transmitted to them by tourists' feedback (García, Gómez, & Molina, 2012).

A study conducted by Freire (2009) showed that the local community is a crucial factor in tourists' choice and purchase of a destination. The author conducted a comparative analysis of tourist destinations – the Algarve (Portugal) and the Costa del Sol (Spain) – in which he analyzed the different dimensions that influence the purchase of a destination. In the Algarve, the sites are mentioned as a positive impression of the destination that is associated with the destination brand and, in turn, leads to an increase in tourist flow. On the other hand, in the Costa del Sol, tourists perceive the local population as less hospitable and state that their interactions do not produce a positive effect, which ends up negatively influencing the destination brand.

Tourists see the local community as a credible and important information source for the choice of products and services the destination offers (Choo et al., 2011), acting as a differentiating factor that contributes to the competitiveness of the destination. Increasingly, destinations have similar attributes and offers, and as the author Freire (2009) states, "(…) the variable 'Local people' can be an element of great value to promote differentiation."

Another important role, which is gaining increasing prominence, is the online contact that the different stakeholders can have with tourists. Information and communication technologies (ICTs) allow locals to get involved in the dissemination of the destination brand in a more accessible way (Braun et al., 2013) since tourists share the various online platforms used to access accurate and reliable information about the place they want to visit with them. Finally, stakeholders linked to tourism can also establish a direct channel through which they distribute the territorial offer to potential consumers. This happens and is justified because many tourists choose to buy tourism services directly from the companies that hold this supply at the destination; therefore, a direct channel allows closer contact with the actors of the destination (Balanzá & Nadal, 2003).

Given the relevance of the local community in the communication of a destination, their needs and desires should be considered and integrated to allow them to participate in the process of creating and implementing the destination brand (Braun et al., 2013; García et al., 2012; Kavaratzis & Ashworth, 2008; Kavaratzis & Hatch, 2013). Some authors (Bornhorst, Ritchie, & Sheehan, 2010; Eugenio-Vela, Ginesta, & Kavaratzis, 2020; Kavaratzis & Hatch, 2013) have highlighted the involvement of stakeholders as a key element in the success of destination branding within the strategic territorial marketing process. Despite the proven role of the local community in the

process of destination branding, it is under-explored in the literature so far (Choo et al., 2011). Some academic approaches regard the community purely as a territorial marketing promotion vehicle (Kavaratzis & Ashworth, 2008), thereby removing it from the brand-building process (Aitken & Campelo, 2011).

3. METHODOLOGY

The methodology used in this study was of an exploratory nature with a mixed methods approach (quantitative and qualitative) and was applied to the municipality of Bragança. The methodology is intrinsically associated with the research objectives: understanding the importance of the different stakeholders in the communication of a destination; identifying the competitive factors of Bragança compared with other territories; understanding the perceptions of stakeholders concerning the promotion of the destination conducted by the municipality; distinguishing the involvement of stakeholders in the promotion of the destination.

Data collection was conducted via individual semi-structured interviews (qualitative method) with the different stakeholders of the destination Bragança, as well as questionnaire surveys conducted in the local community (quantitative method).

The main objective of the interview script for public entities and associations was to get to know their role in the promotion and communication of the municipality of Bragança, while the interviews with entrepreneurs aimed to discover their perceptions of and involvement in the promotion and communication process of the municipality.

Some of the interviews were conducted online through the Zoom platform, and others were conducted in person, particularly those with some entrepreneurs. The audio of all interviews was recorded with the consent of the participants. In total, 14 entities were interviewed, 6 of which were public entities/associations and 8 of which were entrepreneurs. The interviews took place in May and June 2021. The qualitative analysis method comprised several stages. In the first stage, all the interviews were transcribed. Then, a thorough reading was performed of all the data obtained, followed by the codification of the topics and their importance.

A questionnaire survey was also used for data collection. The main objective was to survey the local community, residents of the municipality of Bragança, to obtain information about their perception of their involvement in the promotion and communication of the municipality of Bragança.

The questionnaire was implemented from June 30 to July 31, 2021, and was divided into two parts. The first part concerned the socio-demographic data of the respondents (gender, age, marital status, education, and work activity). The second part was created in light of the survey conducted by Choo et al. (2011). The adaptation of the work of Choo et al. (2011) was justified due to the similarities between the studies. Therefore, the three dimensions used by those authors were applied to discover the level of identification the community felt with the destination. This second part of the questionnaire was composed of an open question, a closed question, and 12 items for which respondents indicated their level of agreement using a 5-point Likert scale ranging from totally disagree to totally agree.

The questionnaires were sent by email to the local community in general, with the requirement that respondents resided in the municipality of Bragança, were at least 18, and would together constitute a representative sample of the population (convenience survey). According to the last Portuguese census, the total population of Bragança over the age of 13 was 12774 (National Institute of Statistics, 2021). Working with a 90% confidence level and a 10% margin of error, the ideal sample size would be 68 (Cochran, 1977). After the validation, a total sample of 88 residents (20 participants more than the ideal sample) was considered valid for the study.

The quantitative method of analysis comprised two phases. In the first phase, all socio-demographic data were collected using the Google Forms platform. In the second phase, all the data obtained from the second part of the survey were analyzed with the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) v.28 software. This software was used to obtain data such as Cronbach's Alpha, conduct correlation tests, and construct scatter diagrams.

