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Place branding performances in tourist local food shops

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ABSTRACT

This article adopts a performative approach to analysing encounters between tourists, retailers, objects, architectures, detailing the communication devices inherent in bringing "to life" a thematic selection of a place's multiple identities to promote tourism. It draws on integrated interpretations of performative approaches, illustrating them relative to the place branding enacted at local food & wine shops to address tourists visiting Verucchio, Italy. The study contributes to the literature on tourism by proposing the concept of performative place branding, enabling a more creative, hybrid, and open-ended consideration of the relationship between tourist places and place branding. This contrasts with the "top-down" logic employed in previous studies and policies for promoting tourist destinations.

Introduction

Local food & wine products are increasingly located at the core of place branding, intending to foster tourism (Blichfeldt & Halkier, 2014; Vanolo, 2015). Their outlet venues are the sites at which the multiple identities of a place are thematically selected and performed, as this article will discuss. In the local food & wine shops that target tourism, co-branding processes occur, connecting the image of a place with a product or vice versa (Kneale & Dwyer, 2008; see also Pike, 2011b). Local food & wine shops are a key interface between visitors and the local environment; sites where place branding is

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brought "to life" through a variety of performative techniques, which extend beyond policy-driven schemes.

Place branding to attract tourism has largely been the domain of management and marketing researchers (Allen, 2010; Kavaratzis, Warnaby, & Ashworth, 2014), while urban studies scholars have typically explored the wider political economic implications of place branding (Anttiroiko, 2014; Evans, 2003; Vanolo, 2008, 2015). These accounts have mainly considered place branding as a "top-down", patronising strategy, whereby marketing and management professionals, paid for by stakeholders, select ideas that then are translated into graphic icons, policy documents, internet portals, and tourists' and locals' opinions (see Kavaratzis & Kalandides, 2015; Lucarelli & Hallin, 2015; Ren & Blichfeldt, 2011 for a critique). Recently, place branding literature has focussed on local stakeholders' narratives at locations highly invested in tourism (Campelo, Aitken, Thyne, & Gnoth, 2014; Lichrou, O'Malley, & Patterson, 2010) to reveal how the associations of meaning that a place brand consists of, relate to place-making elements (Kavaratzis & Kalandides, 2015). Both these streams, however, have directed minimal attention toward how this thematic selection of a place's multiple identities, to which I refer to in this article as place branding, is enacted *on the ground*. Place branding emerges from the entanglement of material, discursive, and embodied performances, which very few studies have pioneered. Among them, Ren and Blichfeldt (2011) provides empirical evidence that images, discourses, performances, physical objects and technologies all articulate a thematic selection of a place's multiple identities at sites where there is no conscious or strategic act of place branding management. Ren (2011) also demonstrates that material objects might be agentic in shaping the selective thematisation of a place, but she reflects on human agency from a distance. In this article, I continue this discussion, as I believe there has been insufficient exploration of how place branding is enacted through tourism performances on the ground. I take this discussion further through a theoretically and empirically informed development of the notion of performative place branding, which concentrates on enactment via objects, images, narratives and people. These performances activate a thematic selection of a place's multiple identities. Differing from previous studies, I question more pointedly whether performative place branding represents an intricate and inclusive acceptance of tourist places, while remembering to underline the flawed and exclusionary implications that this approach also entails.

The aim of this paper is to provide a more fluid understanding of the relationship between tourist places and place branding. It examines how this relationship is mediated by material culture, discourses, and embodied performances. Its secondary aim is to discuss whether a performative approach to place branding could provide a viable framework to facilitate less patronising, albeit not less problematic, forms of place branding for tourist places, than that currently instituted. Moving forward from a post-structuralist position rooted in geography and sociology, this paper will present and critically address the link between tourist places and place branding. In doing so it will discuss extant literature pertaining to the performative turn in tourism studies (Bærenholdt, Haldrup, Larsen, & Urry, 2003; Edensor, 2001, 2007; Giovanardi, Lucarelli, & Decosta, 2014; Haldrup & Larsen, 2010). This approach will provide a more intricate understanding of the multi-layered nature of place branding than that usually acknowledged in management/marketing literature and in critical urban studies, and a sounder understanding of the dynamics occurring between tourism and place branding.

To achieve this, I apply the proposed approach to local food & wine shops in Verucchio, an Italian town centre only recently opened up to tourism. In Verucchio, place branding emerges through the enhancement of shops' interior design, the communicative media outside shops, and retailer/tourist interactions.

Place branding and tourism: the contribution of performative approaches

Tourism and place branding have moved closer in recent decades (Allen, 2010; Kavaratzis et al., 2014; Lichrou et al., 2010). Drawing on a selection of themes to inform the supposed identity of a place (i.e. the meanings that people attach to places), strategies can be implemented to compete with increased regional competition by evoking a distinctiveness of place, with the potential to attract economic resources (i.e. external visitors, potential investors, or wealthy inhabitants) (Anttiroiko, 2014;

Dinnie, 2011; Vanolo, 2008, 2015). This notion of an identity of place is a contested one, since only some individuals, things, activities and discourses can be spatially integrated by connecting fixed identities to certain places in this way (Ren & Blichfeldt, 2011; Sandercock, 2003). Place branding is, at its core, a technique for developing a certain selective narration of a place that resonates with a chosen target group (Johansson, 2012).

