

INTRODUCTORY NOTE: BETWEEN IDENTITY, PARTICIPATION AND VISIBILITY: CONTEMPORARY CHALLENGES OF TERRITORIAL COMMUNICATION

NOTA INTRODUTÓRIA: ENTRE IDENTIDADE, PARTICIPAÇÃO E VISIBILIDADE: DESAFIOS CONTEMPORÂNEOS DA COMUNICAÇÃO TERRITORIAL

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Transformations driven by globalisation, digitalisation, and increasingly complex communication processes have significantly altered how territories are represented, governed, and experienced. Within this evolving landscape, place branding has emerged as a strategic domain that transcends traditional promotional approaches, integrating considerations of identity, governance, participation, and development. Concurrently, digital communication is now a central component of social life, influencing citizenship, the public visibility of social actors, and the collective construction of place-based meanings.

Within the broader field of place branding, a perspective persists that challenges the dichotomy between market-oriented self-promotion of tourist destinations, characteristic of the Anglophone conception, and approaches focused on alternative development, sustainability, and public policy design. As Acosta (2016) highlights, and as Sampaio (2024) and Andrade et al. (2024) further elaborate, these alternative approaches involve citizen participation through public consultations, integrated plans for culture, tourism, and communication, and advisory councils. In this context, the term “marca-lugar” (place branding), prevalent in Lusophone and Hispanophone contexts, is adopted to move away from the strictly commercial perspective of place branding, which, as David Harvey (2012) argues, often leads to the commodification of cities.

It is at this intersection between territory, communication and citizenship that the present thematic issue of *Comunicação e Sociedade* is situated. The proposal emerged from the need to critically reflect on how cities, regions and nations construct narratives about themselves in a media environment marked by technological convergence, accelerated content circulation and expanded public participation. As Jenkins (2006) notes, convergence culture has redefined the relationships among the production, circulation, and consumption of information, making the boundaries between institutions, media,

and citizens increasingly porous. This transformation has direct implications for territorial communication strategies, which now operate within an ecosystem in which the legitimacy of narratives increasingly depends on the capacity to engage diverse social actors.

It is therefore crucial to conceptualise organisational and strategic communication as continually transforming paradigms, shaped by ongoing social, technological, and cultural changes. In this context, organisations, public institutions, and territories are increasingly required to develop relational, participatory, and collaborative communication models. Recent studies by Clésio Teixeira and Sónia Sebastião (2023) underscore the evolving relationships between organisational communication and local communities, highlighting the importance of proximity, active listening, and the co-construction of symbolic and social value. Consequently, place branding functions not only as a tool for differentiation and competitiveness but also as a mediating process among diverse identities, interests, and expectations.

The articles included in this volume exemplify the breadth and depth of research in this field. Collectively, they demonstrate that territorial communication strategies extend beyond economic or touristic promotion to engage with issues such as civic participation, social justice, cultural representation, and sustainable development.

The civic dimension of digital communication is exemplified in the article by J. Joynes and Ashish Kumar Dwivedy, which examines environmental justice movements in Kudankulam and Thoothukudi, Tamil Nadu, India. Their analysis demonstrates how territorial inequalities affect the visibility of protests on digital platforms and shape processes of public recognition, thereby revealing the interconnectedness of communicative justice, environmental justice, and territorial branding.

Within the Brazilian context, Jorgiana Melo de Aguiar Brennand, Ricardo Ferreira Freitas, and Igor Lacerda investigate the relationship between the Feira das Brecholeiras and the Madureira neighbourhood in Rio de Janeiro. Their study illustrates how social media narratives reinforce both the event's and the territory's identities, highlighting reciprocal valorisation among cultural practices, urban sociabilities, and digital communication.

Rodrigo Maurício Freire Soares further develops the discussion on territorial scales in place branding by critically examining the predominance of cities in Brazilian research. He highlights the asymmetries between urban and rural territories and proposes an approach that conceptualises place branding, following Sampaio (2024) and Andrade et al. (2024), as a multisectoral public policy integrated with governance and territorial development processes.

Adopting a perspective focused on everyday territorial life, Márcia Silva examines bus stops in semi-urban and predominantly rural areas of northern Portugal. The study demonstrates how these frequently overlooked spaces reveal inequalities, symbolic appropriation, and communicational dynamics that mirror broader social transformations. This approach underscores that territory communicates through its details, infrastructures, and daily practices.

Yánder Castillo Salina and Jose Angel Yañez Reyes present an innovative case of participatory place branding in Trinidad, Cuba. Utilising participatory ethnography, the authors demonstrate the effectiveness of collaborative methodologies in integrating citizens, cultural agents, entrepreneurs, and institutions into the construction of territorial narratives, thereby fostering more inclusive and socially legitimised processes.

Manuel Santillán Vásquez analyses the first decade of Marca Perú, focusing on the construction of its identity and the challenges of aligning international promotion with efforts to enhance citizens' sense of belonging. The study underscores the complexities of strategic communication for national branding and the difficulties of developing coherent narratives for both domestic and international audiences.

This volume aims to advance understanding of the diverse ways in which territories are communicated, appropriated, and contested in contemporary contexts. The collected articles demonstrate that digital communication serves both as a tool for territorial projection and as a space for civic participation, where identities, memories, visibilities, and forms of belonging are negotiated.

The cover photograph, “Banco de Dados” (data bench), by Luís Amaral, Professor of Information Systems at the University of Minho, establishes a meaningful dialogue with the themes explored in this issue. Taken at a craft fair in Bissau, Guinea-Bissau, the image symbolically represents the interconnections among knowledge, information flows, local economies, and territorial identity. The selection of this photograph is further enhanced by the author's role as the initiator of the *Casa do Conhecimento* project, which exemplifies the practical application of place branding, digital communication, and citizenship principles in northern Portugal. Like the articles in this issue, the image underscores that territories are not solely physical or administrative entities, but also symbolic constructions shaped by relationships, narratives, technologies, and community participation.

By assembling research from diverse geographical and sociocultural contexts, this volume reaffirms the importance of critically engaging with the intersections of strategic communication, territory, and citizenship. In an increasingly interconnected and convergent world, understanding these dynamics is essential for fostering more inclusive, participatory, and socially responsible approaches to communicating places and the communities that define them.

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