

Master thesis Human Geography



BRANDING LIMBURG

A positioning of two branding strategies from a Competitive Identity perspective

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PREFACE

In front of you is my master thesis research, which officially marks the end of my student days. A long awaited moment that, looking back, was reached in a glance. My research internship made me realise how much I have learned in the last couple of years and most of all, how much I have become a real human geographer.

The result of my research internship – and, indirectly, all those years of study - is now in front of you. This would however not have been possible without the help of several people. I was supervised by prof. dr. Gert-Jan Hospers (Radboud University Nijmegen) and dr. Hendrik Jan van Elmpt (Province of Limburg), who I want to thank for their constructive criticism and clear comments. Furthermore, my gratitude goes to the people I have interviewed and who have taken the time to exchange views with me and provide new insights. Last, but definitely not least, I would like to thank my family and friends for their support during this research period and the study years prior thereto.

Stéphanie Schlicher

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SUMMARY

Place branding is a common practice nowadays. The local identity of places is gaining more and more importance as a factor in location choice for companies, residents, visitors and talent because of the ongoing globalisation process. It is evident that places must be branded, but there are several approaches to brand a place. The branding strategies used can thus differ.

Just like many other authorities, the Province of Limburg has recognised the importance of place branding. While in the last four years only South Limburg was actively branded, in July 2013 the Province wants to broaden this practice to Limburg as a whole. The branding strategy of South Limburg under the header of 'Regiobranding Zuid-Limburg', was developed by consultancy firm Berenschot and aimed at positioning South Limburg as a region with a good work-life-balance. The means that were used to reach this goal were mainly communication oriented in the form of promotion campaigns, supplemented with a number of actions and projects. The new branding strategy for Limburg with the working title 'Limburg Branding' is developed by international consultants Simon Anholt, Robert Govers and Jeremy Hildreth. The brand of Limburg will be established through real actions and projects around the leitmotiv "*Limburg. We don't see borders, we see interfaces.*" The broadening of the branding practices from South Limburg to Limburg entails a new branding approach: Competitive Identity.

The Competitive Identity approach is developed by Simon Anholt and purports the idea that a place brand can only be established through clear and coordinated communication from a coalition of government, business, civil society, resulting in newly created institutions and structures. Branding a place through Competitive Identity is about choosing a relevant, distinguishing positioning of the brand which matches the identity of the place and subsequently propagating that brand through real actions and projects. Hereby it is important to create some sort of synergy among all coalition partners involved, in order to ensure the dissemination of the same message about the place in a clear and coordinated way. However, Although Anholt acknowledges that the Competitive Identity is contested due to power structures, he does not include these in his Competitive Identity model. Several critics point out however, that the different actors involved, the tasks and responsibilities assigned to them and their interrelationships with other involved actors can influence a place brand. In this research, this factor is therefore included in the Competitive Identity model. Figure A shows this adjusted Competitive Identity model: all 'channels' through which a brand can be established are displayed at the points of the hexagon, the influencing factor power relations is placed outside the hexagon.

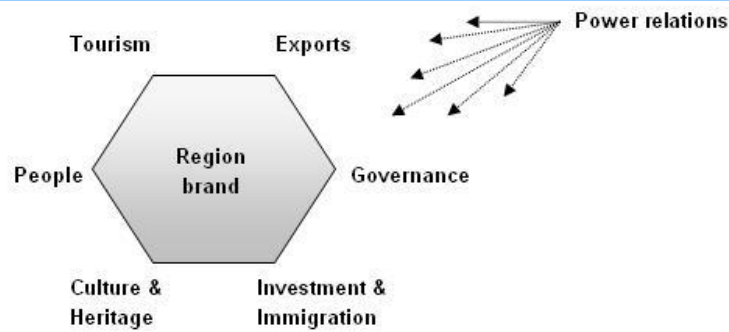


Figure A: Region brand hexagon

The change of branding approach raises the question if the baby is being thrown out with the bathwater, since evaluations show that Regiobranding Zuid-Limburg has had positive effects on the perception of several aspects of South Limburg and on the level of conjunction among stakeholders in South Limburg. By analysing Regiobranding Zuid-Limburg as well as the plans for Limburg Branding from a Competitive Identity perspective, the differences and similarities of both branding strategies become clear. That way conclusions can be drawn on the level of connectivity between the two branding strategies based on which recommendations can be done for the implementation of Limburg Branding. The corresponding research question is as follows:

To what extent is the strategy of Limburg Branding (2011-2012) related to the former branding strategy of Regiobranding Zuid-Limburg (2008-2012) from a Competitive Identity perspective and what can be recommended for the implementation of Limburg Branding?

Although at first sight it might seem unfair to compare a branding strategy that is developed from such a different perspective to a strategy that is developed on the basis of Competitive Identity, the analysis results have shown that both strategies contain aspects fitting into the bigger framework of Competitive Identity and that both strategies have aspects that (might) do not.

In general it can be concluded that Regiobranding Zuid-Limburg became more compatible with Competitive Identity as time progressed: the branding organisation started to act more out of the own identity of the region whereas previously the position of 'others' (like the Randstad) was leading and besides the ongoing practices focused on communication, substance gained importance. In executing actions and projects cooperation with stakeholders was increasingly sought. As for Limburg Branding, it is hard to say how it will exactly fit into the bigger framework of Competitive Identity, since the branding project is still in the planning phase. Because there is no business plan yet, the distribution of tasks and

responsibilities among stakeholders and the branding organisation and their interrelationships remain unclear. However, the preliminary plans are all developed from a Competitive Identity perspective: the uncertainty stems mainly from issues that have not yet been worked out.

The main differences between the branding strategies of Regiobranding Zuid-Limburg and Limburg Branding emanate from the chosen branding approach, the organisation of the branding practice and the positioning of the brand. First of all, Regiobranding Zuid-Limburg was based on the more communicative approach of consultancy firm Berenschot, while Limburg Branding has been developed on the basis of Competitive Identity. Whereas communication has its place in Competitive Identity only after actions and projects worth talking about have been realised, in the 'Berenschot-approach' it is the first and main practice which is followed by several actions and projects to support the message spread. Second, as for the organisation of the branding practice, Stichting Regiobranding Zuid-Limburg turned out to be an executive branding organisation due to the chosen governance structure, in contrast to what the organisation of Limburg Branding is planned to be. Lastly, both brands are positioned differently which results in different strengths and weaknesses of the brands. Whereas the positioning of the brand South Limburg is not sharp and creative enough, it is relevant and elemental to its receivers and inhabitants. This is the other way around for the positioning of Limburg through its border location: although it is creative and memorable, it lacks relevance and cannot be considered elemental.

Concluding, it can be stated that the level of connectivity between the branding strategies of Regiobranding Zuid-Limburg and Limburg Branding is surprisingly fair, considering the different approaches, organisation of the processes and positioning of the brands. Regiobranding Zuid-Limburg became more compatible with Competitive Identity as time progressed, and within the framework set by the above mentioned differing aspects Regiobranding Zuid-Limburg will probably continue to become more compatible with Competitive Identity towards the transition to Limburg Branding.

This results in recommendations for Limburg Branding which are concentrated around two things: taking advantage of the similarities between both strategies and learning from the differences between them. First, it is recommended that actions and projects in the future implementation phase are constantly reassessed on the basis of the chosen positioning of Limburg Branding, in order to create an unambiguously dissemination of the message through all hexagon channels. Special attention should be given to the relevance and feasibility of the brand position. Second, it is recommended that the organisation of Limburg Branding should be given the power to demand or strongly motivate stakeholders to make their projects on brand and to execute them in partnerships, in order to avoid becoming an executive organisation. This power can be for instance created by providing a financial

contribution or extra manpower to projects or through clarifying the intrinsic value of making projects on brand. Lastly, suitable actions and projects initiated by Regiobranding Zuid-Limburg should be made 'on brand' and continued by Limburg Branding as quick wins.

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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Project framework

Nowadays one cannot miss the ads in magazines, on TV and even on billboards in the streets, screaming that a certain city, region or even country is unique and special. And specifically: more unique and special than all the other ones. The slogans that tell you to 'Be Berlin', 'Love New York' or to 'Be inspired by Korea' are just the tip of the iceberg that is called place marketing. Place marketing is a practice with a long history, but in the last decades changing insights have led to the development of a practice that builds on the former one: place branding.

1.1.1 From place marketing to place branding

Whereas *place marketing* is about influencing the behaviour of potential target groups, *place branding* is about influencing the perception of these groups. In order to understand how the latter has come about, we need to go back in history to the emergence of place marketing. Authorities of places have since a long time tried to leave a good impression or promote their place in order to be able to face the competition with other places. The first place selling efforts were used in agricultural colonisation (Ward, 1998, p. 7). Kavaratzis and Ashworth (2005, p. 506) use the example 'city boosting' in this context. City boosting was practiced in the 19th century in the United States of America, to persuade Americans to move to the new founded cities in the West. People were lured in to moving with beautiful promises and sometimes with ordinary lies (Deverell, 2008, p. 513). The practice of place marketing as we know it today holds little relation to city boosting anymore. Although promotional activities are still part of place marketing, nowadays they fit into a more focused, integrated and strategic oriented implementation of place marketing. Place marketing is no longer some randomly undertaken practice, but serious business (Kavaratzis, 2005, p. 330).

The emergence of place marketing as we know it nowadays is closely related to the process of globalisation. In a globalizing world it is easier for people and companies to interact across borders. With the switch from a fordist economy based on mass production and standardisation to a post-fordist economy dependent on services, information and knowledge networks people, capital and companies have become more footloose (Lombarts, 2011, p. 16). Place marketers are thus under renewed pressure to project the local identity of a place in the expanding global flows of images (Govers & Go, 2009, p. 8). Competition among places therefore gained importance and at the same time has become much more difficult, since the globalisation process caused in many cases a certain homogenisation of

these places. Place marketing is no longer purely about how places may be sold and thus promoted, but more and more about what potential consumers wish to buy. The image of the place has therefore gained importance.

It is safe to say that place marketing thought has advanced towards a more mature stage. Simple place promotion has evolved into more sophisticated, theoretically grounded marketing exercises in the last three decades (Kavaratzis, 2005, p. 330). Many theories on successful place marketing have been developed and an important one is presented by Ashworth and Voogd (1987). They introduce a 'geographical marketing mix', which is a set of instruments that can be used to increase the alignment between the place and target groups. These instruments are promotional measures, spatial-functional measures, organisational measures and financial measures (Ashworth and Voogd, 1987, p. 85-86). The total process of place marketing usually takes place in a certain sequence. First, an analysis of the city on its assets, opportunities and audiences is executed. The second step is the identifying and choosing of a vision and corresponding goals with the cooperation and agreement of stakeholders. Third is the planning phase, wherein specific projects are prepared in order to reach the goals. The last step in this process is the monitoring and evaluation of the results of all activities.

Summarizing, different stages can be defined in the development of place marketing. First, there was the implementation of purely promotional activities in order to attract new inhabitants, visitors or companies. These promotional activities were undertaken by several independent actors. The next phase was the step towards the theorizing of place marketing, with for instance the marketing mix of Ashworth and Voogd (1987). They included financial incentives and measures aimed at product development to the already existing promotional activities. Another important step in the development of place marketing was the recognition of the importance of the image of a place. It was noticed that the image is a determining factor for the users of the place and that the image of the place and the attempt to influence it could be an effective way to coordinate the marketing process (Kavaratzis, 2007, p. 699). This touches Healey's concept of collaborative place making: place marketing should be about the designing of a spatial story that gives direction to the associated economic, social and ecological development of a place. This last realisation has caused the recent popularity of the concept of place branding, which is seen by some as the next episode in the history of place marketing (Kavaratzis, 2007, p. 699).

The goal of place branding is to profile the place to the outside world in a distinctive way, which means branding is based on the assets of a place instead of on the wishes and demands of target groups like in place marketing (Lombarts, 2011, p. 22). Ashworth establishes a link between place branding and creating a sense of place: authorities at different scales try to create a sense of place among their people, mainly in

order to legitimise their jurisdiction. Ashworth sees place branding as an extension of this phenomenon (Ashworth, 2011, p. 53), whereby place branding focuses on a target group larger than just the residents of that place. By influencing the perception people have of a place, indirectly their attitude and thus their behaviour towards that place is influenced.

In the practice of place branding the fact that every place already has some kind of reputation or image is not overlooked. Ries and Trout introduce the concept of 'positioning' in that respect. *"The basic approach of positioning is not to create something new and different, but to manipulate what's already in the prospect's mind."* (Ries and Trout, 2000, p. 5). Through positioning one takes a stand in the mental world of its target group. In the case of a region, which is a 'product' that exists for a long time and through this already has an established reputation, it is mainly about 'repositioning' (Maathuis, 2008, p. 91): through branding, people are encouraged to see a region with different eyes. Subsequently, through this different perspective a new reputation of the region can be established.

The practice of place branding takes place in the bigger framework of brand management. Besides the creation of a place brand, this involves the subsequent use of that brand in all possible policy fields in order to strengthen and maintain it. The Competitive Identity approach of Simon Anholt (2007) is one of the leading brand management approaches at the moment. It provides several options through which a country, region or city can build and manage its reputation, whereby the focus lies on actions instead of advertisement and PR. Competitive Identity theory goes beyond the idea that reputations of places are rather like the brand images of companies and products: they are equally important, but need to be managed in a whole other way.

1.1.2 Place branding in Limburg

Just like many other authorities, the Province of Limburg recognises the importance of place branding. In 2008 the Stichting Regiobranding Zuid-Limburg* was founded in order to brand South Limburg as a place with a great quality of life. The choice was made to focus on the perfect 'work-life balance'. For four years this foundation tried to strengthen and broaden the image of South-Limburg through different campaigns: in 2009 the 'Alles wijst op Zuid-Limburg' campaign was started and the 'Bright site of life' campaign runs from 2010. Besides these promotion campaigns several projects in collaboration with stakeholders were set up, like an expat service and a digital logistics hub.