Ultimately, a place brand is a way to forge associations and ascribe meanings to a place (Kavaratzis & Ashworth, 2005). As Kavaratzis and Kalandides recently stressed, "the constituents of place are simultaneously the constituents of the place brand through the associations they cause and the place brand comes together as a whole through the interactions between associations and the interactions between associations" (Kavaratzis & Kalandides, 2015, p. 1369). These associations are materially-based, representationally-based, practice-based, and institution-based, i.e. founded on a normatively regulated system (Kavaratzis & Kalandides, 2015). The place brand can be situated within the process of formation of place identity, which, as set out by Kavaratzis and Hatch (2013), implies collective mental perceptions of place, termed place image. Place branding can be considered a key mode of communication for associative processes related to a place (Kavaratzis & Ashworth, 2005), and can take a variety of forms, while always remaining selective (Sandercock, 2003). In this article, I am less interested in focussing on how a place brand is formulated in the mind, than on how it is enacted through material, discursive and embodied performances on the ground. Secondly, I refuse the use of the notion of a destination brand, since I acknowledge a poststructuralist spatial ontology (Massey, 2005; Soja, 1996), which is sceptical of reductive distinctions; tourist destinations *are fully* places.

A multitude of stakeholders foster place branding; including governments, the private sector, cultural institutions, educational bodies, and residents, all of whom invest variously in the communication of a place and its characteristics (Dinnie, 2011). For example, professionals may be called upon to identify the "assets" of a certain area, and to attract the chosen target tourists. Place image-building is then instigated by specific public or private bodies. Eventually, the agreed brand is then advertised through a variety of media, from tourist websites to brochures, from familiarisation trips to policy-makers' public discourses (Allen, 2010). This kind of top-down approach driven by marketing and management literature is generally standard in place branding (Kavaratzis & Kalandides, 2015; Lucarelli & Hallin, 2015). Critical studies, arising from sociology (Bookman, 2014), geography (Pike, 2011a), planning (Sandercock, 2003), and urban studies (Hannigan, 2003; Vanolo, 2015) have emphasised place branding as an exclusionary process, since it unfolds relative to dominant discourses and symbols (Johansson, 2012). It must be acknowledged that forms of participatory place branding have been introduced recently to allow greater participation from subjects called upon to decide what elements to select when creating that place brand (Kavaratzis, 2012). In such instances, residents are often considered key stakeholders, and so are invited to participate in its construction (Colomb & Kalandides, 2010; Zenker & Erfgen, 2014); this is because, participatory branding involves a large audience of stakeholders in the construction of the brand, extending beyond professionals. A "people-centred" approach situates at its core the role of different stakeholders in activating a place brand, with the result that studies have focussed on narrations of places that can be used by city marketers to develop place branding campaigns (Campelo et al., 2014; Lichrou et al., 2010). While these studies have helped position residents' voices at the heart of place branding strategies, they have failed to demonstrate that place branding can be stabilised, that is to say perpetuated over time and rendered effective, through a set of habitual practices that bring to life material, discursive and embodied performances of place. However, Lucarelli and Hallin's (2015) study offers a performative approach to branding regeneration. For them, place brands are not defined by the sum of the components said to constitute them, but are rather constructed through spatialised social relations that are always material, processual, relational, and performative. This means focussing on the material, semiotic and open-ended expressions through which a brand is enacted. To situate place branding according to a performative approach specifically in relation to tourism, it is essential to review theoretical developments that have emerged in this specific field of studies.

Performative approaches in tourism studies

Tourism performances constantly make and remake tourist places (Bærenholdt et al., 2003; Coleman & Crang, 2002; Edensor, 2001). Tourism acts as a dynamic force creating space via a process entailing conflict, exploitation, and resistance (Crang, 2014), making tourism an active agent in forging those place-making elements that are central to a place brand (Kavaratzis & Kalandides, 2015). The performative approach in the social sciences and humanities is influenced by a range of seminal, albeit very different, works, from the sociological and anthropological accounts of Erving Goffman (1959, 1967), to the philosophic contributions of Judith Butler (1990), to Nigel Thrift's Non Representational Theory from within geography (2008). It extended into the interdisciplinary field of tourism studies in the 1990s. This approach, in its current form, suggests reviewing tourism through bodily doings and enactments, *as well as* representations and meanings (Haldrup & Larsen, 2010). This approach has helped to emphasise the dialectics between production and consumption, by recognising that tourism is a mutually negotiated relationship between consumers and producers (Bærenholdt et al., 2003; Rabbiosi, 2016), and by challenging the ocular centric understanding of tourist experiences. Indeed, consuming tourist places means engaging in a dynamic, multisensory embodied experience (Rakic & Chambers, 2012).