4. THE COUNTY OF BRAGANÇA

To better understand the proposed objectives, it is fundamental to know some details about the municipality of Bragança. Therefore, we highlight the following characteristics: territory, tourism sector, the brand identity of the municipality, and stakeholders.

4.1. Territory

The county of Bragança is in the northeast of mainland Portugal, in the northern region and sub-region Terras de Trás-os-Montes (NUT III). It is one of the largest counties of Portugal in terms of geographical area, at 1173.6 km². The municipality borders Castilla y León (Spain) to the north, see Figure 2.
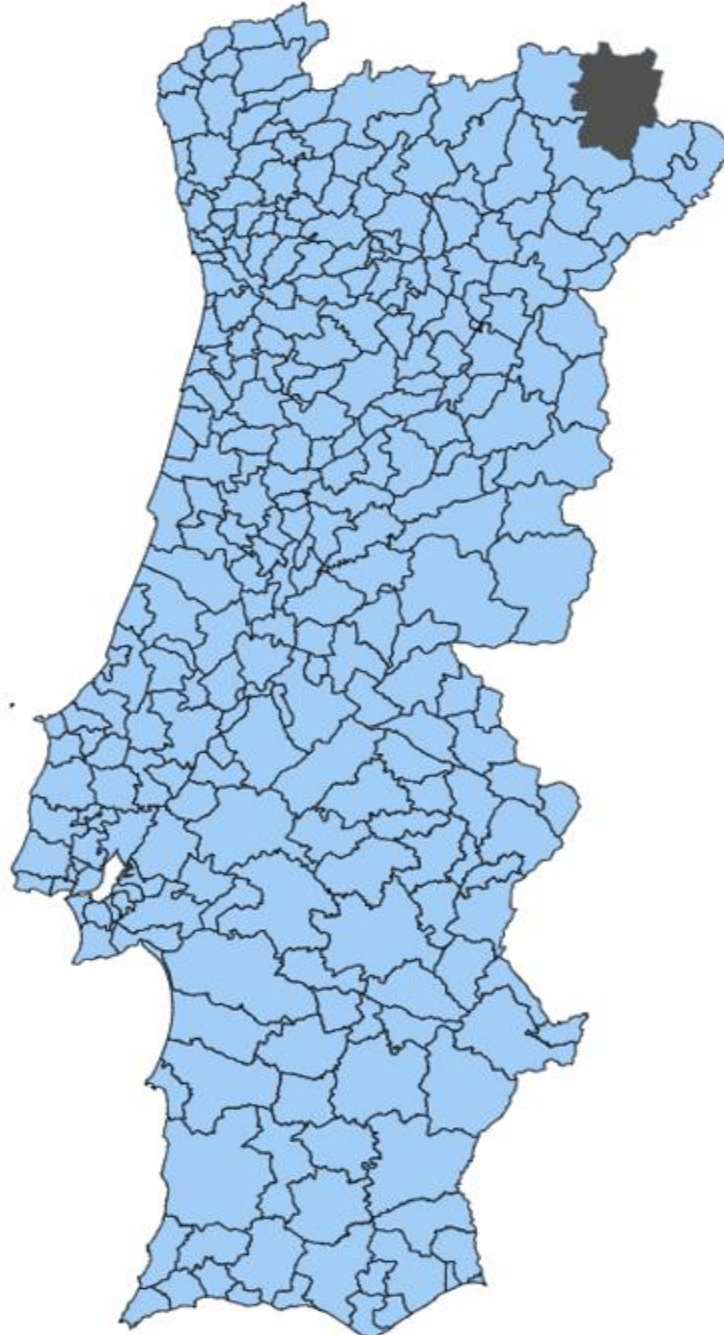
Figure 2. Map of Portugal highlighting the municipality of Bragança.
Source: Taken from the website Pordata.

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The territory's mission, values, vision, and motto are outlined in Table 1. They govern the administrative and cultural structure of the municipality of Bragança.

Table 1. Mission, values, vision, and motto of the municipality of Bragança.

Concept	Description
Mission	To promote and ensure the best quality of life for the population of the municipality of Bragança, through the implementation of innovative, intelligent, sustainable, and integrated development actions.
Values	Transparency - Rigor - Ethics - Integrity - Team spirit - Social responsibility - Sense of belonging and cohesion - Respect - Dedication - Ambition - Innovation - Cooperation .
Vision	To transform the municipality of Bragança into an incubation center par excellence (intelligent, sustainable, connected, inclusive, innovative, authentic, and intellectual), of affirmation in the regional, national, and international space, creating a strong own brand, able to guarantee the conditions for sustainable development, through dialogue and proximity with all local economic agents, enhancing civic participation.
Motto	People first.

Source: Taken from Bragança Municipality (2021).

4.2. Tourism Sector

Regarding the tourism sector, in the year 2019, the municipality of Bragança had a total of 73,699 guests and 111,434 overnight stays, with an average stay of 1.5 nights. According to the National Institute of Statistics (2020), as of 2019, the municipality of Bragança had 36 visitor accommodation options, including hotels, local accommodation, tourism in rural areas, and residential tourism.