* Abroad, the name 'Maastricht Region' is used instead of 'South Limburg' because of Maastricht's greater international reputation. Although the proper translation of 'Stichting Regiobranding Zuid-Limburg' is thus 'Maastricht Region Branding Foundation', the choice is made to use the Dutch name since this research is mainly written for a Dutch audience. This same reasoning leads to the choice for the use of the name 'South Limburg' instead of 'Maastricht Region' in this research.

In 2013 the Province of Limburg will start a province wide branding campaign which has the working title 'Limburg Branding'. The focus on South Limburg will disappear: instead Limburg will be branded as a whole. The Stichting Regiobranding Zuid-Limburg will therefore cease to exist. The objective of the new branding strategy is to make Limburg a 'strong brand', which should be based on the values and identity of Limburg with the aim of creating international awareness and reputation for the region. Ultimately, this strategy could pay off in retaining and attracting new residents, visitors and companies (Provincie Limburg, 2011^B). The preliminary plan is to deploy the border location of Limburg in order to make Limburg an attractive brand both inside and outside the Netherlands with the leitmotiv "*We don't see borders, we see interfaces*" (see chapter 5). International advisors Simon Anholt, Robert Govers and Jeremy Hildreth will lead this project using the Competitive Identity approach.

Box 1: Limburg

Limburg is a province in the south of the Netherlands, located at the borders with Belgium and Germany (figure 1). It has approximately 1.121.630 inhabitants, the majority of which lives in South Limburg (table 1).

Limburg region:	Inhabitants:	Major cities:	Main characteristics:
North Limburg	280.572	Venlo	Horticultural area, logistics hub (Greenport)
Middle Limburg	235.839	Roermond, Weert	Shopping, water recreation area
South Limburg	605.219	Maastricht, Heerlen, Sittard	Colleges and universities, health & science clusters and campuses, hills and nature

Table 1: Limburg in facts (CBS, 2012)

The province has a specific culture and ambiance in comparison to the rest of The Netherlands, which has everything to do with its location (Orbons, 2001, p. 34). The Limburg culture has historically been influenced by its neighbouring countries and this effect was strengthened by its peripheral location within the Netherlands.

Limburg is dealing with some population transitions (De Jong & Van Duin, 2009, p. 47): an aging population and demographic decline cause the depart of young people for better job- or study opportunities. In a way one could therefore say that the peripheral location of the province of Limburg increases the importance of branding. In contrast with its peripheral location within The Netherlands, Limburg is its central location within Europe. This position could provide a useful starting point for branding.



Figure 1: Limburg (Trefplaats, n.d.)

Besides a change in scope and topic, the new branding strategy will bring a change in branding approach. Whereas South Limburg focused in its branding strategy on communication, Limburg Branding will focus on actions. This has mainly to do with the initial design of the strategies and the underlying conceptual frameworks. In the case of South Limburg consulting firm Berenschot developed the strategy and a business plan, in the case of Limburg Branding this were the consultants Anholt, Govers and Hildreth. Whereas

Berenschot uses its own branding strategy based on communication, Anholt, Govers and Hildreth base their strategy on the Competitive Identity approach developed by Anholt. The implications of these choices and an elaboration on these changes can be found in chapter 4 and 5.

This reversal in branding strategy raises the question if the baby is being thrown out with the bathwater. Evaluations show that the branding campaigns of Stichting Regiobranding Zuid-Limburg have had positive effects on the perception of several aspects of South Limburg and on the pride of its inhabitants (Govers, 2012; Sillen, 2012). Although the branding strategy of Stichting Regiobranding Zuid-Limburg has been evaluated several times, this strategy has not been positioned in relation to the new branding strategy based on Competitive Identity theory. A positioning of the branding strategy for South Limburg and the new branding strategy for Limburg as a whole in relation to each other based on Competitive Identity theory is however useful because it can provide an answer to the question to what extent both branding strategies are related to each other and hence what positive effects can be kept or even strengthened. This positioning takes the substance of both branding strategies into account as well as the processes in which this substance came into being.

The societal relevance of this research resides in the fact that the whole of Limburg benefits from a strong Limburg brand and thus from a smooth continuation of the branding practices. Another aspect of the societal relevance of this research resides in the fact that a lot of money is spent on branding in general, while there is no empirical evidence on definite success or fail factors and the degree to which branding is effective (Kaneva, 2011, p. 121). The scientific relevance of this research resides in the new insights this research will generate in the field of place branding and more specifically that of Competitive Identity. Although Anholt has written books about his Competitive Identity theory and applied this theory to several branding projects, it is interesting to use the Competitive Identity perspective to analyse a case in which there was no explicit reference or use of this analytical framework. Competitive Identity has never been used before as an assessment mechanism. A second new aspect of this research is the geographical scale to which Competitive Identity theory is being applied: the regional scale has up until this research not been as thoroughly explored as the national and the city scale. Finally, a new conceptual framework is proposed in analysing the branding of regions using the insights from as well city branding as nation branding. For these three reasons this research will provide a new input in the academic field of place branding.

1.2 Research goal and –questions

This research will be theory informed, but practice oriented as it is conducted in the framework of a research internship at the Province of Limburg. As was already explained in the previous section, a smooth continuation of the branding practices for Limburg is beneficial for all parties involved. The research goal is therefore worded:

- *Goal of this research is the positioning of the branding strategy of Regiobranding Zuid-Limburg (period 2008-2012) and the plans for the new branding strategy of Limburg Branding (period September 2011-October 2012) in relation to each other based on Anholt's Competitive Identity theory, in order to be able to draw conclusions on the level of connectivity between the two branding strategies and to give recommendations for the implementation of Limburg Branding.*

The corresponding research question is as follows:

- *To what extent is the strategy of Limburg Branding (2011-2012) related to the former branding strategy of Regiobranding Zuid-Limburg (2008-2012) from a Competitive Identity perspective and what can be recommended for the implementation of Limburg Branding?*

To provide an answer to this question, several sub questions have to be answered first. First there will be elaborated on the concept of place branding in order to get to a working definition for this research. Then Competitive Identity theory will be explored and operationalised in order to be able to serve as an assessment mechanism for region branding. The questions that will set the contents of the theoretical framework are therefore:

- *What is place branding in general and what definition suits this research?*
- *What does Competitive Identity theory entail?*
- *How can Competitive Identity theory be applied to the regional scale?*

Then the two branding strategies are further discussed. First the branding strategy of Regiobranding Zuid-Limburg is sketched out and afterwards it is analysed through Competitive Identity theory as operationalised in the theoretical framework. The same is done for the plans of Limburg Branding. The corresponding subquestions are:

- *What did the branding strategy of Regiobranding Zuid-Limburg entail and how can this be seen in the light of Competitive Identity theory?*
- *What will the branding strategy of Limburg Branding entail and how can this be seen in the light of Competitive Identity theory?*

Finally, in the conclusion an answer to the main question is formulated and a reflection on the research process is included.

1.3 Structure

In order to answer the research questions, this thesis is divided into six chapters. In this chapter the two cases have been introduced and put in the bigger framework of place branding. Also the research goal and corresponding research questions have been identified. In chapter 2 the theoretical framework is built around the concepts of place branding and Competitive Identity. After the elaboration on these concepts in the first two paragraphs of chapter 2, the regional scale and the concept of power is examined in the third paragraph, leading to the operationalisation of the Competitive Identity approach for regions. In chapter 3 the research strategy is set out, just as the methods for data collection. The case Regiobranding Zuid-Limburg is analysed in chapter 4: after an outline of the whole branding process, the proposed actions and projects are analysed through Competitive Identity as operationalised in chapter 3. After analysing the positioning of the brand, the chapter ends with a short conclusion. Chapter 5 has the same structure and is about the case Limburg Branding. An extra paragraph on the chosen leitmotiv is added. Lastly, in chapter 6 the main research question is answered, recommendations for further research are done and a reflection on the research process is included.

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1 Place branding: main concepts and definitions

2.1.1 Introduction

Like stated in the introduction, place branding is seen by some as the next episode in the history of place marketing (Kavaratzis, 2007, p. 699). With the increasing globalisation, it is important for places to have a good reputation. Living in a world where borders and distances disappear, people and companies become footloose and base their choice of where to go on general ideas and impressions of a place (Govers & Go, 2009, p. 41). The 'brand' of a place has therefore become something that has a value on its own and needs to be managed. It is the place's image that needs to be planned, managed and marketed, which makes place branding the 'right' approach to place marketing in general (Kavaratzis, 2005, p. 336). Although branding and brand management are concepts that are used very often, there is no general agreement on what these words really mean. Even though the main characteristics of place branding are already briefly mentioned, this paragraph will elaborate further on the concept in order to come to a working definition of place branding and related terms for this research. Since Anholt's Competitive Identity theory will form the evaluation criterion in the analysis of Regiobranding Zuid-Limburg, the definitions that fit to this theory will be used throughout this research.

2.1.2 Place brand

Anholt uses the following definition for the concept 'brand': *"A brand is a product or service or organisation, considered in combination with its name, its identity and its reputation.* (Anholt, 2007, p. 4) Since this research is about the branding of places, the definition of Anholt will be slightly changed into the following definition:

A place brand is a city, region or country, considered in combination with its name, its identity and its reputation.

This definition is strong in its simplicity, since it shows in one sentence that there are several aspects that constitute a place brand. Not only what the place is called and what it actually entails, but also what the place evokes in associations and thoughts is part of the brand. A place brand is the sum of all tangible and intangible elements of a place (Moilanen and Rainisto, 2008, p. 6). Anholt provides a very useful subdivision in this context. According to

him a brand can be subdivided into four aspects: the brand identity, the brand image, the brand purpose and the brand equity.

The brand identity refers to the core concept of the product, which is what we actually see in front of us as consumers (Anholt, 2007, p. 5). In the case of a place this is for instance the totality of housing, infrastructure, nature, entertainment facilities etcetera. All tangible aspects of a place come together in this concept.

The brand image on the other hand, is the perception of the brand that exists in the mind of the consumer. A quote of Lindsay (2000, p. 3) fits well to what this term actually entails: *[...] the totality of the thoughts, feelings, associations and expectations that come to mind when a prospect or customer is exposed to an entity's name, logo, products, services, events, or any design or symbol representing them.* Since feelings are the main drivers of people's behaviour, brand image is a core concept in place branding (Anholt, 2007, p. 5).

The third aspect, brand purpose, can be considered as the internal equivalent of brand image. It refers to the image the residents, companies and stakeholders of a place have of their own place (Anholt, 2007, p. 6). In this context Van Ham (2008) states that place branding is required to make a place's image work for its citizens. Hereby he means that many places offer the same 'product' in the sense of territory, infrastructure, governance etcetera, so they must compete with each other on the level of perception of their citizens. A good brand makes citizens feel better and more confident about themselves by giving them a sense of belonging and a clear self-concept (Van Ham, 2008, p. 131). This idea is widely recognised. Hospers and Pen (2011, p. 84) for instance introduced the term 'warm city marketing' for this practice, a form of city marketing by which the target group is formed by the city's own residents instead of people from the outside. Although brand purpose is an internal aspect of branding, it can influence the brand image: *"Since the interactions which residents have with tourists and visitors are generally uncontrollable, it is in the interest of the [place's] managers to ensure its residents are satisfied customers, proud inhabitants and [place] ambassadors."* (Insch & Florek, 2008, p. 146).

Lastly there is the aspect of brand equity (Anholt, 2007, p. 6). This refers to the fact that a brand becomes valuable in its own. The goodwill of the target group towards the place brand determines this asset value. For a place the brand equity for instance manifests itself in the fact that a place is preferred over certain other places.

2.1.3 Place branding

Branding is the umbrella term for the more or less coordinated practices that evolve around a place brand. Although the term stems from the commercial sector, place branding involves multiple stakeholders and is seldom under the control of one central authority, which makes the branding of a place much more diffuse than the branding of a product (Van Ham, 2008,

p. 133). As Govers and Go (2009, p. 25) put it: *“Place branding links place identity with projected and perceived images through communication and experience.”* The definition of Anholt expresses these elements in a different way and also verbalizes the purpose of branding. The concept of ‘branding’ is defined by Anholt as follows: *“Branding is the process of designing, planning and communicating the name and the identity, in order to build or manage the reputation.”* (Anholt, 2007, p. 4)

A fundamental argument of Anholt is however that although places have a brand, branding a place is not possible: at least not in the way products, services or companies can be branded (Anholt, 2007, p. 5; Anholt, 2010 p. 2). This is quite confusing since he gives a definition of the term which contains the ‘designing’ of a place’s name and identity. What Anholt probably tries to say with this argument is that one can invent a certain ‘brand’ or ‘image’ and use that as a starting point for branding practices, but one cannot ensure that that intended ‘brand’ will eventually be the outcome of the process. Anholt’s train of thought regarding this claim has everything to do with the concept of brand image: the brand image is located in people’s minds, which means one cannot change that image directly. As opposed to the branding of a product, the branding of a place is therefore not a matter of communication but of policy change. As Anholt (2008, p. 2) says: *“[...] Places [can] improve the speed, efficiency and effectiveness with which they achieve a better image [...] but that better image can only be earned; it cannot be constructed or invented.”*

Yet, Anholt includes the term ‘communication’ in his definition, which is again quite confusing. The explanation is that although communication is not a main component of place branding for Anholt, it is still a part of it since the policy changes have to be communicated once implemented. Anholt (2007, p. 47) states: *“Communications cannot substitute change, but they can report it, help to consolidate it, and to some extent speed it on its way.”*

To avoid further confusion, the definition of place branding that will be used in this research is a combination of both the definitions of Govers and Go and Anholt, in which the term ‘communication’ will refer to communication in the literal meaning of the word and the term ‘experience’ will refer to real actions including policy changes. The concept of ‘projected images’ will refer to so called invented images and the concept of perceived images will do justice to the brand image which is located in people’s minds. The definition of place branding in this research is thus as follows:

Place branding is the process of linking a place’s name and identity with projected and perceived images through communication and experience, in order to build or manage the reputation of that place.