Reviewing the most novel theoretical approaches in tourism, Cohen and Cohen (2012b) follow Hannam, Sheller, and Urry (2006) in stressing that '"there is a complex relationality between places and persons connected through both *performances and performativities* (Hannam et al. (2006), p.13). Hence, places are 'not so much fixed but are implicated within complex networks by which 'hosts, guests, buildings, objects and machines' are continually brought together to *perform* certain *performances*..." (Hannam et al. (2006), p.13, quoted in Cohen & Cohen, 2012b, p. 2183; author's emphasis). While this assumption is at the core of performative approaches in tourism studies, Giovanardi et al. (2014) claimed that the majority of empirical studies have failed to overcome the binary dichotomies among tourists/guests. I here reference the critique put forward by Giovanardi et al. (2014), and appreciate the effort placed on stressing the role of corporeal co-performances in tourism experiences and places, citing human agency. However, these works fail to consider the agentic performances of a variety of other actors. Conversely, a fluid and hybrid approach recognising the entanglement of policies, bodies, images, and objects has recently integrated the performative approach by introducing some elements of Actor-Network Theory (Latour, 2007; Law & Hassard, 1999) and Non-Representational Theory (Thrift, 2008) to explore the enactments and multi-discursive orderings of objects or realities (Haldrup & Larsen, 2010; Jóhannesson, Ren, & van der Duim, 2015; Larsen, 2014; Ren, 2011; Van der Duim, 2007; Van der Duim, Ren, & Johansson, 2012). This is the case of Ren's (2011) study of how oscypek cheese plays an agentic role in stabilising and shaping the place branding of Zakopane, a Polish city highly invested in tourist flows. The multiple performances surrounding oscypek cheese challenge the "common brand management strategy of image mainstreaming, often seeking to create and promote one 'unique' selling point and hereby dismissing and muting 'destination mess'" (Ren's (2011), p. 879).

Following these recent works, I use the addition of a performative approach to place branding in tourist places to investigate how the thematic selection of place emerges through the material, discursive, and embodied performances enacted in food & wine shops in Verucchio, Italy. These venues have experienced a resurgence, since the town started to encourage tourism in the first decade of the 2000s. I focus on Verucchio's main square, where the new shops are located, and particularly on the performances associated with a single local food & wine shop, *Il Bello e il Buono da Verucchio*. This microscale focus is conceived relationally, referencing processes occurring and involving larger scales. Examining performances in such a limited, albeit porous, area, facilitates an in-depth, detailed, account of the phenomenon. The aim is to both demonstrate and question how a performative approach could help establish a more complex and inclusive recognition of place branding as something constructed through a fluid, uncontrolled, process of exchange and communication, sharing information between a wide set of human and non-human actors. In doing so, this article contributes and promotes an empirically grounded acknowledgement of performative approaches in tourism (Cohen & Cohen, 2012b; Giovanardi et al., 2014).

Ethnography and my own performance

Performative approaches are generally inspired by innovative ethnographic methodologies (Haldrup & Larsen, 2010; Larsen, 2010; see also Merriman, 2014). This article describes just a few aspects of the materials collected during a three years long study (October 2012–December 2015) on the touristification of leisure shopping in Rimini and the surrounding area, which includes Verucchio. In these three years, I visited Verucchio twice a month on average. I also met persons involved with the tourism development of the Rimini back region, such as the Mayor of Verucchio, Verucchio Council members in charge of Tourism and Culture, and the Province of Rimini civil servants in charge of Tourism development. Eventually, I engaged in a focussed ethnography in Verucchio in July and at the end of August 2014. I deliberately chose to conduct my fieldwork during those months, since they are when visitor numbers are at their highest, according to the tourist data provided by the Province of Rimini. From the 4 to 24 of July and from the 18 to 31 of August 2014 I would arrive in Verucchio early in the morning and leave late at night, returning to Rimini, 20 km away, where I was based.

Before engaging in the observational portion of the research, I had introduced myself in person to shopkeepers, stating that I was a researcher and that I would like to spend some time within their shops looking at how they worked. During these introductions, I realised that some shop owners were more willing to welcome me than others were. The owners of *Il Bello e il Buono* became my gatekeepers and closest partners. They knew I was a researcher, as did most of the persons I spoke with when conducting the research, but I never signed agreements with the participants regarding the fact that I was doing some research there. I played with the ambiguity of my own multiple positionalities: beside a researcher, I was also a curious woman (I posed questions and I spent hours just looking at shop windows), a customer (I did also some shopping for myself), and a tourist (I am not from the region). I rarely used tape or video recordings, except in specific instances. In fact, after my preliminary enquiries, I understood that "off the record" interactions (Gillen, 2011) would be key to accessing the field. Having worked on other retail-based fieldworks (Rabbiosi, 2014, 2015), I by now know that when a study setting is also a business area, researchers should be very careful not to intrude on the job being performed.