Figure 3 shows a gradual increase (over five years, from 2015 to 2019) in the total number of guests and overnight stays in the municipality of Bragança. The total number of guests increased by 12.96% from 2018 to 2019. This places the county above the national average (7.5%) and the average of the northern region (11.12%). Similarly, the total number of overnight stays within the municipality of Bragança increased by 12.41%, while Portugal (+3.69%) and the northern region (+10.56%) showed lower average increases (National Institute of Statistics, 2019). The figures illustrate the continuous growth of the tourism sector in the municipality of Bragança. This growth justifies a greater investment by the municipality in initiatives that stimulate and boost the sector.
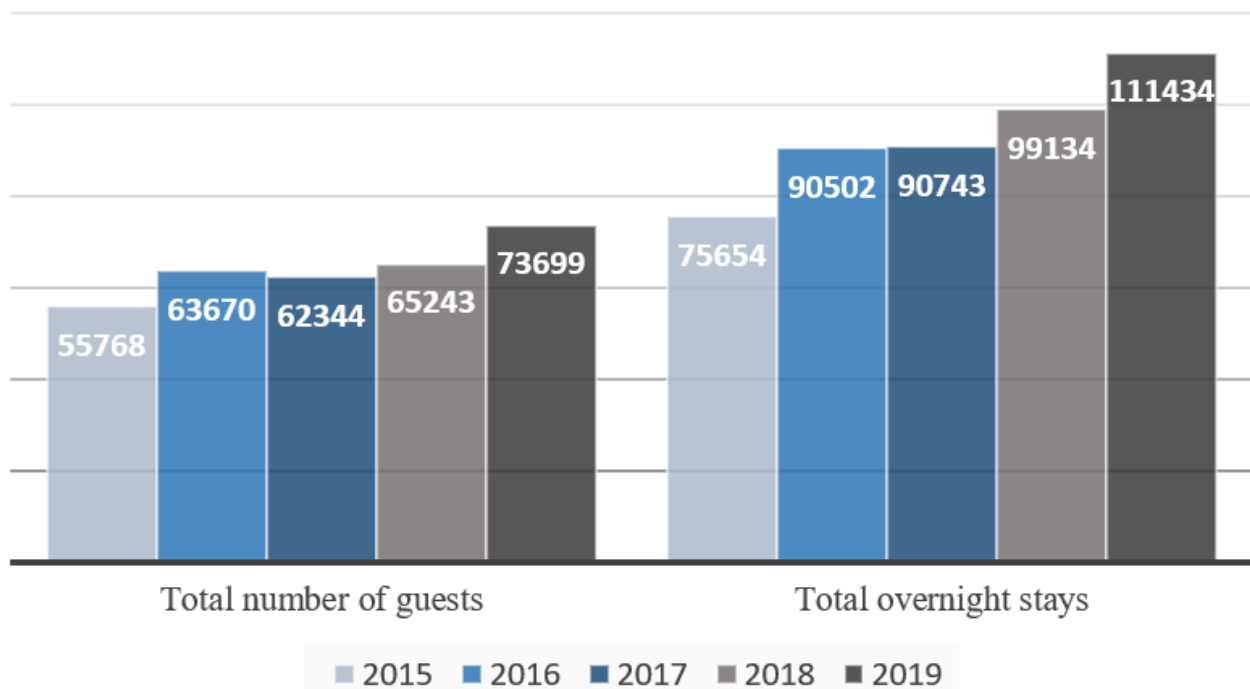

Figure 3. Evolution of guests and overnight stays in the municipality of Bragança (2015-2019).
Source: Taken from National Institute of Statistics (2016); National Institute of Statistics (2019).

4.3. County Brand Identity

In 2015, a new graphic identity was created for the Bragança brand. This consisted of restructuring the brand image, namely the logo in Figure 4, to include several elements of traditional and Transmontana culture.

Figure 4. Logo of Bragança city council.

One of the strategic axes proposed in the Major Planning Options, Budget and Personnel Chart 2021 (Bragança Municipality, 2021) focused on economic development and competitiveness, more specifically, the aim to "increase Bragança's notoriety index, projecting the brand as a territory of excellence." This projection was in line with the goal: "Develop, during the year, at least five promotional actions of the Bragança Brand, in Portugal and abroad" (Bragança Municipality, 2021).

4.4. Stakeholders

The Council of Bragança identified the following stakeholders as part of the strategic process for the year 2021: citizens, workers, government, parishes/unions of parishes, the "Norte 2020" program, educational institutions, cultural and sports associations, business and trade associations/services, entrepreneurs, suppliers, and other local agents.

5. ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

5.1. Interviews

To facilitate a nuanced analysis of the interviews, the questions and answers were separated into themes. This was done by creating themes into which the provided answers could be inserted, as shown in Table 2. This included, in addition to the specific themes, an "other ideas" category.

Table 2. Themes analyzed in the interviews.

Themes analyzed
Strengths and weaknesses
Tourism demand and evolution of the interviewed areas
Consultation of entrepreneurs
Community involvement
Cooperation between the Chamber and the different associations
Perception of the message that Bragança's territorial brand passes on to tourists
Local community's sense of belonging to the Bragança brand
Bragança in 1 word
Other ideas

Most interviewees were asked about the strengths and weaknesses of the municipality of Bragança as a tourist destination. Unique and competitive attributes compared to other territories were identified as strengths, while issues in need of improvement were considered weaknesses.

Table 3. Strengths and weaknesses mentioned in the interviews.