2.1.4 Brand management

Once a place brand is established, it is important for places to maintain and strengthen the brand they have. This is where the concept of brand management comes in. According to Kavaratzis (2005) brand management depends heavily upon changing the way places are perceived by specified user groups: *“It involves the creation of a recognisable place identity and the subsequent use of that identity to further other desirable processes, whether financial investment, changes in user behaviour or generating political capital.”* (Kavaratzis, 2005, p. 334) Branding is thus a part of brand management. As Van Ham (2008, p. 132) states: *“Branding [...] is not only about ‘selling’ places, services and ideas and gaining market share and attention; it is also all about managing identity, loyalty, and reputation.”*

In this research brand management is an important concept since the Competitive Identity approach can be considered a form of brand management. Brand management is thereby first and foremost an internal project that is related to the concept of brand purpose. By uniting people around a common strategic vision a powerful dynamic for progress can be created (Anholt, 2010, p. 12). Since this strategic vision is created through policy changes and actions it is a logical consequence that this is an internal process. Brand management will be defined in this research as follows:

Brand management involves the creation of a place brand and the subsequent use of that brand in all possible policy fields in order to obtain, strengthen or maintain a certain reputation.

2.2 Competitive Identity theory

2.2.1 The Competitive Identity approach

Like stated in the previous paragraph, Competitive Identity is a form of brand management. The term was introduced in a time of “branding fatigue”: branding seemed to be inseparable from the idea of hollow slogans and other marketing practices and therefore had a negative reputation (Fan, 2006, p. 2). Competitive Identity not only brought a new term to the field of branding, according to Anholt it also introduced five new ideas (Anholt, 2010, p. 12). First of all there is the notion that places must communicate with the outside world in a clear and coordinated way through a coalition between government, business, civil society and newly created institutions and structures. All stakeholders should contribute to the propagation of the place’s image. Second, the notion of brand image is critical to the Competitive Identity approach since this concept refers to reputation as an external phenomenon over which the ‘owner’ of the brand has no control. Another important idea is the notion of brand equity, since this term implies that reputation is something that is highly valuable and needs to be

managed over the long term. The fourth contribution to the field of branding is the notion of brand purpose, since this concept stresses the fact that brand management is first and foremost an internal project. The importance of sustained and coherent innovation in all sectors is the last new notion that Competitive Identity has put forward; public opinion is best influenced by new positive things instead of a repetition of past successes.

Summarizing, it can be said that Competitive Identity is a coordinated identity strategy that can lead to the competitive advantage of a place (Anholt, 2007, p. 18). An important component of Competitive Identity is 'public diplomacy', a concept which entails both the policy making and the communication of that policy by a country's government (Anholt, 2010, p. 95). According to Anholt, it is public diplomacy mixed with brand management that underpins the idea of Competitive Identity (Anholt, 2007, p. 12). *"In other words, brand management for countries should be treated as a component of national policy, not a discipline in its own right, a 'campaign', or an activity that can be practised separately from conventional planning, governance, economic development or statecraft."* (Anholt, 2007, p. 33).

The Competitive Identity approach assumes that the reputation of a place is created through six natural channels. Although in the remainder of this paragraph these channels will be thoroughly covered, they are already mentioned briefly: the reputation of a country is said to be created through the channels of tourism, brands, policy, investment, culture and people. In the case of a city, these channels differ (Anholt, 2007, p. 59-61): the reputation of a city can be measured through perceptions of the place, the presence, the potential, the people, the prerequisites and the pulse. The basic theory behind the Competitive Identity approach is the use of all these channels in a coordinated and coherent way, in order to strengthen and maintain a certain place brand. As Anholt puts it:

"[...] when governments have a good, clear, believable and positive idea of what their country really is, what it stands for and where it's going, and manage to coordinate the actions, investments, policies and communications of all six points in the hexagon so that they prove and reinforce this idea, then they stand a good chance of building and maintaining a competitive national identity both internally and externally." (Anholt, 2007, p. 26)

Competitive Identity has three properties. First it attracts groups of people, for instance consumers or talents, and immaterial things, like respect and attention. Second, Competitive Identity transfers this attraction to other objects (the reputation of the place reflects on its people, products etcetera). Lastly, Competitive Identity can create order: a powerful and attractive strategy helps to create spontaneous alignment of purpose and shared goals among stakeholders (Anholt, 2007, p. 29).

Since it is not easy to change people's image of a place because people tend to hold on to their beliefs for a long time, the reputation of a place can only be altered by making real life changes. “[...] *reputation wasn't built through communications, and it can't be changed through communications.*” (Anholt, 2007, p. 31) The way to apply the Competitive Identity strategy is therefore as follows: first one should find out how the place is seen today and understand why this view is holding the place back in its ambitions. Subsequently one should come up with a clear vision on how the place should be seen and then work out a process for getting from the current brand to the future one (Anholt, 2007, p. 30). It is thereby important that no actions are undertaken just for the sake of image management: every action should first and foremost be done for a real purpose in order to be sincere and effective (Anholt, 2007, p. 32). Only if an action has an outcome worth talking about, advertisement and PR should be undertaken (Anholt, 2007, p. 34), “*because with no announcement to make and no product to sell, it is likely that they are ignored by the majority of the people who are exposed to them*” (Anholt, 2010, p. 86). A core idea of Competitive Identity is that the general strategy for this process should come out of the identity of the place: “*it needs to be dug out of the history, the culture, the geography, the society of the place.*” (Anholt, 2007, 75).

Anholt has later formulated this three-step strategy in the following terms: *strategy*, *substance* and *symbolic actions* (Anholt, 2010, p. 13). ‘Strategy’ comprises the whole process of knowing what a place is, where it stands today, knowing where it wants to go and knowing how it is going to get there. ‘Substance’ is the execution of that strategy through innovations and reforms in all possible fields. The ‘symbolic actions’ can be viewed as a particular part of the substance, since they are innovations that are emblematic of the strategy and therefore have a communicative power. In order to lead to a successful Competitive Identity all three steps have to be executed: the success is in the combination. A more detailed roadmap of the Competitive Identity Approach cannot be given, since there is no standard formula: every place has its own aims, circumstances, resources and competences (Anholt, 2007, p. xi). However, Anholt (2007, p. 76-78) provides criteria that a good strategy must comply. First, a branding strategy should be *creative*, which means it is surprising and memorable. Since places cannot be invented, the creativity lies in the take on the chosen perspective. Second, the strategy should be *ownable*: it should be uniquely and unarguably about the place and not anywhere else. The strategy should thereby be *sharp* (telling a very specific and definite story about the place) and *motivating* (pointing people towards new and different behaviours). Fifth, the strategy should be *relevant* to the consumer. And lastly, the strategy should be *elemental*, which means it should be simple and usable over a long period of time and in differing situations. These six criteria will be used to analyse the brand positioning of both cases.

2.2.2 The Competitive Identity of a country

As previously mentioned there will be elaborated on the six channels which create the reputation of a place and thus the Competitive Identity. Anholt (2007) represents the six channels which establish a country's reputation in his so called 'hexagon of Competitive Identity'* (figure 2). This model is intended to inform recommendations for branding activities and at the same time it serves as a tool for measuring the value of national brands in the Anholt-GfK Roper index (Kaneva, 2011, p. 122).

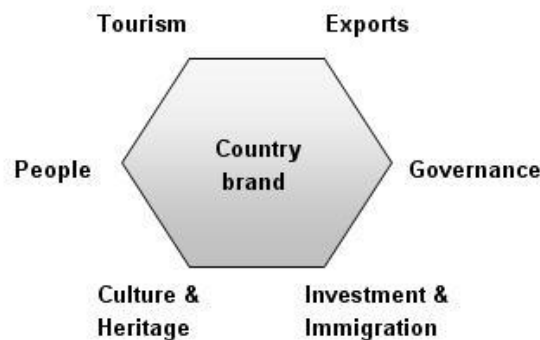


Figure 2: The hexagon of Competitive Identity (GfK Roper, 2008, p. 4)

The channel of *tourism* refers to tourism promotion as well as visitor's first-hand experience of the country. Real marketing practices only have proven to work for this channel of the hexagon, since tourism promotion addresses a specific target group with a clear message. In addition tourist boards usually have big budgets and the most experience in marketing (Anholt, 2007, p. 25). Once a member of this target group has taken action and actually visited the country, a happy holiday experience will definitely change the brand image of this person (Anholt, 2010, p. 89). Even if one does not visit the country, the images drawn through tourist campaigns can result in a favourable impression of the place which may lead to a greater tendency to buy products of the country, recommend the country to others or even invest in the country (Anholt, 2007, p. 89). This idea is consistent with Urry's theory of 'the tourist gaze'. Through tourism promotion city branders can manipulate the gaze of possible visitors: the gaze falls upon exactly those features of a place that are already anticipated (Hospers, 2011, p. 28-29). Creating strategic agreement between the tourist board and other stakeholders of the country is however often difficult, since positive tourist images (such as for instance a quiet countryside and old-fashioned towns) are not always

* The names of the channels of this hexagon slightly changed through the years. The name of the channel of governance changed for instance from 'foreign & domestic policy' (2003) to 'policy' (2007) to 'governance' (2008). However, the content remained. In this research the latest version of the hexagon is used.

helpful to other fields. Competitive Identity seeks to find a balance between these contradictions within a country (Anholt, 2007, p. 90).

The channel of *exports* refers to export brands which act as ambassadors of the country's image (Anholt, 2007, p. 25). This has everything to do with the so called 'country of origin effect'. If a product is manufactured in a country of which the consumer has a positive image, this will positively influence the consumer's attitude towards the product (Pappu et al., 2007, p. 729). This is consistent with the second property of Competitive Identity, namely that it transfers the attraction of an object to other related objects. This country of origin effect could also work the other way around: if one appreciates a certain brand and finds out that this brand stems from a certain country, there is a good chance that this country will be appreciated more (Anholt, 2007, p. 92).

The channel of *governance* is about the policy decisions of the country's government. It includes domestic policies as well as foreign policies (GfK Roper, 2008, p. 4) and this channel is where the concept of public diplomacy comes in. Public diplomacy is a term that was first used in the 1960's to describe how the United States of America had to manage their reputation abroad through foreign policies. It referred to the informing and influencing of foreign publics in order to promote the national interest and national security of the United states (Public Diplomacy Alumni Association, n.d.). Instead of conducting politics behind closed doors, in public diplomacy politics are conducted in front of a large audience. Nowadays public diplomacy is the norm: through instant communications and widespread democracy international relations take place before a global audience. The promoting tasks of modern diplomats have thereby stretched across different policy fields such as trade, tourism, investment and culture. All major stakeholders of the country's image need to be fully represented, which is one of the basic principles for building Competitive identity (Anholt, 2007, p. 13). Public diplomacy purely concentrates on the presentation and representation of government policy, which makes public diplomacy a part of the bigger whole which is Competitive identity; Competitive Identity focuses on how the nation as a whole presents and represents itself (Anholt, 2010, p. 94).

The channel of *investment and immigration* is mainly important for business audiences, because this concept refers to the way the country solicits inward investments and recruitment of foreign talents and students (Anholt, 2007, p. 25). This practice is consistent with the first property of Competitive Identity; certain groups of people are attracted by this channel.

Culture and heritage is a channel that refers to cultural activities and exports, like music and films. Through cultural exchange the reputation of a nation can be build (Anholt, 2007, p. 25), since it drives public perceptions towards a fuller and more durable understanding of the country and its values (Anholt, 2007, p. 97). In branding practices

culture can play an important role since people do not distrust cultural expressions: culture is not a commercial invention. The role of culture can be seen as a vital element in Competitive Identity because of its unique attachment to the place. The selection of elements that define a certain culture can however be problematic, since there is a need to balance past and present culture and to represent diverse social groups with different cultural backgrounds (Pasquinelli, 2010, p. 561). As Anholt states (2007, p. 98): *“The challenge for all countries is to find ways of continually presenting and re-presenting their past cultural achievements alongside their modern equivalents in ways that are fresh, relevant and appealing to younger audiences.”* At the same time countries *“need to reassess the way they identify themselves and communicate that identity to the world in the light of their changing populations.”* (Anholt, 2007, p. 99).

Lastly the channel of *people* refers to the people of the place themselves: the famous inhabitants as well as the population in general are important ambassadors for a place (Anholt, 2003, p. 215). The association with famous inhabitants of a place is therefore a recognised branding instrument (Ashworth, 2011, p. 54). Effective nation branding involves both communication from government to people (which is performed through public diplomacy) and communication from people to people (Anholt, 2007, p. 105). The same argument goes for this channel as for the channel of culture: when promotion does not have a commercial source, it is trusted and therefore more effective.

Obviously these six channels often overlap and influence each other. Tourism promotion creates a certain image of a country by for instance responding to the specific culture of that country. This created image can, in turn, influence the tendency to invest in a country, which may evoke policy changes. Of course many other possible effects can be identified, but there is no need to be complete in this listing since the message is clear: this overlap is why Competitive Identity theory stresses the importance of one collective strategy so much. Without a clear strategy, all of these channels go their separate ways and no effective Competitive Identity can be created.

2.2.3 The Competitive Identity of a city

“Cities are rather different from countries: they aren’t usually famous for producing particular products or services, the tourism emphasis is often as much on conventions as on leisure visitors, the apparatus of government is usually more technocratic than political, and the city’s culture isn’t always easy to distinguish from the culture of the country as a whole.” (Anholt, 2007, p. 59). With this reasoning Anholt underlines the need for a different Competitive Identity hexagon when dealing with cities. Because of their smaller scale, cities are easier to think of as single entities: there are less wide discrepancies in culture, people

etcetera (Anholt, 2007, p. 59). People therefore consider cities in more practical terms, which leads to the following hexagon (figure 3):



Figure 3: The city brands index hexagon (Anholt, 2007, p. 60)

The city brands hexagon is a tool to measure people's perception and by that evaluating the effectiveness of city branding (Ashworth and Kavaratzis, 2007, p. 527). The perception of a city can be measured through six channels. The channel of the *presence* is about the city's international status and standing (Anholt, 2007, p. 59). It is about how familiar people are with the city, their actual visits and their take on the fame of the city in fields of culture, science and policy. The channel of the *place* is about people's perceptions of the physical aspects of the city, while the channel of *potential* is about how people consider the economic and educational opportunities of the city. The *pulse* refers to the perception of the lifestyle of the city: how vibrant the city is considered to be and how many interesting things there are to do. The channel of the *people* has the same interpretation as the eponymous channel in the hexagon of a country's reputation: it refers to the city residents and the way outsiders see them. Lastly, the channel of *prerequisites* refers to the perception of the basic qualities of the city, meaning how easy it would be to find an accommodation, the level of facilities in the city etcetera.