Prior to commencing the focussed ethnography, I had agreed with the municipality of Verucchio to place a chair, a picnic table and a flag from my university in the main square—a sort of office outside my institutional office—where I could meet and chat with tourists, residents or other passers-by without intruding too much into the shops. This strategy enabled me to observe performances within the shops while they were immersed in private/public space dynamics. Verucchio's main square is limited in size, and so I had the opportunity to develop connections not only with shopkeepers but also with the "regulars" of the piazza, particularly elder inhabitants. In addition to spending time at my office-out-of-office, I spent time wandering around Verucchio, sitting on the stairs of the piazza, and drinking or eating at the different facilities in the square. This gave me the opportunity to gain a more nuanced idea of Verucchio's multiple "senses of place", and enabled me to focus on material, discursive and embodied performances naturalistically. In the case of the observations of material and semiotic performances, interactions between food & wine shops and tourism were observed focussing on the tools that played the role of interface between retailers and tourists, specifically on how commodities where communicated and displayed in shop windows and on how inside shops and shops' interior and exterior spaces were organized. Data analysis as such mainly followed an etic perspective; I allowed myself to self-reflect upon my own unfolding and engulfment through objects (paraphrased from Rob Shields, 1994). I was also able to "physically" step onto the stage, where objects', retailers', and tourists' performances were enacted, to observe them, sometimes from the side of the stage and at others taking a more active role. We were all simultaneously objects and subjects, according to the reverted principles of observant participation (Dewsbury, 2010). My notes were handwritten as soon as possible thereafter in a book (80 pages). I typed up the notes two months after the fieldwork when I started analysing my materials. My notes also include drawings (six sketches), pictures (97), and videos (six, from one minute to 30 minutes long). I analysed the different data using an abductive and iterative process; several texts were produced, ultimately leading to a coherent—albeit always unstable and subject to other interpretations—narrative, organised into four sections.

Place branding performances in Verucchio

Verucchio is a municipality located 18 km from Rimini, an Italian coastal city most famous for seaside mass tourism resort (Fig. 1). New tourist promotion strategies have been introduced in the last twenty years to rejuvenate Rimini's image. The Tourism Council of the Province of Rimini, and the Rimini Chamber of Commerce launched the tourist product *Malatesta & Montefeltro* in 2011. Named after the two signorial families that made the area famous at the end of the Middle Ages and in the Renaissance, the initiative represents,

> [A] specific communication stream through which the Rimini hinterland can be promoted as a new autonomous product, even if physically connected and located in the Riviera di Rimini. The (corresponding) brand serves to appraise those aspects of the Province's identity that are connected to our historical roots, to nature, to artistic witness, to food and wine production, to handcraft traditions, etc. (Provincia di Rimini, 2011; author's translation).

Verucchio stands symbolically at the core of the area promoted as *Malatesta & Montefeltro*. Located in the Marecchia river valley, the main landmark in the historical town centre is the ancient Malatesta Fortress (11th–16th century). Close by, there is a Villanovan civilization necropolis (10th–7th century BC). Artefacts from the necropolis are exhibited in the local museum, and hosted in a 12th century monastery. The built heritage of Verucchio's historical town centre is maintained in generally good condition today. It has been the object of consistent renovation over the last 15 years, thanks to public-private investment that took place as the touristification process of Verucchio emerged in the 2000s (Rodriguez, 2008).

Tourism flows in the Rimini back region are still extremely limited, when compared with those in the coastal area (60,814 arrivals in the 26 municipalities comprising the back region in 2014 vs.