Strengths	Weaknesses
Nature	Misuse of the Citadel
Gastronomy	Lack of tourism supply
Culture	Accessibility
Heritage	Lack of professionalism in the tourism sector
Hospitality	Tourist disorganization
Rurality	Lack of care (cleaning and signposting) in natural spaces
• Typical villages	
• Not massively changed	

Table 3 presents the main strengths and weaknesses mentioned by the interviewees. In order to illustrate the highlighted strengths, it is important to present the interviewees' ideas in their own words:

"It is a very rich territory with many ancestral traditions and offers the potential more memorable and unique tourist experiences than they can experience in other areas of our country." (Interviewee A).

"(...) the authenticity – the truth is that we are a region that is not massively changed by tourism, that is, those who come here can experience some authenticity in the rurality that we still have, in the nature that we still have." (Interviewee F).

Concerning the weak points, we highlight the following ideas:

"There is still a lack of professionalism in the tourism area, whether on the part of tourism agents or even the entities themselves that have the responsibility of managing the tourism." (Interviewee M).

"The weak point is disorganization at the tourism level. (...) The organization chart for this should be: the public sector to promote, the agents that are on the ground (restaurants, accommodation, museums, etc.) are all connected, and in the middle, there are one, two, three people who create a bridge between them and work to collect information, to update, to monitor (...) to know what the concerns and what the wishes of the private sector are and at the same time what the client type is (...) there has to be a very direct connection. (...) There are parts of the territory that are not talked about (...)." (Interviewee C).

"Nature itself in a raw state has two points, a very strong positive point, which is that it is untouched, and the negative point, which is that untouched nature is not enough for us to promote nature tourism. In other words, we must have economic agents, we must have companies linked to the tourist entertainment sector that really bridge the huge gap that exists between the city and the region." (Interviewee F).

5.1.1. Demand for and Evolution of Tourism in the Area

Entrepreneurs of various commercial businesses were asked about the evolution of tourism in the region and the tourism demand for their business. This was asked in order to better understand the entirety of tourism, the tourism demand in the region, and whether these entrepreneurs were strongly linked with the tourism sector. It is important to understand how strong this link is, given that these entrepreneurs have direct contact with tourists. It is important to note that answers relate to the pre-pandemic (Covid-19) period.

Businesses that are not directly linked to the tourism sector (restaurants/grocery) generally stated that their business was much sought after by tourists, with one of the entrepreneurs even mentioning that more than 60% of their customers consisted of tourists.

Other ideas about tourism evolution from the interviews included:

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"Tourism was naturally growing. (...) In terms of the economic factor, it was very positive because there was always intent, at least in the people I met, and other employees perceived it as well, to realize that they had intentions to invest here, and some even came looking to invest in the country, it was extremely positive." (Interviewee B)

"I can say that we were living in the so-called golden years of tourism. Tourist demand was growing and our region had become better known and recognized, and I think it had, and still has, a great deal of potential." (Interviewee A)

5.1.2. Consultation of Entrepreneurs

Entrepreneurs were asked whether they had already been consulted by the Bragança City Council (CMB). The purpose of this question was to understand whether the CMB had enquired about entrepreneurs' needs and interests about the destination and how they should communicate the destination to their tourist clients. Concerning this question, there was no consensus among the eight entrepreneurs, with some stating there was no such consultation, while others referred to some kind of contact – though it sometimes did not meet the needs of the entrepreneurs. Some of the ideas expressed were:

"I cannot remember very well... But I can say that there have already been certain initiatives (...) although I know that there is interest on the part of the municipality, I don't know if it is annual or not, to bring the tourism actors together and give them some training or information about the territory and get feedback." (Interviewee A)

"Yes and no. No, because it was not done in the best way, it was a consultation that they did (...) with various agents in the field, and then what came out was more of the same. (...) Despite listening to us, what they plan to do afterward is not exactly what we need (...)." (Interviewee C)

"At the level of communication... the Chamber often approaches us, but it ends up being very vague. That is, to get anything done, we must ask and ask (...). What I think is that a lot of effort, a lot of resources have been wasted, and above all, there is no dialogue, especially between the different state agents that could really regulate this strategy." (Interviewee F)

"Generally, I would say no... no tourism work is done with us. There's no territory work, there's office work, there's image work. (...) And I don't think that the council is working to try to understand, in my opinion, to try to understand the development of the city and to try to understand the gaps in terms of territory." (Interviewee G)

5.1.3. Community Involvement

Stakeholders were asked about their perception of the inclusion of the local community in the promotion and communication strategy of the destination. Of the 14 interviewees, only 9 responded to this question. Some responded positively about this involvement (3 respondents), whereas others stated that this involvement does not exist (3 respondents). Finally, 3 respondents answered the question more ambiguously.

"I judge that yes, I think the 'transmontano' is proud of its roots and traditions, I think so!" (Interviewee A)

"No. Before creating a brand, we should have gathered the entrepreneurs (...) to listen. Listen to the entrepreneurs and then communicate, what do you think are Bragança's strong points (...)." (Interviewee E)

"Not as much as it should be; maybe the first people to be involved should actually be the locals. Because they are the first contacts that exist with tourists (...)." (Interviewee L).

5.1.4. Cooperation Between the Council and the Different Entities and Associations

All the entities and associations interviewed were stakeholders of the municipality of Bragança and were therefore asked about their cooperation with the Town Council. All reported a positive relationship of cooperation between the two, in the sense that the municipality designs certain projects that the associations make feasible. This

opinion also derives from the Council's interest in the associations and entities that participate in the organization of initiatives that are developed in the municipality.