2.2.4 Discussing the Competitive Identity framework

Anholt's ideas concerning Competitive Identity are being received in general as comprehensive, practical and relevant in developing place branding thought (Baxter, 2008; Dinnie, 2008; Suter, 2009). The country brand hexagon is one of the most frequently cited models in measuring place brands and informing recommendations for branding activities (Kaneva, 2011, p. 122). As Dinnie (2008) puts it: *"Rather than dwelling on academic theory, Anholt clearly describes the practical steps that countries need to take in order to enhance their reputations and to achieve the economic benefits that can flow from such reputation enhancement."*

This quotation of Dinnie links the main positives about Competitive Identity to the main critiques. The main critical points raised by several authors are linked to Anholt's role as a consultant. Criticasters point out that this might have resulted in a lack of academic underpinnings for his Competitive Identity approach. Kaneva (2011), Ashworth and Kavaratzis (2007), Fetscherin (2010) and Kalendides (2010) all start their critique from this perspective.

Kaneva (2011, p. 121) points out that although Anholt's model is practical, the effectiveness of it is not empirically proven. Kaneva states that that limited empirical evidence of the effectiveness of branding besides anecdotal "success stories" is presented.

Fetscherin (2010, p. 468) states that Anholt's country brand index is limited in its use because of the non-transparent proprietary methodologies used. Thereby he points out that the index is based on subjective perception data, whereas objective secondary data can contribute to a better understanding of the country brands.

Ashworth and Kavaratzis (2007, p. 529) concentrate their critique on Anholt's city hexagon on the point that it is conducted from a consultant's perspective and is suggested as a tool with which to investigate the effects of branding activities. The theoretical values it is based upon therefore needs a reappraisal according to them.

Another critical point starting from this perspective comes from Kalandides (2010): *"We should keep in mind that this is not a book written for academics – thus it does not bother much with sound conceptualisations – but is an excellent manual by a leading consultant in the field."* Kalandides then points out that Anholt's conceptualisation of 'place' is too narrow. Anholt uses the concept of place in an anthropomorphic sense (e.g. *"places must engage with the outside world in a [...] coordinated way"*), resulting in a too rosy picture of the ease with which Competitive Identity can be applied. The suggestion of Anholt that places engage with the outside world through a coalition of government, business and civil society does no justice to the complex relations a place consists of. Kalandides states that a place consists of relations of material structures, institutions, practices, relations, mental representations and a lot more, which implies that conflicts and coalitions among social groups or individuals are an inseparable part of a place. So by ignoring politics and power relations in his conceptualisation of place, Anholt does not provide a sound basis for his Competitive Identity theory. Kaneva (2011, p. 121) endorses Kalandides' line of thought by stating that technical-economic approaches to branding, in which she classifies Anholt's approach, ignore relations of power and neglect the implications for democracy. *"These instrumental approaches obscure the political dimensions of national governance and identity construction in order to render them suitable for co-optation by the logic of marketing"* (Kaneva, 2011, p. 122).

2.3 Operationalising Competitive Identity

2.3.1 Challenges in applying Competitive Identity in this research

Striking is that although Anholt's book (2007) on Competitive Identity promises a new brand management for nations, cities *and* regions, a regional hexagon is left out. Anholt suggests the use of the city hexagon as a model for regional Competitive Identity. In this respect Anholt (2007, p. 59) uses the argument that "[...] *subnational regions are in many ways analogous to cities.*" However, the city hexagon is a model that can only be used for measuring a brand, whereas the country hexagon is a model that both can be used as a tool for measuring as well as for informing recommendations for branding activities. The city hexagon is thus not fit as a model for managing a place's brand and it seems rather strange that Anholt does not propose a solution to this. Ashworth and Kavaratzis (2007, p. 529) recognise this problem: *"if the city hexagon is to be used as a guide for managing a city's brand, the ways and measures to ensure success in the fields included in the framework need to be clarified."*

Taking a close look at the channels of the city hexagon, it turns out that the channels identified in the country hexagon are present in the definitions of the channels of the city hexagon. To give an example: Anholt defines the channel of presence in the city hexagon as the city's international status and standing, which is created by how familiar people are with the city, their actual visits and their take on the fame of the city in the fields of culture, science and policy. If one thus wants to influence or manage this channel, one has to do that through actions in the fields of tourism, culture, investment and governance, which are all channels of the country hexagon. The country hexagon could thus be used on different levels of scale for managing a place's reputation. The fact that the country hexagon is chosen as a starting point in the approach of Limburg Branding supports this line of thought.

Considering the critique on Anholt's conceptualisation of place and the fact that Anholt himself does not suggest the use of the country hexagon for managing place brands of smaller scale levels than the country, however leads to the need for examining the regional scale in relation to branding before operationalising the country hexagon for this research. Therefore the next section is an elaboration on the regional scale from a branding perspective.

Linked to the critique on Anholt's conceptualisation of place is the critique on his lack of attention for the concept of power in Competitive Identity. Although Anholt recognises the fact that power structures have an influence on place branding, he does not elaborate on what these power relations entail and he does not include this factor in his Competitive Identity hexagons. Responding to the critique of Kalendides and Kaneva as elaborated on in section 2.2.4, a section on power relations is included in this paragraph. In the last section of

this paragraph the Competitive Identity model that will be used in this research is defined and operationalised.

2.3.2 Regions: a matter of scale

Prior to the operationalisation of Competitive Identity, it is important to elaborate on what a region actually is and how this concept will be used in this research. Scale is very important in place branding, since the scope of a place is the starting point for defining the brand. If the chosen scope is too broad, it might result in a weak brand which is built upon the lowest common denominator, but if the chosen scope is too narrow it may stop the brand from reaching a broad target group (Lindsay, 2000, p. 8; Ashworth and Kavaratzis, 2007, p. 526).

Although scale is an important concept in geography nowadays, until the 1980's the concept was largely taken-for-granted. Scale was defined as *"a relatively closed system, the majority of whose interactions remain within its boundaries"* (Herod, 2011, p. 5) and used for dividing the world into manageable pieces in order to make them analyzable. New insights such as Wallerstein's world-systems and Giddens' structuration theory led to a revival of the debate on scales and this debate still continues today. With these theories it was suggested that scales are socially produced and have real consequences for social life (Herod, 2011, p. 5-11). As Herod and Wright (2002, p. 4) state: *"[...] Social life is fundamentally scaled and issues of geographic scale are central to how social life is constructed and plays out. Equally, how we think about scale fundamentally shapes how we understand social life and its attendant spatiality."*

The regional scale has been for many geographers a key concept, but at the same time it is fair to say that the region is the scale which has been most frequently conceptualized in spatially rather vague terms (Herod, 2011, p. 127). It has generally been placed somewhere between the urban and the national scale (Whitehead, 2007, p. 139). The first conceptualisations of the regional scale stem from the beginning of the twentieth century and they focus on the region as a natural entity, whereas through the centuries this view was followed by views of the region as a cultural or economic entity (Herod, 2011, p. 163). Central has been the debate on the ontological status of the regional scale: should regions be considered as material things that can be 'seen' in the landscape or are they merely a mental device that allows people to make sense of their existence? (Herod and Wright, 2002, p. 5).

During the 1990's a new geographical approach to regional study emerged, which is usually referred to as the New Regional Geography. This approach set out to explore how regions are made through their social, economic and political relations with other places, which means that regions are conceptualized as socially constructed spatial categories. It recognises that although regions are socially constructed, they are being forged and

demarcated all of the time (Whitehead, 2007, p. 141). So this new approach to regional geography allows for taking both material and immaterial aspects of regions into consideration. Paasi (1991, p. 241) joins this line of thought in stating that regions and communities are spatially constituted social structures. He however criticizes the fact that history and culture are disregarded in this new approach (1991, p. 239). He views a region as an area with a unique history and culture and distinguishable territorial, symbolic, institutional and establishing phases. As Paasi (1991, p. 239) states: *“The region is comprehended as a historically contingent process whose institutionalisation consists of four stages: the development of territorial, symbolic, and institutional shape and its establishment as an entity in the regional system and social consciousness of the society.”* His statement that “regions are not, they become” expresses the fact that this is a recurrent process (Pike et al., 2006, p. 35).

Despite all these contemplations, defining the concept of region in practice remains difficult. This has to do with several ambiguities around the term region: there is no clarity about the size, the powers or the nature of regions. With regard to the size of a region, one can state that it is roughly fixed somewhere between that of a municipality and a country. However, this means that the size can vary. Think for instance of a country like the USA wherein the term region can refer to one or more states, while these are many times larger than The Netherlands as a whole. Second, the powers of regions can greatly differ. Some regions might have their own government (e.g. *bundesländer* in Germany or provinces in The Netherlands), whereas others have no constitutional administrative authority (e.g. South Limburg in The Netherlands). Lastly, regional scales can overlap. Within the Euregion for example, there exist several smaller regions of which South Limburg is one. Within South Limburg again smaller regions exist, like Heuvelland or Westelijke Mijnstreek.

Considering all the above, the regional scale is a scale that harbours a lot of variation in itself. It is thus not surprising that different authors have different views on how to deal with regions in terms of branding. Caldwell and Freire (2004) for instance consider the regional scale as compatible with that of cities, because both scales should be branded using their functional facets instead of the emotive facets used in branding a country. Herstein (2012) on the other hand considers region branding an integral part of country branding which is not even in all cases worthwhile, depending on the strength of the country brand. Although this is only a small selection, the conclusion is clear: the regional scale is always contested and this is also fact when it comes to branding.

2.3.3 Power relations

In the discussion of Anholt's Competitive Identity framework (see section 2.2.4), the subject of 'power' was brought up through the critiques of Kalandides and Kaneva. They state that

Anholt does not give the concept of power relations the attention that it deserves. Although Anholt recognises the fact that power structures have an influence on place branding since *“the translation of brand management from private to public sector practice will always be a political, intellectual and ethical challenge”* (Anholt, 2006, p. 81) he does not elaborate on what these power relations entail and he does not include this factor in his Competitive Identity hexagons.

Studying place branding literature, it turns out that involving power relations in general place branding is not common practice. This is rather strange since it is recognised that *“[...] the ownership of places as brandable entities remains deeply and fiercely contested, involving power and control issues, thus inviting the politicization of policy-making in place marketing and regional development”* (Kasabov & Sundaram, 2009, p. 4). In literature on destination marketing (simplistically explained: touristic place branding) however, this subject is more often covered. In several articles the role of stakeholders and political processes in place branding is elaborated on (Morgan, Pritchard & Piggott, 2003; Ruzzier & Petek, 2012). Even though destination branding differs from the place branding practices studied in this research, these insights can be used. A destination brand is namely in general viewed as the outcome of a multi-stakeholder collaborative decision making process and furthermore, *“the collective phenomenon of destination branding has been described as a ‘highly complex and politicized activity’”* (Marzano & Scott, 2008, p. 247). This emphasis on the involvement of stakeholders and collectivity reflects the main characteristics of the Competitive Identity approach to branding. It may be assumed however, that in destination branding the power relations are less complex than in place branding in general, since a greater variety of stakeholders has an interest in a strong general place brand than in a strong touristic brand.

The fact that power relations are more often recognised as an influencing factor in branding strategies in which collaboration is important is not surprising, since collaboration and power are theoretically interrelated concepts (Marzano & Scott, 2008, p. 250). Mokken & Stokman (1976, p. 42) state in this respect: *“Power and influence in a community or society emerge and develop, however, primarily in a relational framework – a specific complex of particular social relations between actors, by means of which certain actors, or groups of actors, acquire the capacity to fix or to change the action alternatives of other actors [...] or to determine the behaviour of those actors in relation to the alternatives available to them [...]”*. The structure of social relations in which this developing of power takes place is part of the institutional framework of the community or organisation, the network of interactions, transactions and communications between relevant actors (Mokken & Stokman, 1976, p. 46).

Although the concept of power is too complex to be covered in only one paragraph, it is useful in the framework of this research to define the aspects which determine the power capacities of actors in a network or organisation. These are their power position and their

power base. The power position of an actor refers to his position in the network concerned. The level of centrality in the information structure or a formal or informal position in the organisation determine an actor's possession of power (Krackhardt, 1990, p. 345). The power base of an actor refers to the specific combination of resources of power that are available to and can be commanded by actors in a particular position (Marzano & Scott, 2009, p. 43). Power position and power base are thus interwoven concepts, which both come out of the interrelations among the actors in the network.

2.3.4 Operationalisation

As stated in section 2.3.2, the regional scale is always contested. Creating a general strategy for regional Competitive Identity is hard, since the concept of region is quite ambiguous. This might be a reason for the absence of a regional hexagon in Anholt's work. However, in the paragraph on Competitive Identity theory it was stated that the country hexagon is applicable to smaller scale levels. With some adjustments, the country hexagon can be applied to regional Competitive Identity, which makes the design of a regional hexagon unnecessary. Considering the regions examined in this research, South-Limburg and Limburg, several slight changes in the definitions of the channels of the country hexagon have to be made. This has to be done in order to make the country hexagon compatible with both regions, since they differ in size, powers and nature.

The critique on Anholt's attention for the concept of power is also taken into account in this operationalisation, by including the influencing factor 'power relations' in Anholt's hexagon. It is important to note that this is not the only influencing factor on a place brand: factors beyond control like occurring events, path dependencies, media, economic conjuncture etcetera all have their impact on a place's brand. These influencing factors play a role in all kinds of fields: they are for instance recognised in Porter's diamond under the header of 'chance' (Rugman and Verbeke, 1993, p. 289). It is however beyond the scope of this research to map and analyse the chance factors impacting the Zuid-Limburg and Limburg brands. The non-inclusion of this influencing factor is thereby justifiable, because this factor cannot be taken into account by designing and implementing branding strategies. The hexagon that will be used as a regional hexagon in this research is shown in figure 4, the definitions of its components are enlisted on the next page.