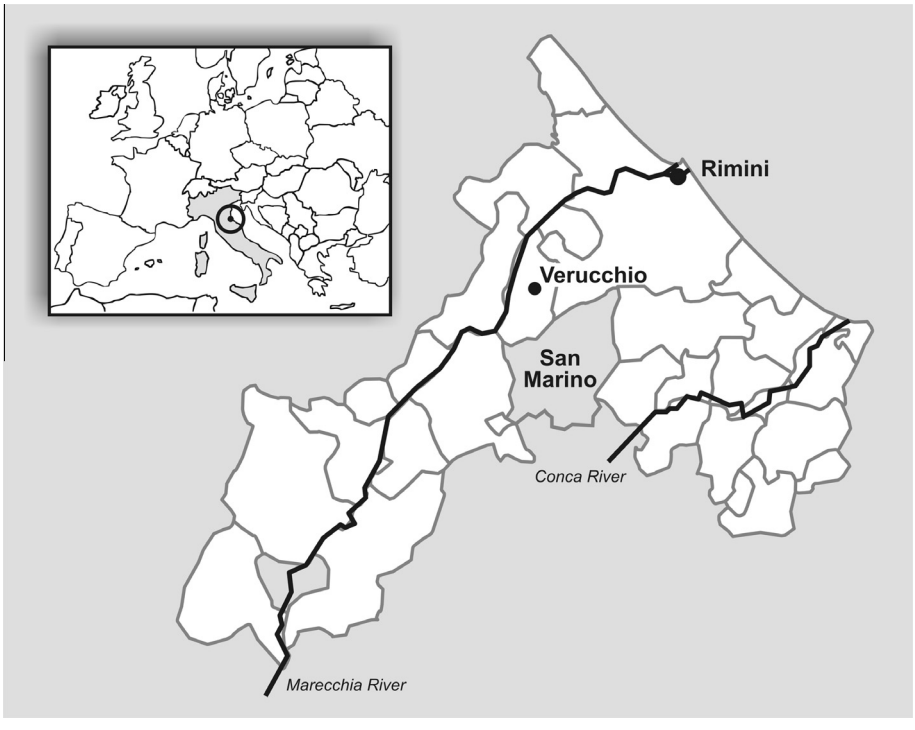

Fig. 1. Verucchio, in the Province of Rimini (Italy).

3,146,748 in the 5 coastal municipalities in 2014; and 148,673 overnights vs. 14,921,74). However, numbers have been rising since the beginning of the Millennium (13,590 arrivals and 45,163 overnights in the 21 municipalities comprising the back region in 2000 vs. 60,814 arrivals and 148,673 overnights in the 26 municipalities comprising the back region in 2014) (figures from the Province of Rimini, 2000 and 2014). As part of this reimagining process, Verucchio is becoming a site for tourist consumption, triggering the regeneration of retail in its historical town centre. Tourists are interested in purchasing locally manufactured goods, and this is repairing the retail desertification the town centre had faced when many of its inhabitants moved away in the 1980s.

In the midst of the 2000s, some shops reopened in the historical town centre. Piazza Malatesta is the main shopping area in this part of Verucchio (Fig. 2). Nine shops border the square: a bank, a bakery, a chemistry, a newsagent, a café, and four local food & wine shops. One is *La Taberna di Malatestino* (Malatestino's Inn), named after a member of the Malatesta family. Previously a traditional grocery, this shop transformed into a café serving local food & wine in 2008. Two of the other local food & wine shops that line the square also sell local handicrafts: *Il Bello e il Buono da Verucchio* [The Nice and the Tasty from Verucchio] and *Tipicità Italiane* [Italian specialities]. Both opened their doors at the beginning of 2010. *Tipicità Italiane* was originally conceived of as a themed shop selling excellent Italian food & wine, but today it sells a wide range of local products. Both shops are also licensed to provide food and offer wine tastings. The fourth food & wine shop, which opened in 2014, is *Piada Style*. "Piada" is a kind of bread typical throughout the Romagna area, which is usually eaten filled with ham or vegetables, as a snack or as a meal.

Limited steps have been undertaken thus far in framing official *Malatesta & Montefeltro* place promotion. Those taken mainly address the creation of a tourist product while instigating social cohesion among different local stakeholders. These might benefit from supposed reinforcement of the local economy by activating exogenous resources (such as tourism) (Gordon & Buck, 2005; Harvey, 1989). The official logo and the name of the brand are not yet acknowledged by local stakeholders or tourists. However, fieldwork has shown that some sets of associations consistent with the *Malatesta & Montefeltro* brand are implemented at certain sites that stand at the intersection between place and

Fig. 2. Verucchio's historic town centre. The shops that border piazza Malatesta.

tourism, such as local food & wine shops. Here, ascribed meanings about Verucchio are communicated and enacted through the performances of the shops' advertisements, the materiality of the shops themselves, the visual arrangement and display of commodities, and the bodily performances of shopkeepers and tourists. All actively enact a selective thematisation of Verucchio that brings "to life" place branding, as will be shown in the next section.

Place and product performances on the doorsteps of shops

Visual merchandising is a key medium through which the co-branding of place and products are enacted in Verucchio's local food & wine shops. The entrance *of Il Bello e il Buono da Verucchio*, one of the shops that has opened in Verucchio's main square recently, appears to be intended as an artistic installation, composed of a variety of elements that extend the shop beyond its doors, into the public space of the piazza (Fig. 3). Several olive oil tins and red wine bottles lie on the shop's doorsteps, next to a basil plant and a little Olive tree. The shop's owners are also olive oil manufacturers. Seen together with the basil pot and the wine bottles, the olive oil tins enact a "system of signs" (Baudrillard, 1968) that evoke the famous Mediterranean diet. Local food & wine shopkeepers display these symbolic objects to attract tourists. They enact Verucchio as a tourist place with specific characteristics, also affording opportunities for tourist performances, e.g. by contemplating the installation, taking pictures of it, touching it or moving through it. Those "things" "play critical roles (as actants) in the unfolding of cultural events and processes" (Franklin & Crang, 2001, p. 15). In this case they are performers of the concept at the basis of the core business of *Il Bello e il Buono* (whose main product on sale is olive oil) as well as Verucchio's place brand, albeit including elements associated with the larger Mediterranean area.