5.1.5. Perception of the "Bragança Territorial Brand" Message

All the entrepreneurs were asked about their perception of the Bragança brand tourist messaging. Of the 8 entrepreneurs, 4 had a positive perception of the message, and the other 4 claimed to not know what message is being communicated. Some of the answers given by the entrepreneurs were:

"Well, we have a set of initiatives that have taken place here, like 'Bragança. Naturally!' and 'Bragança, freedom to start again'... I think that the message we want to convey is that of a natural territory, a territory with a lot of potential for personal well-being, also from a professional point of view." (Interviewee A).

"I think the message is good, I think the message is positive. I think that people leave here with a good opinion because we know how to receive them well, we also know how to sell well, but I think that it is still not enough to make Bragança a touristic place (...)." (Interviewee G).

"I think it attracts potential tourists, which can create motivation for tour operators or people to become interested... I think there should be a stronger campaign targeted at tour operators, travel agencies, people who can support this destination in the medium and long term and not the final customer (...)." (Interviewee C).

"I think it sends a very tenuous message. I don't know what message it is sending, honestly (...). All the communication that is being done, is not being done whole-heartedly, with head, torso, and limbs. It is being done according to the situation." (Interviewee E).

5.1.6. The Local Community's Sense of Belonging to the Territorial Brand

Interviewees were also asked about their perceptions of the local community's sense of belonging to the Bragança territorial brand. Of the 14 respondents, 12 answered this question. Seven believed that there was a feeling of belonging (e.g., "I think so, because I myself have this feeling of belonging" - Interviewee A), 3 thought that this feeling did not exist ("No (...) I hear people from here say a lot (...) and we have nothing that distinguishes us (...). People feel some sorrow that Bragança does not have any product that really distinguishes it" - Interviewee E | "Not regarding the brand itself, but regarding the city, yes!" - Interviewee B), and 2 were unsure ("I don't know if it does, but I know it should have..." - Interviewee L).

5.1.7. Bragança in One Word

At the end of each interview with the entrepreneurs, they were asked to define Bragança in a single word. The words chosen were inspiring, gastronomy, potential, magic, excellence, genuineness, and attractive. These words all correspond to positive characteristics of the municipality of Bragança, and this may reflect the image that entrepreneurs have of the municipality. Furthermore, throughout the interviews, themes and ideas arose spontaneously that were not directly related to the questions. Since several interviewees expressed similar ideas, some of these points are addressed here.

One such point relates to the training courses the Municipality of Bragança had organized for tourism stakeholders, to educate and empower people linked to the tourism sector. The theme "training" emerged in the interviews as an added value created by the Municipality. Some of the ideas expressed by the entrepreneurs interviewed were:

"I found it very pertinent (...) and I think that this initiative is undoubtedly praiseworthy and shows the concern that the municipality has in this sense." (Interviewee A).

"Excellent initiative." (Interviewee C).

Another commonly mentioned point related to the way the various public entities and associations (CMB, Porto and Northern Region Tourism Entity, Terras de Trás-os-Montes Inter-Municipality Community (CIM-TT)

and the Association of Terra Fria Municipalities (AMTF) were involved in the promotion and communication of the territory. Each entity communicated a different area of the region, leading to different destination brands for each entity. This raised another issue, which is overlapping and incoherence between projects and initiatives. Many of the interviewees mentioned this point as one of the problems facing the promotion of the territory.

Some of the ideas mentioned in the interviews:

"The union between the entities and institutions obviously seems to me to be an extremely important point (...), I mean, each one doing its own work is wasting means, financial resources, and so on. (...) I think that the territories are only valid if they can unite around a joint strategy, and whoever thinks they can do this work individually is very wrong. Because Bragança cannot attract people by itself." (Interviewee L).

"Sometimes, money is spent unnecessarily, so it would be much more valid and would have repercussions and a much greater market penetration if there were a joint communication (...)." (Interviewee M).

"The vision of the public sector is not the same as the vision or needs of the private one. (...) There are lots of projects in the territory, I am not talking only about the municipality of Bragança, I am talking about the district, that overlap; they get money for the same things (...). (...) 5 entities are communicating the territory, some things coincide, others are totally different, and then it happens that each one is trying to get ahead, it completely distorts everything." (Interviewee C).

Throughout the interviews, the importance of aligning the communication and promotion strategy with tourism agents was also mentioned, and this function should be the responsibility of a single entity, such as the Municipality. Some of the ideas expressed were:

"It seems quite an important fact to me that we align this strategy with the tourism agents. What I don't think is at all intelligent is for the Municipality to pull back from the bridges it has with local/private organizations." (Interviewee F).

"What happens is that the municipality defines it all, (...) they summon the entrepreneurs and the tourism agents, and they talk a bit about things and then they present what they intend to do. Most of them are SMEs, family businesses, with no strategic vision, no knowledge, no experience (...). If there were greater involvement in discussing ideas, finding solutions, seeking interactions between people and us, between the people of the city and the businessmen and the municipality, maybe we would converge in a more positive situation." (Interviewee B).

They also mentioned the lack of training and awareness in the local community. Several interviewees stated that many of the tourist areas have mainly small and medium-sized businesses, often family-run, and they are sometimes not sufficiently aware, educated, and trained to promote and communicate the territory.

"There is a great lack of awareness of people, a great lack of training for people in the villages, and the villages receive a lot of tourists..." (Interviewee C).

"Our entrepreneur profile, unfortunately... our entrepreneurs have a very low level of training (...)." (Interviewee E).