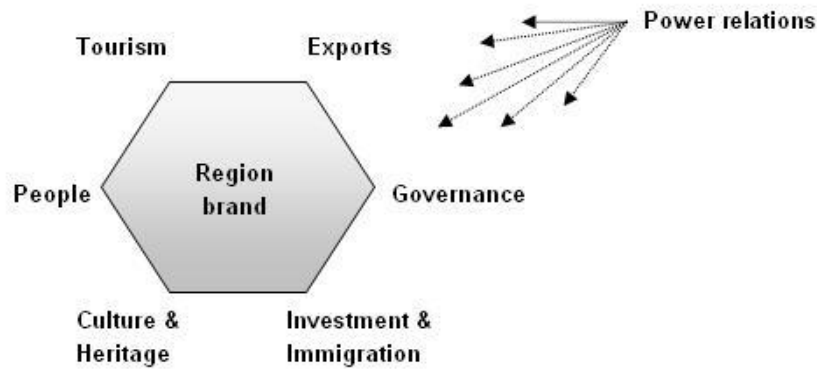


Figure 4: Region brand hexagon

The influencing factor *power relations* is positioned as an influencing overall factor this hexagon, responding to the critique of Kalendides and Kaneva as elaborated on in section 2.2.4. As became clear in the section 2.3.3, power emerges through social relations and the power capacity a specific actor has is determined by his power position and power base in the network concerned. So this concretely refers to the different actors involved, the tasks and responsibilities assigned to them and their interrelationships with other involved actors. These power relations are thus located at a higher level than the individual channels and influence the region brand indirectly, which makes them hard to manage.

The channel of *tourism* has the same definition as in the country hexagon, since tourism and tourism promotion can be practiced at every level of scale. This channel thus refers to tourism promotion and the image that the region is creating through the branding campaign to influence the tourist gaze.

The channel of *exports* refers just like in the country hexagon to real products coming out of the place and being exported. In the case of regions, this channel will usually refer to local products and specialties.

The channel of *governance* has in this regional hexagon a slightly different definition than in the country hexagon. As was already mentioned in the previous section, not every region has its own public authority. Most policies a region is faced with come out of the tube of an administrative entity it is part of: this might be a nation, a Euregion, a province etcetera. However, each region has its own form of governance: when there is no formal public authority, there are always regional partnerships, workgroups or institutions which influence the region through their decisions and actions. Therefore Anholts definition of governance being “policy decisions of the country’s government” is too narrow. Considering the regional scale, the channel of governance refers to regional authorities, partnerships, workgroups or institutions which influence the region brand through their decisions and actions.

The channel of *investment and immigration* in the country hexagon refers to the way the country solicits inward investments and recruitment of foreign talents and students. For the regional scale, this channel will entail every recruitment of investment and talents and students from places outside the region.

The channel of *culture and heritage* has the same definition as it has in the country hexagon. This channel thus refers to if and how cultural activities and exports are used to brand the region.

Lastly, the channel of people is the same as the eponymous channel in the country hexagon. This channel entails every aspect of the branding strategy that is linked to the inhabitants of the region. Just as in the country hexagon it involves the association with famous inhabitants as well as branding practices aimed towards (unknown) inhabitants in order to make them more suitable ambassadors.

This regional hexagon will form the theoretical frame through which the two cases, the branding strategies of South Limburg and Limburg, will be analysed. The manifestations of the six channels of the hexagon in the branding strategies of South Limburg and Limburg will be sketched out and placed in the bigger framework of the core ideas of Competitive Identity. It is important to emphasize that the fact that this hexagon exists of six channels does not mean that there is no overlap possible among these channels. However, in the analysis the division shown in the hexagon is maintained as much as possible in order to create a structured analysis. If appropriate, the influence of power relations on the channels is mapped out.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research strategy

As already stated in section 1.2, this research is conducted as a research internship at the Province of Limburg. This implies that although the research is theory-informed, it is also practice-oriented since the results should contribute to the new branding project Limburg Branding. Since this research has the form of a master thesis and is conducted in the framework of a three month research internship, time and possibilities are limited. These considerations have led to the choice for an in-depth research. This implies a small scale research wherein only two cases (namely Regiobranding Zuid-Limburg and Limburg Branding) will be analysed. Generalisable knowledge is in this research not required and the concentration on two cases will lead to more details and strong underpinnings (Verschuren and Doorewaard, 2007, p. 160). In order to be able to position the new branding strategy Limburg Branding in relation to the former branding strategy of Regiobranding Zuid-Limburg, a complete view of (the plans for) both strategies is needed. The research will therefore be qualitative in nature, since this allows for a more open and global approach (Verschuren and Doorewaard, 2007, p. 290).

Considering the above matters, the choice is made for the strategy of a comparative case study. A case study is suitable when an in-depth and integral view is needed of a process bound to a certain time and space. This is the case with the branding strategy of Regiobranding Zuid-Limburg: the campaigns and projects run from 2008 to 2012, which is a clear time range. Since there are advanced plans for the new branding strategy of Limburg Branding, no new campaigns or projects will be launched and no profound decisions will be made anymore considering Regiobranding Zuid-Limburg. This makes the branding strategy of Regiobranding Zuid-Limburg perfectly suitable for a case study.

Since the project of Limburg Branding is still in its initial phase, analysing it as a case study is somewhat more difficult. Therefore the choice is made to determine a clear time frame, namely the period of September 2011 to October 2012, on basis of which the new branding strategy will be analysed. Only plans made and decisions taken in this time range will be taken into account in this research.

The case study is hierarchical in nature, which means the research takes place in two phases: first, the two cases are separately analysed through Competitive Identity theory. In analysing and displaying the results of the cases the same pattern is followed as much as possible, in order to facilitate the comparison of the results in the second phase (Verschuren and Doorewaard, 2007, p. 187).

3.2 Research methods and –material

Different methods are used in this research in order to collect the necessary information. Triangulation of methods and sources ensures the reliability and accuracy of the outcome of this research. The first research method used is literature study. Before the actual research started, this method was used to get more insight in key concepts like place branding, Competitive Identity theory and the regional scale. The research material in this phase thus existed solely of professional literature like scientific books and papers. The theoretical framework is based on the gathered information during this process.

During the research the method of literature study was furthermore used to gain information about the two cases with extensive document analysis. The material in this phase included policy documents and reports, internal memos and notes, external studies and evaluations, press releases, newsletters, advertisements and non-textual branding utterances like movies and radio commercials. By means of qualitative content analysis based on Competitive Identity the relevant information is distilled from these sources.

Aside from the literature study, information is gained through attending relevant meetings and conversations or interviews. The choice was made for expert interviews, since this form of interviewing allows for the reconstruction of both process knowledge and context knowledge (Flick, 2009, p. 167). The interviewees are chosen based on their capacities as experts in the field of one or both of the branding strategies or of theoretical concepts like borders. The definition of 'experts' from Deeke (1995, in: Flick, 2009, p. 165) is thus applied here: *"We can label those persons as experts who are particularly competent as authorities on a certain matter of facts."* The interviews serve on the one hand as a means of validating and interpreting the information found through the literature study and document analysis and on the other hand as a way to gain extra information. That is why the choice was made for a semi-structured design (Flick, 2009, p. 165), which means that only a few topics were determined beforehand and that the rest of the conversation had its natural flow. This enabled the respondents to give extra information and when desirable to elaborate on some of the topics. The list of respondents can be found in appendix A.

4. REGIOBRANDING ZUID-LIMBURG

4.1 Chapter outline

This chapter starts with an outline which is descriptive in nature. The course of the entire process around Regiobranding Zuid-Limburg is depicted based on important decision- and implementation moments in section 4.2. In section 4.3 Regiobranding Zuid-Limburg is analysed from a Competitive Identity perspective. First, projects and actions which took place within the framework of Regiobranding Zuid-Limburg are analysed on the basis of the regional hexagon and second, the positioning of the region through the leitmotiv “*work-life-balance*” is elaborated on through Anholt’s criteria. Lastly, this chapter ends with a conclusion about the level of connectivity of Regiobranding Zuid-Limburg with Competitive Identity.

4.2 Regiobranding Zuid-Limburg: an outline from beginning to end

4.2.1 The initial phase: from initiative to business plan (February '07 – February '08)

In 2007 a group of South Limburg entrepreneurs took the initiative to approach the Province of Limburg and Limburg Development and Investment Company LIOF with the idea for a joint marketing strategy for South Limburg. Although the region already had a strong reputation in the field of tourism and recreation within the Netherlands because of its “Burgundian”, vibrant lifestyle and rural atmosphere, the reputation of South Limburg in other areas was significantly weaker. The entrepreneurs desired the highlighting of Limburg as an area with good job- and business opportunities, an image which was also in the interest of LIOF. Although several smaller marketing projects had been launched by individual parties to change the image of South Limburg, a shared vision lacked. The Province of Limburg recognised the need for such a shared vision in order to tackle pressing issues like dejuvenation, demographic decline and the lag of investments (Stichting Regiobranding Zuid-Limburg, 2009^A, p. 5) and agreed to facilitate the process.

It is widely recognised that the goal to enlarge a region’s prosperity and well-being cannot be reached through marketing practices alone. Therefore the choice was made to start a joint place *branding* strategy. The significance of region branding was later formally recognised in the coalition agreement 2007-2011 (Provincie Limburg, 2007^A, p. 20), in which was stated that by making optimal choices and carrying these choices out in a structural way, the province of Limburg aims to reach an optimal profiling for tourists, residents and investments. In the elaboration of this coalition agreement also a time frame was given:

within four years the branding for Limburg regions as well as for Limburg as a whole should be established (Provincie Limburg, 2007^B, p. 54).

The first step in the actual branding process was taken when LIOF (with financial support of the province) commissioned a stocktaking of the most important South Limburg stakeholders and their ideas about the region. The contract for this was assigned to consultancy Urban Unlimited. Their research resulted in the following characterization: South Limburg is “[...] *a region where life is good, with excellent international relations and good potential to be used as a stepping stone to the outside and international frameworks, with a powerful economic perspective in the fields of life sciences, chemical materials and innovative energy.*” (Urban Unlimited, 2007, p. 19-22). This resulted in the idea to brand South Limburg as a ‘*High Life region*’. The idea was that this all-encompassing brand referred to the good climate for life, living and working and at the same time to sensory aspects (care, cure and wellness) and mental challenges (top technology and creative industry) (Urban Unlimited, 2007, p. 30).

Based on the report of Urban Unlimited, the initiators agreed to carry on with the realisation of branding South Limburg and key stakeholders from the region were appointed by the Province as trail blazers to pave the road for the formation process. Two trailblazers originated from the business sector (mr. Elverding as former CEO of DSM and mr. Oostwegel as restaurateur/hotelier) and one from the public authorities (mr. Schrijen as water board chairman and former mayor of Venlo). With the appointment of the trailblazers, the role of the Province changed into a facilitating one, which means there was no direct political involvement anymore. The business plan for region branding South Limburg by Berenschot (see box 2) was thus commissioned by the trailblazers.

The business plan by Berenschot provided a brand concept and recommendations for the further course of the process and the organisation of the branding practices. The brand concept provided in this report was consistent with the earlier conclusion of Urban Unlimited: the strength of South Limburg is not to be found in one dimension like culture, living or business, it is to be found in the combination of all these things on a small territory. This resulted in the following brand story: “*South Limburg is a European region pre-eminently, where people from all over the world come together to make high quality products. It is a region with a sophisticated balance between living and working. Innovation and high quality go along with ‘joie de vivre’. Maastricht is the pearl of the region which radiates the region’s culture and tradition.*” (Berenschot, 2007, p. 25-26). Focal points which are formulated based on this brand concept are ‘innovative and high quality products’, ‘European appearance’, ‘quality in the field of gastronomy and accommodation’, ‘quality of living environment’ and ‘Maastricht’. According to Berenschot (2007, p. 27) these focal points should be leading in the communication and promotion about South Limburg to create the desired image.

Box 2: Berenschot

Berenschot is a renowned consultancy within The Netherlands when it comes to place marketing and branding. In 2003 Berenschot was the first Dutch consultancy to design an integral city marketing strategy for Amsterdam and many other cities followed (Berenschot, n.d.^A).

Even though place marketing and branding are different practices, Berenschot uses in broad lines the same self-developed strategy for both (Berenschot, n.d.^{A, B}). In designing the branding strategy for South Limburg, first of all a positioning analysis was executed, based on Limburg stakeholder interviews and other relevant material (Berenschot, 2007, p. 2). This analysis was displayed in the so called 'spider web', in which the identity, perceived image and desired image of the region are distinguished (see figure 5). The mismatches between these images form a starting point for determining the focus of the eventual brand concept (Berenschot, n.d.^C).

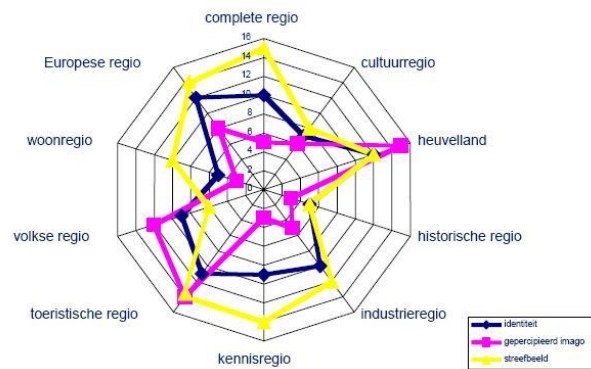


Figure 5: Berenschot's spider web of Limburg (Berenschot, 2007)

The implementation of the brand concept is twofold: it is about gaining brand exposure through communication (promotion, events, presentations etcetera) on the one hand and validating this brand image through real projects and products on the other (Berenschot, 2007). In other words: It is about "proving what you claim".