To the sides of *Il Bello e il Buono*'s doors are two printed posters, with no graphic refinement. One of the posters addresses the topic of olive oil production and the other describes "medieval caves" in the interior of the shop (Fig. 4a). Similarly, the nearby *Tipicità Italiane* displays a poster inviting viewers to take "a gastronomic trip between taste and the region discovery in the magic atmosphere of medieval caves" (Fig. 4b). Before focussing on the role of the caves in next section, I will concentrate on the per-

Fig. 3. The material performativity of a local food & wine shop in Verucchio, Italy.

Fig. 4. Visual and discursive performativity of *Il Bello e il Buono* (a) and *Tipicità Italiane* (b) side posters.

formances of the two posters. Those of *Il Bello e il Buono* lack the strong aesthetic of themed shops' communicative devices; the posters here are simply typed in black and white, with no consideration of font. These posters embody little care for aesthetics, in contrast with the staged authenticity of transnational local food chains, such as for instance the American casual dining restaurant chain specialising in Italian-American cuisine, *Olive Garden*. In another example, *Tipicità Italiane* removed its unassuming poster in 2014 (one that included pictures of local cured meats and cheeses) substituting it with a more refined, professional, graphically designed, one. In fact this shop aims to convey a more cosmopolitan atmosphere than *Il Bello e il Buono*; an objective enacted by its new posters. With this diversity, the socio-semiotics of both shops' posters, and the visual installation described, some characteristics of Rimini back-region can be understood as being communicated in a more nuanced, hybrid and open-ended tone than offered by the materials produced by the Province of Rimini. These formal materials limit themselves to a logo, a restricted set of pictures on the Rimini Riviera website and some not very detailed lines in a specially produced guide (Provincia di Rimini, 2014).

Commodification of historic built heritage through performances

The system of signs expressed by the posters and the material setting at the entrance of two of the food & wine shops in Verucchio, as mentioned above, are the object of encounters and performances between tourists, retailers, places and products. At the end of July 2014, on a warm and sunny day, I was observing Verucchio's piazza. Cyclists, a few per hour, traversed the space, but it was otherwise quite empty. Suddenly, the voices and movement of a group of five people broke the silence of the square. My attention moved back and forth, for a while, between the materiality of the piazza and

the performances of these people, on "the corporeality of their bodies and their creative potential, as well as the significance of technologies and the material affordances of places" (Haldrup & Larsen, 2010, p. 3). One of these people held a tourist guide. They chatted, shifting from Italian to English. Lifting her head up and looking around while crossing the square, one of the women within the group noticed *Il Bello e il Buono*.

The owner of *Il Bello e il Buono*, Ms Carolina, then came to the door and kindly invited the tourists to come in, and so did I. A sort of guided tour began, as if in a museum or a heritage site. Ms Carolina, who speaks some basic English, invited the group to pass from the entrance room, where the till is located, and where food, wine and handcraft products line the walls, to move into the backyard rooms, that is to say, the "medieval caves". Here there is an ice pit; a hole dug in the ground, to which ice and snow would be added in the winter and packed with insulation, often straw, in order to remain frozen for many months, to store perishable food. Ms Carolina started telling the story of the room; its age, the original function of the ice pit, and how the room and the ice pit connect with the story of Verucchio. The caves of *Il Bello e il Buono* are said by its owners to come directly from the times of the Malatesta, and they have paid particular attention to enhancing them. The tourist group previously introduced were an Italo-American family visiting their country of origin, and they paid careful attention to Ms Carolina's guided tour of her shop and her stories about Verucchio. The shopkeeper's entire body was involved in her storytelling: she pointed things out, smiled, and used her voice at different volumes and pitches. Ms Carolina infused the room with sounds and movements bringing together material (the ice pit), discursive (the content of her narration), and sensorial elements (her corporal engagement): a hybrid network of human and non-human things that are engaged in the enactment of a thematic selection of Verucchio's multiple identity. The tourists react and participate: some replying with utterances of astonishment, by moving their heads up and down in response to Ms Carolina, and enter into the conversation by asking continuous questions. An authentication process (Cohen & Cohen, 2012a) emerges through this kind of performance, as a shared idea of the value of cultural heritage is the element around which all the people involved in the staging agree and organise their interactions.