5.2. Questionnaires

To complement the interviews, 88 Bragança residents were surveyed. The survey was divided into two parts: the first collected socio-demographic data, and the second asked about the topic under analysis. The collected socio-demographic data included gender, age, marital status, education, and work activity of the 88 respondents, 54 (61.4%) were female, and 34 (38.6%) were male. Most were aged between 18 and 34 years old (61.3%), with the most common marital status being single (59.1%). Regarding schooling, most had a higher education (69.3%). Finally, concerning labor activity, 58% were employed.

In the second part of the survey, participants were first asked to define Bragança in 1 word, although this was not mandatory of the 88 respondents, 85 answered this question. The most frequently chosen words were "wonderful" and "nature," each of which was chosen by 8 respondents, followed by "welcoming" (5 answers),

"beautiful" (5 answers), "tranquility" (3 answers), "fantastic" (3 answers), "safe" (3 answers), and "quality of life" (3 answers). The remaining words were chosen once or twice. Most of the words corresponded to positive adjectives (e.g., "wonderful," "beautiful," and "welcoming"), others related to characteristics of the region (e.g., "nature," "smoking," and "mountainous"), and some related to judgments and opinions (e.g., "backward," "unequal," and "monotonous").

The second question was, "Do you know which entity is responsible for the management and communication of the Bragança destination?" Of the 88 respondents, the majority (n=49; 55.7%) did not know, whereas 39 (44.3%) did. The third question employed a 5-point Likert scale (Strongly Disagree – Disagree – Neither Agree nor Disagree – Agree – Strongly Agree) and presented six sentences relating to three dimensions (introduced by Choo et al. (2011): cognitive identification, affective identification, and evaluative identification). The objective was to understand the level of identification the community felt with the destination in these three dimensions.

Table 4. Respondents' identification-level data.

Community's level of identification with the destination		Likert scale N = 88 (%)				
		1	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**
		TD	**D**	**NAD**	**A**	**TA**
Cognitive Identification	The Bragança destination brand aligns with my personal identity.	6 6.82%	11 12.50%	30 34.09%	25 28.41%	16 18.18%
	I believe that the image I have of the municipality of Bragança is the same as the one the council communicates.	2 2.27%	22 25%	27 30.68%	26 29.55%	11 12.50%
Affective Identification	I feel represented by the Bragança destination brand.	7 7.5%	17 19.32%	28 31.82%	24 27.27%	12 13.64%
	I have a sense of belonging towards the Bragança destination brand.	7 7.95%	11 12.50%	26 29.55%	28 31.82%	16 18.18%
Valuative Identification	I play an important role in communicating Bragança's destiny.	10 11.36%	12 13.64%	24 27.27%	26 29.55%	16 18.18%
	I feel I am part of the communication of the Bragança destination.	6 6.82%	14 15.91%	20 22.73%	34 38.64%	14 15.91%

Note: 1 – Totally Disagree (TD); 2 – Disagree (D); 3 – Neither Agree nor Disagree (NAD); 4 – Agree (A); 5 – Totally Agree (TA); N – sample.

Table 4 presents the respondents' answers. For cognitive identification (awareness of the individual's own belonging to a social group), most respondents answered "Neither Agree nor Disagree." For affective identification (awareness of the individual's emotional involvement in a social group), most respondents answered "Neither Agree nor Disagree" or "Agree," Finally, for evaluative identification (awareness of the individual in relation to his/her inclusion in a social group) most respondents responded with "Agree."

To assess the reliability of the survey, Cronbach's Alpha was calculated. Table 5 shows that cognitive identification (= 0.779) had reasonable internal consistency, and affective identification (= 0.909) as well as evaluative identification (= 0.915) had good internal consistency.

The items with the highest level of agreement were item 6 ("I feel that I am part of the communication of the Bragança destination" mean = 3.41), item 4 ("I have a sense of belonging towards the Bragança destination brand" mean = 3.40) and item 1 ("The Bragança destination brand aligns with my personal identity" mean = 3.39). The items with the lowest level of agreement were item 3 ("I feel represented by the Bragança destination brand" mean = 3.19) and item 2 ("I believe that the image I have of the municipality of Bragança is the same as the one the Municipality communicates" mean = 3.25).

Finally, the answers within each identification dimension were averaged, and Figure 5 presents the division of the answers into 3 segments: "Totally Disagree" and "Disagree" (ranging from 1 to 2.5), "Neither Agree nor Disagree" (3), and "Agree" and "Totally Agree" (ranging from 3.5 to 5). Although most of the respondents answered "Agree" and "Totally Agree" in the three dimensions, a significant proportion of respondents also answered "Totally Disagree" and "Disagree" and "Neither Agree nor Disagree." In other words, although the results present a