4.2.2 The second phase: establishment and implementation (March '08 – April '09)

After approval of the business plan by the advisory group and consent of Provinciale Staten (Provincie Limburg, 2008), Stichting Regiobranding Zuid-Limburg was founded in September 2008 (see box 3) (Stichting Regiobranding Zuid-Limburg, 2009^A, p. 5). Although in the first half year of the foundation's existence a first image measurement was carried out and an agreement was made with tourist organisation VVV Zuid-Limburg concerning the alignment of campaigns, the real branding activities of Stichting Regiobranding Zuid-Limburg did not start until the spring of 2009, after the presentation of the implementation plan.

This implementation plan was presented in March 2009 and was called 'Samen bouwen aan een sterk merk' (translation: 'Building a strong brand together'). In this plan the foundation sets itself the objective to "[...] broaden the reputation of South Limburg from mainly 'Burgundian' to the ideal 'work-life-balance'" (Stichting Regiobranding Zuid-Limburg, 2009^A, p. 9). This implied that the branding practices were going to aim at people who define 'quality of life' as more than just work and who can make the choice to start a new life in South Limburg relatively easy, for instance because of a lesser quality of life in their current

residence. The target group was thus defined as: people in the age group 30 to 55 years old, secondary and highly educated and living in the Randstad (Stichting Regiobranding Zuid-Limburg, 2009^A, p. 7). Although the branding strategy thus mainly focused on people within The Netherlands, the choice was made to create a separate logo for non Dutch practices: in this logo the region is called 'Maastricht Region' instead of 'Zuid-Limburg', since Maastricht is a stronger brand abroad (Stichting Regiobranding Zuid-Limburg, 2009^A, p. 17).

Box 3: Organisation and governance structure of Regiobranding Zuid-Limburg

The organisation responsible for the execution of the branding of South Limburg was established in the form of a foundation and named Stichting Regiobranding Zuid-Limburg. In its statutes its main purpose is worded: "[...] the region branding of South Limburg and the development and execution of initiatives obliging to this purpose." (Notariaat Versteeg Giesbers & Steegmans, 2008, p. 3). The foundation should try to reach this purpose by means of inter alia the establishment of a promotion campaign, the organisation and facilitation of events, lectures or manifestations and the collaboration with corporations which pursue a similar or complementary goal.

The management of the foundation exists of a general board in which the province of Limburg, South Limburg municipalities and private parties take place and an executive board, assembled of designated members of the general board. The executive board exists of representatives of the Province, public partners and private partners and a chairman (Notariaat Versteeg Giesbers & Steegmans, 2008, p. 4-5). All partners are member of the umbrella council of donors, whereby the height of the financial contribution determines the level of influence a member has in it (Stichting Regiobranding Zuid-Limburg, n.d.)*

*In 2010 the role of the Province changed into that of auditor, due to a new Provincial governance code.

As was determined in the business plan, the message of South Limburg should focus on the overall package of the region, since the region is not strong enough in one specific area. The five focal points as determined in the business plan should all come forward in this message, whereby the focal point 'innovative and high quality products' will be linked to the so called 'Versnellingsagenda 2008-2011'. In this policy document the economic strategy for Limburg is laid down, wherein top referral care, systems for solar energy and the research & business campus are marked as growth engines for South Limburg (Versnellingsagenda Limburg, 2008, p. 10). The part of the Versnellingsagenda about South Limburg thus formed the input for the story that Stichting Regiobranding Zuid-Limburg had to tell about the region in terms of economy.

Stichting Regiobranding Zuid-Limburg planned to spread its message about the perfect 'work-life-balance' not only by campaigning (through print campaigns as well as internet), but also by co-branding with existing products like Tefaf, Pinkpop or Cultura Nova (Stichting Regiobranding Zuid-Limburg, 2009^A, p. 9). The importance of collaboration of

different South Limburg parties like corporations, institutions and public authorities is an important precondition to make these efforts successful: for South Limburg to be profiled to the outside world as a single unit, the region needs to act as a single unit. Regarding South Limburg municipalities, this collaboration took shape in the form of 'Stedelijk Netwerk Zuid-Limburg', an administrative network organisation concerned with the development of South Limburg in different fields like economy and culture (Stedelijk Netwerk Zuid-Limburg, 2009, p. 4). In the same way as with the Versnellingagenda, alignment with Stedelijk Netwerk Zuid-Limburg was sought.

Although the focus in all these practices is on South Limburg, it is important to note that Stichting Regiobranding Zuid-Limburg adopted an open approach: the branding practices focus on South Limburg, but the broader context and attractive themes from Limburg and the Euregion should be taken into account (Stichting Regiobranding Zuid-Limburg, 2009^A, p. 11). Although South Limburg has its own unique selling points, Stichting Regiobranding Zuid-Limburg recognises that the region cannot be totally isolated from the rest of the province or the surrounding regions across the border: each job in Limburg or the Euregion can for instance be an incentive to move to South Limburg. The boundaries of the brand are thus not as clear as they might seem beforehand.

4.2.3 The execution phase: branding practices & evaluations (May '09 – November '12)

2009

Like stated in the previous section, the branding activities of Stichting Regiobranding Zuid-Limburg started in the spring of 2009. The first operation was to launch the website zuidlimburg.nl (English version: maastrichtregion.com), which is the centre of all branding activities. The website has the form of a portal which contains all the information that proves the fact that South Limburg has a perfect work-life-balance. This concrete information is divided into ten divisions (living, working, culture, investment & innovation, education, recreation, culinary experiences, accessibility, the Euregion and expats), of which living, working and culture are the main ones. To keep all these divisions up to date, cooperation was sought with existing institutions like Banenrijk Limburg, VVV's, Funda Wonen, Zuiderlicht and LimburgStudeert (Stichting Regiobranding Zuid-Limburg, 2009^A, p. 19).

In June 2009 the first nationwide campaign was launched with the title 'Alles Wijst Op Zuid-Limburg' (translation: 'Everything Points To South Limburg'). The campaign consisted of advertisements which were spread online as well as of September in newspapers and Magazines (see box 4). Each advertisement pointed out problems of the Randstad and then proposed the unique selling points of South Limburg as the solution. The main goal of the printed advertisements was to generate traffic to the website, where the claims in the

advertisements could be proven. Online blogs, panels and for a were used to create awareness of the campaign and South Limburg. At the same time three blogs were added to the website zuidlimburg.nl about the three topics matching the campaign: living, working and life in South Limburg (Stichting Regiobranding Zuid-Limburg, 2009^b).

Box 4: 'Alles Wijst Op...'

The 'Alles Wijst Op...' campaign was conducted online as well as offline through advertisements. Examples of these advertisements are shown below. Each advertisement has the same structure: First, the picture points out a problem concerning quality of life. Then 1. a solution is provided (for instance good housing or education), 2. a potential job is highlighted and 3. a cultural activity is mentioned (Stichting Regiobranding Zuid-Limburg, 2009^A, p. 17).



Figure 6: 'Alles Wijst Op...' advertisements (Stichting Regiobranding Zuid-Limburg, 2009)

The website zuidlimburg.nl was kept calm and businesslike in order to strengthen the campaign. The message of the campaign was no-nonsense, so the website functioned as a justification based on facts.

Besides carrying out its own campaign, Stichting Regiobranding Zuid-Limburg facilitated projects of other parties which contributed to the enhancement of the brand South Limburg. Regarding cultural projects, alignment was sought with VIA2018, the organisation behind the candidacy of Maastricht and the Euregion as Cultural Capital of Europe in 2018. The foundation for instance sponsored events like career-event InMosae and techno fair TechTop and co-branded festival Cultura Nova in television commercials (Stichting Regiobranding Zuid-Limburg, 2009^C, p. 11). In collaboration with PricewaterhouseCoopers an expat service was established (Stichting Regiobranding Zuid-Limburg, 2009^D).

Even though the region branding of South Limburg mainly aimed on changing the image people from outside the region had of South Limburg, there was also attention for internal branding. The internal branding practices started with advertisements in Limburg newspapers under the slogan 'Trots op Zuid-Limburg' (translation: 'Proud of South Limburg'), wherein South Limburgers declared their pride to their fellow (South) Limburgers. Later on a series of film portraits under the name 'Zuid-Limburgse Levens' (translation: 'South Limburg lives') was launched, in which people tell about their life in South Limburg.

2010

In 2010 Stichting Regiobranding Zuid-Limburg continued and expanded for the most part the activities which were deployed in 2009 and initiated some new projects. A small selection of these activities: the website was expanded with information about local products, co-branding with cultural events like Cultura Nova and Nederlandse Dansdagen continued and together with the Belgian and Dutch Provinces of Limburg for the first time a South Limburg stand was opened at the Tefaf fair (Stichting Regiobranding Zuid-Limburg, 2010, p. 12-13).

New was the 'Bright site of life' campaign which was launched in May (see box 5). The 'Alles Wijst Op...' campaign received lots of critique from stakeholders because of its negative tone and one wanted a campaign which was more authentic and based on a positive image of South-Limburg instead of a negative image of the Randstad (Stichting Regiobranding Zuid-Limburg, 2010^A, p. 5). Since the website had proven to be more successful in changing the perceived image of South Limburg than the print campaigns, the focus was placed on online advertising. In printed advertisements the emphasis lied on making the reader aware of the website (Stichting Regiobranding Zuid-Limburg, n.d.^A).

In august Placebrandz presented a quickscan evaluation of the first two years of Stichting Regiobranding Zuid-Limburg by order of the Province of Limburg. The most important conclusion was that the assignment to the foundation was formulated too vaguely, which resulted in too much emphasis on marketing practices instead of branding practices. This emphasis on promotion and marketing was also caused by the focus on accountability on the short term by the stakeholders. Furthermore it was concluded that tourism and the Burgundian character of South Limburg should not be left out in the branding message, although this was explicitly advised by Berenschot. It was recommended to the foundation to focus on the identity of the region, lay emphasis on its key values, collaborate more with other parties and generate free publicity with real actions and projects (Placebrandz, 2010; Stichting Regiobranding Zuid-Limburg, 2010^B).

2011

Even though most practices of Stichting Regiobranding South Limburg were continued in 2011, the dynamics changed. Based on the quickscan it was decided to focus more on the identity of the region and story telling instead of focussing on brand awareness and accountability (Stichting Regiobranding Zuid-Limburg, 2010^A, p. 3). This led for instance to the choice for giving the portrait series 'Limburgse Levens' a more prominent place on the website and allowing for more warmth and a 'Burgundian' feel in the campaign utterances of 'Bright Site of Life' (see box 5).

Box 5: 'Bright Site of Life'

The 'Bright Site of Life' campaign started in 2010 and replaced the 'Alles Wijst Op...' campaign. 'Bright Site of Life' had a more positive tone, although hard facts about South Limburg formed the base of the campaign. 'Proving what you claim' was still the main principle. In 2010 the campaign run online as well as offline in a print campaign. Main goal of the print campaign was to generate traffic to the website by making people curious about the content (see figure 7).



Figure 7: 'Bright Site of Life' advertisements 2010 (Stichting Regiobranding Zuid-Limburg, 2010)



Figure 8: 'Bright Site of Life' advertisements 2011 (Stichting Regiobranding Zuid-Limburg, 2010)

In 2011 the campaign changed under influence of the quickscan of Placebrandz. More attention was paid to story telling and authenticity and less on facts and figures (see figure 8). The campaign utterances were expanded with commercials on radio and television. In these commercials the slogan 'Je zal er maar...' was introduced.

Furthermore, alignment was sought with Limburg Economic Development (LED), a partnership between government, business and educational organisations in South Limburg with the goal to realise the Brainport 2020 program. With the advent of LED, the alignment with the Versnellingsagenda and Stedelijk Netwerk Zuid-Limburg faded into the background.

Also several new activities were deployed and new projects were launched in 2011. Together with the Chamber of Commerce and European Logistics Center Limburg, the foundation launched the website eulogisticshub.com in order to position the region by relevant professionals as a logistic hub. Also a working visit for the Dutch media was organised to give the press a complete and honest view of the region and the 'Bright Site of Life' campaign was expanded with television commercials (Stichting Regiobranding Zuid-Limburg, 2011^A; Stichting Regiobranding Zuid-Limburg, 2011^B).

2012

The choices made in 2012 are dominated by the plans for the new branding strategy Limburg Branding, which were announced in the new coalition agreement September 2011 and which will be described in chapter 5. The fact that Limburg Branding begins to take shape led to the

choice for continuation of current activities and not making new irreversible commitments (Stichting Regiobranding Zuid-Limburg, 2011^C, p. 4). The campaign 'Bright Site of Life' is still running and with a view to the future Stichting Regiobranding Zuid-Limburg adapts its methods to the Competitive Identity approach and focuses more on the highlighting of the international position of South Limburg (Stichting Regiobranding Zuid-Limburg, 2012^A). The World Championship cycling which took place in South Limburg was used to position the region internationally (Stichting Regiobranding Zuid-Limburg, 2012^B).

All this is consistent with the recommendations Govers makes in his evaluation of four years Regiobranding Zuid-Limburg, which was presented in May. This evaluation was commissioned by the Province of Limburg and Stichting Regiobranding Zuid-Limburg jointly. The underlying purpose of this evaluation was to incorporate learning effects from Regiobranding Zuid-Limburg in the development of Limburg Branding (Govers VOF, 2012, p. 1). In line with the conclusions of the quickscan in 2010, Govers emphasizes one again that the vaguely formulated task and objective of the organisation led to a focus on communication or marketing and less on real branding. The campaigns have had an impact, but if they led to actual image improvement remains unclear. The unwritten objective of Stichting Regiobranding Zuid-Limburg, namely improving cooperation and solidarity within the region (internal branding), has been a success. Govers recommends for the future to give priority to the international perspective and focus on meaningful and symbolic actions instead of communication (Govers VOF, 2012, p. 11-12)

4.2.4 The next phase? (December '12 – July '13)

The annual plan for 2012 of Stichting Regiobranding Zuid-Limburg (2011, p. 22) includes a look ahead to the future of branding in Limburg. Since in the provincial coalition agreement 2011-2015 a broadening of the branding practices to Limburg as whole was set as an objective, it was clear that branding in some form would continue. Stichting Regiobranding Zuid-Limburg suggests to arrange this in the form of a so called 'Bijenkorf' model: Limburg Branding should function as a warehouse in which Limburg regions like Zuid-Limburg can position themselves as brands. The Limburg brand should be built from regional identities and not the other way around. The annual plan for 2013 is therefore a South Limburg plan, which allows other Limburg regions to hitch on when Limburg Branding starts (Stichting Regiobranding Zuid-Limburg, 2012^C, p. 27)

4.3 Analysis

4.3.1 Introduction

In this paragraph the branding strategy of Regiobranding Zuid-Limburg will be analysed. First, the actions and projects undertaken by Stichting Regiobranding Zuid-Limburg are identified and analysed. After the influencing factor power relations is elaborated on, the actions and projects are analysed through the hexagon of Competitive Identity and when appropriate reference is made to the power relations. For each action or project is elaborated on if and how it fits into the bigger framework of Competitive Identity. The actions and projects are classified as substance and symbolic actions. It is important to emphasize once more that the design of Regiobranding Zuid-Limburg was based on the approach of Berenschot and not Competitive Identity. This has led to the fact that the branding strategy of Regiobranding Zuid-Limburg entails several practices of which can be concluded beforehand that these do not fit into the Competitive Identity approach. Therefore all practices which are purely promotional, like the advertising campaigns, will be left out in this analysis. Real actions and projects realised by Stichting Regiobranding Zuid-Limburg in collaboration with partners will form the input for the analysis based on the regional hexagon.