The interior design is very sober; the "medieval cave" is enhanced by the lack of furniture. Built heritage are important performative elements in contemporary retail design. The articulation of retail signs with heritage signs produces consumption spaces with a specific aesthetic that expresses an idea of uniqueness, continuity with the past, intimacy and social proximity, and high-end products and services (Mermet, 2013). *Il Bello e il Buono da Verucchio* and *Tipicità Italiane* use the "medieval caves" the shops are located in, to enact these characteristics. Verucchio's cultural heritage, as expressed by the built forms of the buildings that date back to the Malatesta's times, enhance the intangible cultural heritage expressed through what is sold within the shops (namely, local food & wine). These two elements, which have no direct connection are brought "to life" in *Il Bello e il Buono* by a set of material, discursive and embodied performances, which implement the scope of the place brand corresponding to the *Malatesta & Montefeltro*. As Kavaratzis and Kalandides reflect (2015), the sum of associations that a place brand intimately is are materiality-based, representations-based, practices-based. In this case, the shopkeepers, tourists, furniture, walls, and ice pit, all contribute to the sum of associations that eventually form the *Malatesta & Montefeltro* place brand, implementing it and boosting it.

Performing the tourist guide

The last room in *Il Bello e il Buono* is composed of a cave made out of an interrupted tunnel; which once connected to some of Verucchio's other historical buildings. On the night of a summer event, which consists of a run ending in Verucchio's historic town centre (a popular event not aimed at tourists but domestic visitors mainly from Rimini and its environs), the shopkeepers in the piazza were offering some refreshments to the participants for free. Ms Carolina set up a table in the "medieval cave" and some people joined her as the run ended. Once inside the shop, they were astonished by the site: "How beautiful it is in here!" they exclaimed, looking around with tourists' eyes, even though they had not travelled far. Indeed, tourism has become an ordinary practice (Larsen, 2014; Minca & Oakes, 2014), and people know how to perform the role of "the tourist" even if they are not one. This is what occurred in the cave at *Il Bello e il Buono* on the night of the event. Impressed with the cave, which itself becomes one of the main performer and not just a scenery, one of the visitors exclaimed:

"You've done miracles here!" Ms Carolina replied: "No, this was already here!" The man concluded: "Of course, but it has never been shown". Then, Ms Carolina discussed the restoration of the ice pit, stressing how much effort she and her husband were putting "into make it known". Performing the role of tourist guide, Ms Carolina offered pieces of information about Verucchio's fortress, artfully asking reflexively from time to time: "You knew this, didn't you?" She also invited further historical or practical questions that her visitors might have about Verucchio. In playing her part, Ms Carolina is not only a shopkeeper; retailing seems to enmesh with place branding.

On the occasion described, Ms Carolina also explained what the pit was used for in the past to each group of runners as they arrived. They listened to her explanation and looked into the ice pit while eating the appetisers offered, contributing to the enactment of the local food & wine shop as a tourist place as well as stabilising Verucchio's place branding. Indeed Ms Carolina frequently adopts her "tourist guide" persona. However, the staging is never the same, as it is subject to elements of improvisation that a fluid performance on the ground always involves (Bærenholdt et al., 2003; Giovanardi et al., 2014). For instance, some of the visitors might move around without listening to Ms Carolina, or chat with her/his group mates instead of listening to her, or question Ms Carolina's "story", or even interrupt her storytelling with some personal accounts that move the topic elsewhere. On one occasion a visitor to the cave started showing off about the qualities of the area where he came from, instead of praising the qualities of Verucchio. Where place branding is also about regional competition (Anttiroiko, 2014), this can also emerge during local/tourist performances. In this case, Ms Carolina was forced to change her usual script by adding new elements to her selective narration of Verucchio, in order to compete with her visitor. Place branding achieved through a performative approach is then a more open-ended, creative, adaptive, and inclusive process, designed to attract a wider range of participants than traditional place branding campaigns.

Outside the shops

This article illustrates the notion of performative place branding with reference to tourist local food & wine shops. The examples above reveal how they contribute significantly to a specific narration about Verucchio's multiple identities. Other shops, such as the bakery, the Post office, and the pharmacy have not entered the domain of place branding/tourism stage yet. However, performative instances can also be found at some of the other commercial venues bordering the square. Aestheticised pictures portraying some of the objects from Verucchio's archaeological museum are hung in the ancient *Caffé Centrale*. They perform another nuanced selection of themes about Verucchio, consistent with the enhancement of cultural heritage.

Exploring the intersection where place branding as it is performed by tourist local food & wine shops meets the rest of Verucchio is not the focus of this article. However, a second glimpse at Verucchio's main square offers interesting insights. The *tempos* of Verucchio change significantly seasonally, according to the day of the week, and throughout the day. In line with Kärrholm (2009), commercial activities evidently synchronise urban rhythms. They serve to implement the vivacity of the square, thanks to the scene settings illustrated in Section "Place and product performances on the doorsteps of shops", but the shops also more efficaciously enmesh with other tourist and/or leisure events such as those portrayed in Section "Performing the tourist guide". On those occasions, tables and benches are set outside the shops and become stalls for appropriation (Goffman, 1971) from a wide range of visitors, whose voices and presence contribute to the sensuousness of Verucchio. Lights from the shops integrate with public ones and for several hours the piazza becomes crowded, and noisy. This is in contrast to the silent afternoons, when just a few cyclists pass through, although the calm can be interrupted by the public bus, which stops there twice daily. At such times, the square might be perceived as a silent still life except for the discrete presence of some elders sitting down on the benches under the porches alone or chatting with friends. Youngsters arrive later in the afternoon, some of them astride noisy mopeds.