positive paradigm, there is still room for improvement via initiatives/actions with the objective of obtaining ideal results (> or = 70% agreement).
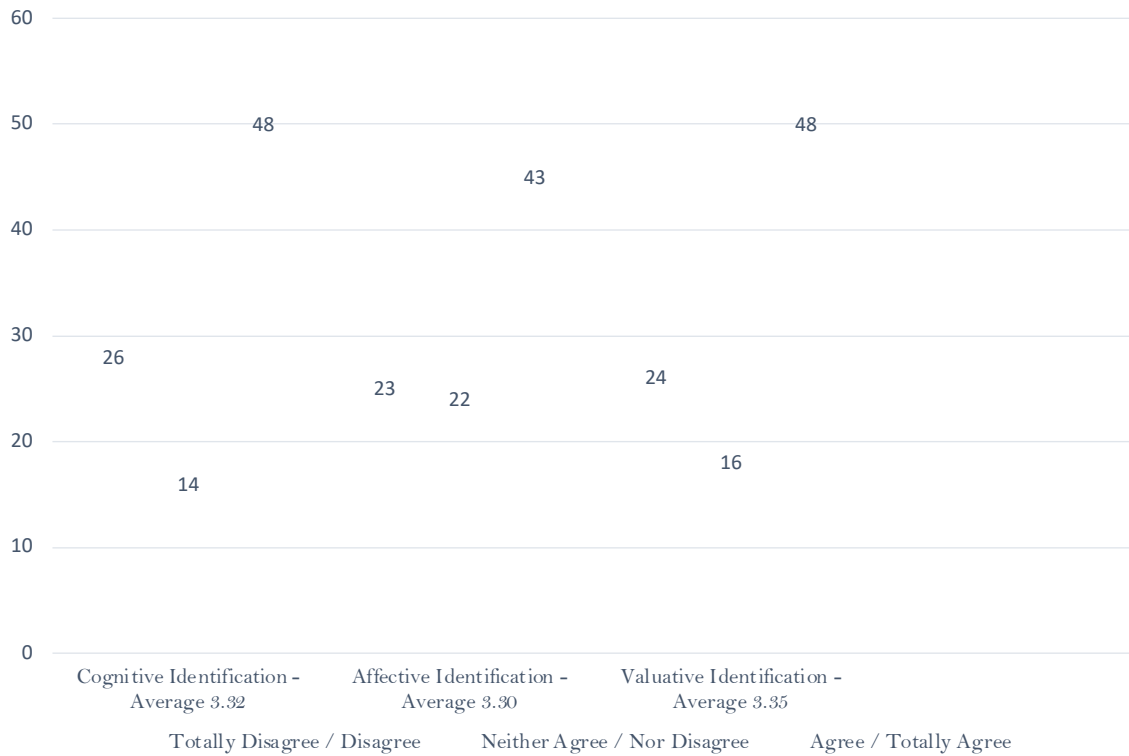

Figure 5. Average responses within each identification dimension.

Table 5. Cronbach's alpha, mean, standard deviation, and correlation of the identifications.

Dimension	Cronbach's alpha	Nº items	Average ± Standard D.	Correlation Item / Factor
Cognitive Identification	0.779	Item 1	3.39±1.129	0.640
		Item 2	3.25±1.042	0.640
Affective Identification	0.909	Item 3	3.19±1.143	0.834
		Item 4	3.40±1.160	0.834
Valuative Identification	0.915	Item 5	3.30±1.243	0.846
		Item 6	3.41±1.141	0.846

Table 6. WoM agreement data from respondents.

Statement	Likert scale N = 88 (%)				
	1	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**
	TD	**D**	**NAD**	**A**	**TA**
I convey a positive opinion about Bragança to other people.	1 1.14%	3 3.41%	3 3.41%	39 44.32%	42 47.73%
I don't speak favorably about Bragança.	38 41.18%	30 34.09%	8 9.09%	6 6.82%	6 6.82%
I encourage friends and acquaintances to visit Bragança.	1 1.14%	2 2.27%	6 6.82%	33 37.50%	46 52.27%
Whenever possible I recommend Bragança as a holiday destination.	5 5.68%	5 5.68%	11 12.50%	29 22.73%	38 41.18%
I don't suggest visiting Bragança on holiday.	46 52.27%	23 26.14%	12 13.64%	4 4.55%	3 3.41%
I know how to recommend activities in Bragança.	4 4.55%	5 5.68%	12 13.64%	37 42.05%	30 34.09%

Note: 1 – Totally Disagree (TD); 2 - Disagree (D); 3 - Neither Agree nor Disagree (NAD); 4 - Agree (A); 5 - Totally Agree (TA); N - sample.

The last question also used a 5-point Likert scale (Strongly Disagree - Disagree - Neither Agree nor Disagree - Agree - Strongly Agree) and consisted of six sentences related to word-of-mouth (WoM) of the destination to tourists. It aimed to discover whether respondents transmitted a positive destination image and recommend it as a holiday destination. Table 6 presents the survey results. The vast majority of respondents conveyed a positive destination image ("Agree" 39 respondents and "Totally Agree" 42 respondents) and encouraged friends and acquaintances to visit Bragança ("Agree" 33 respondents and "Totally Agree" 46 respondents) 23.87% (21 respondents) would not recommend visiting Bragança, since they chose the answers "Totally Disagree," "Disagree," or "Neither Agree nor Disagree."

Table 7. Cronbach's alpha, mean, standard deviation, and correlation of WoM.

Dimension	Cronbach's alpha	Nº items	Average ± Standard D.	Correlation Item / Factor	Cronbach's alpha
WoM	0.798	Item 1	4.34±0.801	0.621	0.758
		Item 2	4.00±1.194	0.670	0.749
		Item 3	4.38±0.807	0.762	0.710
		Item 4	4.02±1.144	0.524	0.774
		Item 5	4.19±1.060	0.322	0.828
		Item 6	3.95±1.060	0.536	0.771

Regarding Cronbach's alpha, Table 7 shows that WoM has a reasonable internal consistency (= 0.798). The items with the highest level of agreement were item 2 ("I do not speak favorably about Bragança" mean = 4.38) and item 1 ("I convey a positive opinion about Bragança to other people" mean = 4.34). The items with the lowest level of agreement were item 4 ("Whenever possible I recommend Bragança as a holiday destination" mean = 3.95) and item 5 ("I do not suggest visiting Bragança on holiday" mean = 4).