Second, the positioning of the brand South Limburg is analysed. As has come forward from the outline, the chosen leitmotiv for the branding strategy of Regiobranding Zuid-Limburg is *“work-life-balance”*. This leitmotiv was created by Berenschot on the basis of stakeholder interviews and the earlier stocktaking by Urban Unlimited. Statements are made about this positioning through Anholt’s criteria as enlisted in section 2.2.1: creative, ownable, sharp, motivating, relevant and elemental.

In the last section of this paragraph a general conclusion follows wherein is reflected on the overall branding strategy of Regiobranding Zuid-Limburg.

4.3.2 The branding practices

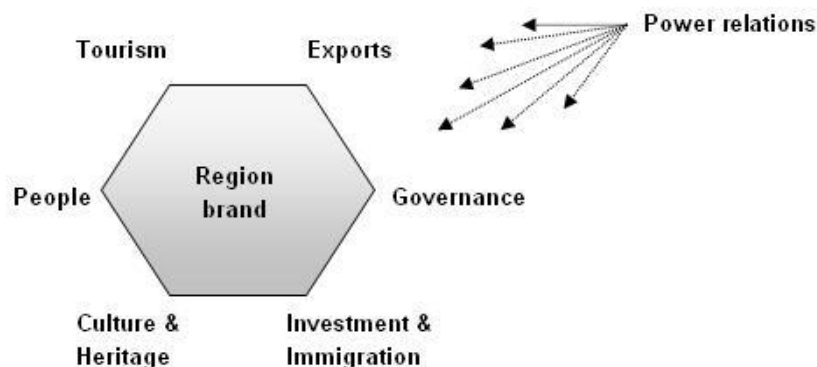


Figure 9: The hexagon of regional Competitive Identity

Power relations

As argued in section 2.3.3, power relations are an influencing factor in the regional model of Competitive Identity. These practices, institutions and relations have an influence on the six channels of the hexagon. Concretely the influencing factor power relations refers to the actors involved, the tasks and responsibilities assigned to them and their interrelationships. Since some aspects of this factor influence all or several of the six channels, it is useful to provide an overview before the individual channels of the hexagon will be analysed.

An aspect that influences all the channels of the hexagon is the way Regiobranding Zuid-Limburg is organised and the tasks and responsibilities that are assigned to the foundation that had to give shape to this branding of South Limburg. Representatives of most of the Limburg stakeholders are involved in the Stichting Regiobranding Zuid-Limburg, as has come forward in box 3. This governance structure and the tasks and responsibilities assigned to the foundation in the statutes, has led to a relatively big influence of the stakeholders. From both the quickscan in 2010 (Placebrandz, 2010) and the evaluation in 2012 (Govers, 2012) it comes forward that the unclear formulation of objectives and means led to less impact force than the foundation could have had. Moreover, the lack of commitment led to a focus on accountability from the stakeholders. This resulted in a strong emphasis on communicative actions in the form of campaigns.

Furthermore, the interrelationship between Stichting Regiobranding Zuid-Limburg and several regional partnerships and policy organisations influenced specific channels. Stichting Regiobranding Zuid-Limburg has used programs and projects of such partnerships and organisations as input for the stories it can tell about South Limburg to proof what is claimed: namely that South Limburg is a region with a great work-life-balance. The channel of Culture and Heritage is in this respect aligned with VIA2018. VIA2018 is the organisation behind the candidacy of Maastricht and the Euregio as Cultural Capital of Europe in 2018. Since culture is an important part of the work-life-balance in South Limburg, Stichting Regiobranding South Limburg decided to invest in cultural projects which are reinforcing to this candidacy (Stichting Regiobranding Zuid-Limburg, 2009^A, p. 20). Just as VIA2018 was leading for the cultural practices for South Limburg, the guidelines of Limburg Economic Development (LED) are leading for the economic practices. LED is a partnership between government, business and educational organisations in South Limburg. Goal of LED is to realise the Brainport 2020 program in South Limburg, in which region branding is named as one of the action lines. Regiobranding Zuid-Limburg provides the exposure which is needed to create an environment in which LED can reach its goals.

Even though the factor power relations is not included in the original hexagon of Competitive Identity, it can be analysed through the bigger framework of Competitive Identity. In general it can be concluded that the power of the stakeholders through their involvement

in and relationship with Stichting Regiobranding Zuid-Limburg has influenced the branding strategy. The emphasis on accountability has led to a focus on promotional activities and has led the foundation to be for the most part an executive organisation instead of a more strategic one. The fact that the programs and projects of regional partnerships and organisations formed input for the practices of Regiobranding Zuid-Limburg instead of the other way around, supports this conclusion. The power relations have caused the foundation to focus on alignment with running projects and partnerships instead of taking the lead in them, which the foundation should have done from a Competitive Identity perspective.

Exports

In section 2.3.3 it is said that the channel of exports refers to products coming out of the region and being exported. The listing of local products on the Regiobranding Zuid-Limburg website is a practice that fits to this channel for the obvious reasons. In addition the involvement in the world championship cycling 2012 is named under this heading, because it can be viewed as an export product from South Limburg which was exported to viewers all over the world.

Database of local products

In 2010 Stichting Regiobranding Zuid-Limburg started paying attention to local products, because they are strong carriers of identity. Information on local products was incorporated in the website zuidlimburg.nl and a list of local products was composed in cooperation with the producers of the products (Stichting Regiobranding Zuid-Limburg, 2010^A, p. 13). This database includes not only South Limburg products, but products from throughout the Euregion. To keep the list up-to-date collaboration was sought with Land van Limburg, the Limburg portal for agro and leisure (Stichting Regiobranding Zuid-Limburg, n.d.^C). With the database of local products, Regiobranding Zuid-Limburg supports the Interreg project 'GROEI.kans!', which aims at increasing the sales of local products (Stichting Regiobranding Zuid-Limburg, 2011^C, p. 14; Arvalis, 2012). At the same time it reflects the goal of Interreg project 'Euregio met Smaak' to develop product-market combinations for local products from the Euregion (Stichting Regiobranding Zuid-Limburg, 2010^F; Interreg 2010).

The database of local products is a new product; even though Land van Limburg has a similar database on its site, the database of Regiobranding Zuid-Limburg is unique because it entails products from the whole Euregion. With this scope the database serves a real purpose, namely the support of several Interreg projects. The database has a communicative power and is emblematic of the strategy, since it touches the work aspect by strengthening the market for local products. The database of local products can therefore be classified as a symbolic action.

World championship cycling

In September 2012 the world championship cycling was held in South Limburg. Stichting Regiobranding South Limburg used this opportunity to position itself as an international, hospitable region with a good work-life-balance. The foundation did this through several actions: decoration of the fence around the finish with images that show the versatility of the region, an action with huge banners to welcome the viewers to South Limburg and contributions to the content of folders and the round book (Stichting Regiobranding Zuid-Limburg, 2012^B).

Even though these actions fit into the overall strategy of Regiobranding Zuid-Limburg, whether they fit into the bigger framework of Competitive Identity is not as easy to determine. Only the providing of information through contributions to folders and the round book is an action which is undertaken for a real purpose. The other two actions, the decoration of the fence and the banner, are undertaken for the sake of image management only. It is however important to note that Stichting Regiobranding Zuid-Limburg has been involved in the plans around the world championship since 2009 (Stichting Regiobranding Zuid-Limburg, 2009^D), so the visible actions as they are listed above might not be the only contributions the foundation has made to the event. The event as a whole can be seen as a perfect example of a project that fits into the Competitive Identity approach, because of its communicative value and involvement of stakeholders. The World championship cycling can be classified as a symbolic action.

Governance

The channel of governance refers to regional authorities, partnerships, workgroups or institutions through which the regional brand is established. Although Stichting Regiobranding Zuid-Limburg has sought cooperation with several parties to realise projects, no actions were undertaken to establish the South Limburg brand directly through the core activities of these organisations. The fact that this did not happen has to do with the power relations as identified in section 4.3.2. The tasks and responsibilities that were assigned to Stichting Regiobranding Zuid-Limburg and the interrelationships with regional partnerships and organisations like LED and VIA2018 meant that the foundation did not have the power to influence the governance of other players in the field. Therefore, there are no projects or actions to analyse under this heading.

Investment and Immigration

The channel of investment and immigration is operationalised as referring to ways in which investment and recruitment of talents and students is encouraged through the branding strategy. Several practices of Stichting Regiobranding Zuid-Limburg touch these subjects:

the search engines on the website concerning jobs offers and education opportunities, the creation of an expat service, the launch of the website eulogisticshub.com and the creation of the Smart Services Hub. As stated in section 4.2.2, Limburg Economic Development (LED) is whenever possible leading in the economic practices of Regiobranding Zuid-Limburg.

Search engines for job offers and education opportunities

The search engine for job offers is created and kept up-to-date in cooperation with career sites Banenrijk Limburg and Carrière in Limburg. The scope is not limited to South Limburg alone, since each job in Limburg can be the reason for a person to move to South Limburg. The same goes for the education opportunities enlisted on the site: even cross-border courses are included. The search engine for education is created and kept up-to-date in cooperation with education site Limburg Studeert (Stichting Regiobranding Zuid-Limburg, 2011^C, p. 10).

At first sight the search engines concerning job offers and education opportunities seem to fit into the same category as the database of local products: together with specialised organisations Stichting Regiobranding Zuid-Limburg provides an overview of the opportunities and keeps the content up to date. Big difference is however that the created overview is nothing new: the partners already provide such search engines on their own website, so Stichting Regiobranding Zuid-Limburg basically functions as a portal. In fact, by using the search engines visitors actually leave the zuidlimburg.nl website (Stichting Regiobranding Zuid-Limburg, 2011^C, p. 11). This is thus an action which is undertaken purely for the sake of image management, which means that it does not fit into the Competitive Identity approach wherein only actions for a real purpose are proven to be effective.

Expat service

The expat service is part of the website maastrichtregion.com, which is the English counterpart of the website zuidlimburg.nl and is entirely focused on expats. In 2009 the service was created in cooperation with accountancy PricewaterhouseCoopers in the context of 'proof what you claim': with the expat service Stichting Regiobranding Zuid-Limburg wanted to show that South Limburg is indeed a hospitable region where the work-life-balance is good. The expat service provides an intake for expats wherein they are familiarized with regulations and procedures and where they can get a personal advice on missing formalities (Stichting Regiobranding Zuid-Limburg, 2009^D). The physical appearance of the expat service in the form of a service desk is housed at the city hall in Maastricht (Stichting Regiobranding Zuid-Limburg, 2009^G). In 2010 an Expat Guide was created in cooperation with LIOF and University Maastricht by order of Brainport Eindhoven. Besides general

information for expats in The Netherlands, this guide includes information about South-Limburg specifically (Stichting Regiobranding Zuid-Limburg, 2010^E).

The expat service is a great example of a practice that fits into the Competitive Identity approach. The service is created for a real purpose and is the first of its kind, which makes it innovative and new and gives it communicative value. At the same time it is emblematic of the branding strategy because it lies at the core of a great work-life-balance: it shows hospitality and it creates the opportunity to actually take the step to go live and work in South Limburg. One could thus conclude that the expat service lies at the intersection of substance and symbolic action: it is a little bit of both.

Website eulogisticshub.com

The website eulogisticshub.com was developed in 2011 based on an idea of the Chamber of Commerce and Limburg Development and Investment Company LIOF. These parties contacted Stichting Regiobranding South Limburg with the question to give shape to the idea of a website which profiles the whole province of Limburg as a logistic hub. This website is the first 'business-to-business' profiling that Stichting Regiobranding Zuid-Limburg performs. It aims at international professionals who look for information about logistic facilities in Europe, which is a growing market since high transport costs make it attractive for companies to settle close to the selling market. Good logistic facilities are a requirement for settlement and thus investment (Stichting Regiobranding Zuid-Limburg, 2011^B).

Even though the website eulogisticshub.com is not created in cooperation with stakeholders and the ownership is still in hands of Stichting Regiobranding Zuid-Limburg, it fits into the Competitive Identity approach. The website fills a gap in the market and solicits inward investments, which can be seen as an execution of the strategy to profile South Limburg as a region with a perfect work-life-balance. The website has a communicative power: the substance, which are the logistic facilities, is already present in the region. The website can be classified as a symbolic action which makes them more accessible and remarkable.

Smart Services Hub

After the creation of eulogisticshub.com, the second step in business-to-business profiling was the creation of the *Smart Services Hub*, which is a partnership between sixteen South Limburg service companies, research institutions and public institutions. These companies and institutions make use of each others systems, infrastructure and employees, in other words: they make use of each others smart services (Stichting Regiobranding Zuid-Limburg, n.d.^B). Goal of the Smart Services Hub is to create innovation amongst its members, attract human capital and create an infrastructure for further developments in these fields (Smart

Services Hub, n.d.). Stichting Regiobranding Zuid-Limburg facilitated the process of creating the Smart Services Hub by designing their website. The ownership of this website is nowadays in hands of the Smart Services Hub itself.