These bodies and material presences inflate the space with performances that extend beyond the ones enacted at the tourist local food & wine shops. In those venues, a thematic selection of Verucchio's multiple identity is articulated beyond the conscious or strategic act of place branding management in line with that observed by Ren and Blichfeldt (2011). While the place branding they perform is hybrid in nature and creative and adaptive in form, it is still susceptible to the exclusion of objects,

people, and temporalities, as suggested by previous accounts focussing on the bodily performances on the ground of tourism (Mordue, 2005; Quinn, 2007).

Conclusion

In the Rimini back region, certain local food & wine products serve as material expressions of what is otherwise an intangible cultural heritage. They literally and metaphorically feed new forms of tourist consumption. Local food & wine shops become interfaces between tourists, actors and place, and in so doing actively contribute to place branding. With reference to these sites, this study has proposed a theoretical interpretation and elaboration of how place branding emerge though a set of material, bodily and discursive performances, in line with the emerging perspective of performativity (Cohen & Cohen, 2012b). This implies a shift from a policy-driven logic of conceiving and studying place brands (Ren, 2011; Ren & Blichfeldt, 2011), consistent with views of tourist places as "constantly crossed by a potential to perform that emerges from the convergence of mundane practices and actions" (Giovanardi et al., 2014, p.113). "Things" also play a major role (Franklin & Crang, 2001; Ren, 2011; Sheller & Urry, 2006). Drawing on these insights, the case study illustrated how material, discursive, and embodied performances staged at local food & wine shops enact a selective thematisation of place, to which I refer to in this article as place branding. These performances might represent a frontier to be further explored, from where to arrive at theoretical and empirical implications.

Firstly, it was claimed that this theoretical framework enabled a more open-ended, creative, complex and inclusive consideration of place branding. Place branding is actually enhanced and implemented through material, discursive and embodied performances that have the advantage of being susceptible to immediate reaction and reinterpretation from either shopkeepers and tourists, and other kinds of audiences/performers. The same element of, for instance, a cave (as in the episode described) can shift from interior decoration to a connective tool, to a whole set of other spaces, objects, and stories. Performances are subject to continuous implementation and distortion; this can modify the place branding script, to create one that otherwise seems flawed and patronising. This article however takes a step further than previous research, by questioning this assumption and showing this is only a partial truth. As has been shown throughout the article, the staging, performances, and enactment of place branding at local food & wine shops seems to include a very similar selections of themes, referring to Verucchio's cultural heritage, such as the olive tree production and other food traditions, or the past connected with the Malatesta family. While expanding the content of the official *Malatesta & Montefeltro* place brand and opening up a space to bring it "to life", place branding performances are still confined to a few commodified elements of its cultural heritage.

A second and consequent issue, concerns the quality and the scope of the "inclusivity" of place branding in such an approach. I have focused the majority of my attentions on the hybrid performances brought about by both "things", shopkeepers and tourists', since they have emerged as the most affective performers of place branding. Still many elements and people remain excluded. For instance, elders comprise a major group of the population in Verucchio but they do not fall within place branding enacted at tourist local food & wine shops. Place branding unfolds in relation to dominant discourses and symbols (Johansson, 2012) also under such an approach. A critical account of who is not an affective performer needs to be considered and compensated through other approaches and self-reflexivity.

Third, we have seen how the intrinsic performativity of place branding becomes more powerful in producing, reproducing and stabilising tangible and intangible cultural heritage. However, the heritage-making agency of performative place branding is rarely considered as a powerful resource in this process. A methodological change in dominant policy-making is essential to apply performative perspectives within problem-oriented work. Only by looking at multiple actors' performances simultaneously and associated objects, logos, or documents can we establish a more integrated idea of the relationship between (and within) tourism and place. Instead of suggesting how to operationalise what has been described, this article suggests that a performative perspective is above all an invitation to move away from rigid positivist frameworks that fail to grasp the complexity of phenomena as they happen on the ground.

Finally, in this study I have not focused on the digital infrastructure that may frame or facilitate a performative exploration of place branding. In fact, these elements did not emerge significantly from fieldwork. However, augmented reality tools, QR codes, and gaming technologies implement the hybridity of tourist/place networks. Thus, future research may need to take these features into account, considering their growing role in spatial interactions with places' cultural heritage (Garau, 2014). In addition, comments on user-generated digital platforms should also be integrated into performative place branding, reflecting their acknowledged capacity to frame places (Zukin, Lindeman, & Hurson, 2015). Thus, a full account of the relationship between digital, material, discursive and bodily performances will be a major issue in the future research agenda.

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