Finally, we calculated Pearson's correlation coefficient R between the different identification dimensions and WoM to measure the contribution an independent variable (identification dimension) has in the variation of the dependent one (WoM). In Table 8, we can see that all correlations were positive and significant and that WoM had a moderate association with cognitive identification and affective identification and a low association with evaluative identification.

Table 8. Pearson's correlation test between WoM and identification dimensions.

Items	Cognitive Identification	Affective identification	Evaluative identification
WoM	0.417**	0.414**	0.389**

Note: ** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level.

6. CONCLUDING REMARKS

Destinations should be managed in close partnership with the promoter and the different stakeholders. Although many conceptual models in the literature place stakeholders as a central element in the implementation of destination management strategies, they are often left out of the creation and communication process.

This study's analysis was not able to identify a cooperative relationship between the Bragança destination management entity and the tourism/commercial entities. In other words, the promoter does not seek to know the needs and interests of those who have direct contact with tourists, even though they are the ones who have greater sensitivity and access to gaps and problems in this sector. This relationship is extremely important for the successful operation of any region, and it is essential to establish a two-way cooperative relationship.

Another point that was mentioned in most of the interviews is that the various entities aiming to promote the destination do not have a joint strategy, leading to various overlapping projects and messages. This happens because each entity promotes a different geographical area of the region. Instead, different entities should focus on a

certain area and work together to promote the territory. The Municipal Councils communicate their municipality, the ERTPN communicates Trás-os-Montes (covering municipalities in two districts), the CIM-TT communicates Terras de Trás-os-Montes (some municipalities of the district of Bragança), and the Association of Terra Fria Municipalities and the Association of Terra Quente Municipalities communicate the municipalities inherent to each association in the district of Bragança. It should be noted that the whole district of Bragança has similar characteristics, and it would be much more effective to market it as a single region, even at a touristic level, since the destination's image in the consumer's mind is more easily created if a joint brand is communicated.

Finally, the issue of involving the local community in the creation of the destination's promotion and communication strategy did not generate much consensus among the interviewees. Some acknowledged this involvement, while others claimed there was none. Nevertheless, it is an important element in marketing the destination.

In the survey of local inhabitants, although most respondents agreed, to some extent, with the phrases in the different identification dimensions, a significant proportion of the respondents were neutral or did not agree. Therefore, it is important to note that the different identification dimensions should be worked on through initiatives/actions to ensure that locals identify with the brand being communicated.

In general, we can conclude that although several respondents did not cognitively or affectively identify with the destination, most were happy to transmit a positive message, recommend the destination, and encourage friends and acquaintances to visit Bragança. Given this finding, we can confirm that the local community has a sense of belonging to the destination Bragança and shows an interest in being part of the destination's communication process. We can also see that the respondents have a positive image of the destination, and this is related to the positive message (WoM) that they pass on to tourists, aligning with the findings of Stylidis (2018) and Strandberg et al. (2020).

In light of the abovementioned facts, it is essential to raise awareness of the importance of the different stakeholders in the process of constructing, communicating, and promoting a regional brand. This is an element that should be at the heart of any strategic plan to communicate and promote a tourist destination. In this sense, this study hopes to stimulate and encourage the involvement of the local community in the destination's strategic plans. Based on the results of the interviews and surveys, a set of recommendations for the management of the destination has been created to solve some of the identified problems. Therefore, our suggestions of actions that can be taken by the destination's management entity together with other relevant entities include:

- Developing promotion and internal communication initiatives about the territory, i.e., educate and empower the local community about the potentialities of the region.
- Awareness actions within the local community to stimulate participation in the destination's communication.
- Periodic consultation with the majority of the region's stakeholders to discover their needs, interests, and concerns about the region.
- Present the region's promotional campaigns to stakeholders in advance so that they are aware of what is being communicated and can take part in the promotion.
- Align all entities/associations that have a role in promoting the territory so that a specific geographical area/destination brand is communicated.

7. LIMITATIONS AND SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

This study has some limitations, particularly concerning the sample selected for the interviews since it could have covered more entities from different sectors, and some of the interviewed entities were chosen for convenience. This is because some entities, after being contacted, did not show interest in participating, so others were used where the people in charge were part of the researchers' network. It should also be noted that the sample of respondents was not a faithful representation of the population of the municipality of Bragança since a large part of

the sample was chosen by convenience, and the survey was conducted online, which may have influenced the characteristics of the respondents. Therefore, it would be desirable in future work to interview a larger sample of tourism entities and individuals to allow stronger conclusions to be drawn. Besides considering a larger sample in future research, it would also be interesting to conduct a longitudinal study to observe the involvement of different stakeholders in the promotional actions of the destination. This study could take the form of a more practical line of research, in which for each action, event, or promotional initiative proposed by the respective management entity, the cooperation and involvement of the local community are analyzed. Another possible future line of research would be to analyze the contact that tourists have with the local community and their perception of this contact to ascertain whether tourists consider the local community to be a key element in selecting and enjoying a destination.

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