The Smart Services Hub does fit into the Competitive Identity approach. It is a project executed for a real purpose and most importantly: ownership is transferred to the members of the partnership. The Smart Services Hub therewith helps to establish the brand South Limburg through the channel of Economy.

Culture and Heritage

The channel of culture is defined as the channel which refers to the way in which cultural expressions, activities and exports are used to brand the region. Practices of Regiobranding Zuid-Limburg that fit into this channel are the co-branding with cultural events like Cultura Nova, the creation of a culture agenda and the annual participation in Tefaf. Although these practices are elaborated on separately in this section, it is important to notice that they are part of the activities around the candidacy of Maastricht as Cultural Capital in 2018. In 2009 Maastricht applied as a candidate together with the Euregion Maas-Rijn (VIA2018, n.d.) and since then the guidelines of VIA2018 have been leading in the cultural practices of the foundation, as was already explained in section 4.2.2.

Co-branding with cultural events

The co-branding with cultural events is a practice that Stichting Regiobranding South-Limburg has executed throughout its existence. In 2009 the foundation co-branded summer festival Cultura Nova for the first time and later Nederlandse Dansdagen, Toon Hermans-jaar, Opera Zuid and Cultuurzomer Maastricht followed. Co-branding is defined by Stichting Regiobranding Zuid-Limburg as product enhancement and sponsorship (Stichting Regiobranding Zuid-Limburg, 2009^A, p. 20). The co-branding of cultural events however only came down to sponsoring which enabled TV commercials for the events. These commercials ended with a reference to the website zuidlimburg.nl (Stichting Regiobranding Zuid-Limburg, 2009^C, p. 11).

Although co-branding is defined as product enhancement and sponsoring, the result of co-branding with cultural events is purely promotional. The cultural co-branding practices have a communicative power, but that is because they have the form of commercials, not because they have a communicative value in themselves. Therefore co-branding with cultural events does not fit into the Competitive Identity approach.

Culture agenda

The digital culture agenda is created and kept up-to-date in cooperation with cultural magazine Zuiderlucht and Uitburo Limburg, a project of the tourist offices VVV (Stichting Regiobranding Zuid-Limburg, 2009^F, p. 3). All cultural activities and events which take place in Zuid-Limburg or the surrounding Euregion are listed on the website zuidlimburg.nl in order to create an overview of the cultural expressions in the Euregion.

The cultural agenda is a new product which is created in cooperation with other organisations. This is fitting to the Competitive Identity notion that all stakeholders should contribute to the propagation of the places image. The agenda has a communicative value and is emblematic of the strategy, because culture is an important aspect of a good work-life-balance. The culture agenda can therefore be classified as a symbolic action.

Participation in Tefaf

From 2010 on South Limburg was annually represented in a stand on art fair Tefaf. This stand was created together with Chapeau! Magazine (Stichting Regiobranding Zuid-Limburg, 2010^A, p. 12). Several parties participated in the stand like the Dutch and Belgian provinces of Limburg, University Maastricht, MECC Maastricht, Theatre at the Vrijthof, Bonnefantenmuseum, municipality Maastricht, Limburg employers association LWV and VVV Maastricht. The stand was made of in Limburg produced materials only, which were delivered by stakeholders ((Stichting Regiobranding Zuid-Limburg, 2010^D).

The participation in Tefaf fits into the bigger framework of Competitive Identity. The joint participation of regional stakeholders through a stand displays the cultural unity of the region and its surrounding areas. The fact that it is realised in cooperation with several partners and with Limburg materials only, makes it new and innovative and gives it a communicative value of its own. The participation in Tefaf can therefore be classified as a symbolic action.

People

The channel of people entails every aspect of the branding strategy that is linked to the inhabitants of the region. It involves the association with famous inhabitants as well as branding practices aimed towards (unknown) inhabitants. The channel refers to practices aimed at making inhabitants more suitable ambassadors for their region as well as representations of the inhabitants to the outside world. In the branding strategy of Stichting Regiobranding Zuid-Limburg there is only one practice that completely fits this channel: the portraits series 'Limburgse Levens'.

'Limburgse Levens'

This portraits series was launched online in november 2009 and exists of film portraits in which South Limburg inhabitants tell about their life in South Limburg and why they made the choice to live there. The inhabitants shown in the portraits are migrants (new migrants or return-migrants) and/or South Limburg entrepreneurs. 'Limburgse Levens' is a distinct project of Stichting Regiobranding Zuid-Limburg, although the content of the portraits is on main lines aligned with the running campaigns. At the time of the 'Alles Wijst Op...' campaign in 2009, the series started for instance as pure and honest portraits of entrepreneurs, whereas after the quickscan in 2010 there was more room for the personal and emotional aspects of living in South Limburg. The overall purpose of this portrait series is twofold: on the one hand the identity of South Limburg is carried out through the portraits and on the other hand the portraits provide an appealing representation of the South Limburg inhabitants (Stichting Regiobranding Zuid-Limburg, 2009^E). The portrayed inhabitants become ambassadors of the region and they are actively encouraged by Stichting Regiobranding Zuid-Limburg to give substance to this role, for instance through workshops on the ambassadors day in 2010 (Stichting Regiobranding Zuid-Limburg, 2010^A, p. 16). Underlying purpose of the series is to create pride and a sense of community amongst the South Limburg population (Stichting Regiobranding Zuid-Limburg, 2010^C). Even though this is not a formal objective of Stichting Regiobranding Zuid-Limburg, the importance of it is recognised and evaluations have shown that this goal is reached (Govers, 2012, p. 4).

The creation of *'Limburgse Levens'* is a practice that fits into the bigger framework of Competitive Identity. The series have a communicative power and are emblematic of the chosen strategy of Regiobranding Zuid-Limburg, because they touch every aspect of the perfect work-life-balance. The portraits series Limburgse Levens can be classified as a symbolic action.

Tourism

The channel of tourism is defined as referring to everything related to tourism and the way tourist gaze is influenced. This channel is a bit of a stranger amidst the others, because Stichting Regiobranding Zuid-Limburg made the choice not to undertake actions focused on tourism (Placebrandz, 2010, p. 8). This choice stems on the one hand from the conclusion that the reputation of South Limburg as a tourist destination was already strong when Regiobranding Zuid-Limburg started. In addition South Limburg tourism was largely based on the 'Burgundian' feel of the area, while 'Burgundian' was something that Berenschot shelved as a corny and unwanted label (Berenschot, 2007 p. 17, p. 20). On the other hand the choice to leave tourism out was had to do with the division between marketing and branding: Samenwerkende VVV's Limburg or SVL was appointed as the one organisation that should

promote tourism, while Regiobranding Zuid-Limburg should focus on the branding of the region. Because the position of Stichting Regiobranding as explained in section 4.2.2. led to a strong focus on communicative actions, not much room was left to undertake actions or projects in the field of tourism.

It is however important to name the channel in this analysis, because despite the lack of a formal relation between SVL and Stichting Regiobranding Zuid-Limburg, both organisations have tried from the outset to align their actions in order to strengthen each others message. The quickscan of Govers in 2010 showed the importance of the inclusion of tourism in the branding strategy for South Limburg, which increased the support for more alignment. Through the advisory group of LED Leisure, Stichting Regiobranding Zuid-Limburg participates in the plan making and communication around tourism in South Limburg. Moreover, last year SVL and Regiobranding Zuid-Limburg funded and designed a promotion campaign together for the first time.

Since purely promotional activities are left out of this analysis, as was argued in the introduction of this paragraph, and other actions of Regiobranding Zuid-Limburg through the channel of tourism remain too unclear for an analysis, no conclusions are drawn on the way these practices fit into the bigger framework of Competitive Identity.

Summarizing

The table below gives an overview of the actions and projects in Regiobranding Zuid-Limburg and their classification (see table 2).

Channel	Action or project	Fits into Competitive Identity?
Exports	Database of local products	Yes: symbolic action
	World Championship Cycling	Yes: symbolic action
Governance	-	-
Investment & Immigration	Search engines job/study	No
	Expat Service	Yes: substance/symbolic action
	Website eulogisticshub.com	Yes: symbolic action
	Smart Services Hub	Yes: substance
Culture & Heritage	Co-branding cultural events	No
	Culture agenda	Yes: symbolic action
	Participation TEFAF	Yes: symbolic action
People	Limburgse Levens	Yes: symbolic action
Tourism	-	-

Table 2: Actions and projects Regiobranding Zuid-Limburg

The table shows that most actions that fit into Competitive Identity could be classified as symbolic actions. This is a logical consequence of the fact that the branding strategy of

Regiobranding Zuid-Limburg was focused on communication: symbolic actions have a great communicative value, which makes them compatible with more communicative branding strategies as the one of Regiobranding Zuid-Limburg. The fact that emphasis was laid on communication is, besides the fact that the branding strategy was developed by Berenschot, due to the power relation the branding organisation had with its stakeholders: the organisation was not in the position to ignore the call for accountability by stakeholders. Considered from a Competitive Identity perspective however, this strategy lacks substance.

Something else that stands out is that most actions are undertaken through the channels of Culture and Heritage and Investment and Immigration. This seems logical for a branding strategy whereby the focus lies on the perfect work-life-balance, but this does not fit into Competitive Identity thought: a brand should be established through all channels at the same time in a coherent and coordinated way. The fact that Governance and Tourism are left out does therefore not reflect Competitive Identity at all.

The last notable thing about the branding practices of Regiobranding Zuid-Limburg is that although there are several projects and actions undertaken in cooperation with stakeholders, the branding organisation was in most cases the initiator and executor. If Regiobranding Zuid-Limburg had been designed on the basis of Competitive Identity, the stakeholders of the corresponding channels would have been the initiators and (at least) the executors of the projects and actions.

4.3.3 The positioning of the brand

As has come forward from the outline, the chosen leitmotiv for the branding strategy of Regiobranding Zuid-Limburg is “*work-life-balance*”. This leitmotiv was created by Berenschot on the basis of stakeholder interviews and the earlier stocktaking by Urban Unlimited. Anholt provides six criteria which ensure that a branding strategy is compelling and motivating when most of them are met. As Anholt (2007, p. 76) puts it: “*[...] if an idea [or strategy] gets ‘ticks’ in most or all of the parts of this model, [...] it will probably add something to the country’s reputation and provide a return on the effort put into it.*” The criteria hereby are as enlisted in section 2.2.1: creative, ownable, sharp, motivating, relevant and elemental.

Creativity regarding a place branding strategy lies in the perspective that is given to the observation about the nation or the people. In Regiobranding Zuid-Limburg, this perspective was the perfect work-life-balance. Even though this might be attractive, it cannot be considered surprising or memorable: there are several regions which use this leitmotiv, like the Brabantse Kempen (ARC Nederland, 2011) and the Province of Drenthe (Marketing Drenthe, n.d.).

The previous consideration leads directly to a conclusion about the *ownability* of the strategy: the strategy is not uniquely and unarguably about the place and not anywhere else,

since it actually is applied in other regions. The strategy can therefore not be considered ownable.

A strategy can be considered *sharp* if it is “*highly focused, not generic and tells a very specific and definite story about the place, rather than a bland catch-all strategy*” (Anholt, 2007, p. 77). Regiobranding Zuid-Limburg actually fell prey to this last phenomenon: the catch-all strategy. This is actually already enclosed in the chosen leitmotiv ‘work-life-balance’. This is an extensive leitmotiv that entails a lot of aspects and therefore quickly becomes bland and general. This is also reflected in the actions and projects undertaken: from the world championship cycling to the promotion of local products, everyone can hitch on without making any (great) adjustments. This would not be the case if the strategy was more sharp.

The criterion *motivating* refers to the extent to which a strategy points people towards new and different behaviours. A branding strategy should be an active force in sustaining or changing the image of the place instead of being a passive descriptor (Anholt, 2007, p. 78). Due to the power relations as elaborated on in section 4.2.2, Stichting Regiobranding Zuid-Limburg did not have the capability to actually influence policy. However, with several actions and projects like the portraits series Limburgse Levens and the expat service, Regiobranding Zuid-Limburg is motivating. It creates new insights and opens up new possibilities, making people behave differently in and towards South Limburg.

A strategy is *relevant* when it offers a meaningful promise to the consumer. The relevancy of Regiobranding Zuid-Limburg is contested. On the one hand one could say that a good work-life-balance is relevant to every working person, on the other hand it is known that only a small percentage of the people even considers moving outside their own municipality (Hospers and Pen, 2011, p. 79). Thereby it is debatable if South Limburg can keep the promise of a good work-life-balance: especially higher educated people have trouble finding a job in the region.

The last criterion for a good branding strategy is that it should be *elemental*, which means it should be simple and usable in different contexts and over a long period of time. The strategy of Regiobranding Zuid-Limburg is, probably because of its all encompassing leitmotiv, suitable for many different people in different situations. Work-life-balance is thereby a term of which everyone can imagine more or less what it entails, which makes it simple and usable. The branding strategy of Regiobranding Zuid-Limburg can therefore be considered elemental.

Criterion	Extent to which the criterion is met
Creative	-
Ownable	-
Sharp	-
Motivating	+
Relevant	±
Elemental	+

Table 3: Rating of the positioning of Regiobranding Zuid-Limburg

Table 3 gives an overview of all the above. Summarizing, it can be stated that the positioning of Regiobranding Zuid-Limburg should have been more unique en specific in order to be considered from a Competitive Identity perspective as a good strategy. With a unique en specific leitmotiv, South Limburg would stand out more and that is exactly what branding through Competitive Identity aims for: a known region attracts more inhabitants, talent and companies. A good work-life-balance might be rather a goal of place branding than it is an actual branding strategy.

4.4 Conclusion

Although as a result of the analysis it might seem that Competitive Identity is just about 'ticking boxes' and meeting certain conditions, Competitive Identity involves much more than that. As follows from the theoretical framework, branding a place through Competitive Identity is about choosing a relevant, distinguishing positioning of the brand which matches the identity of a place and subsequently propagating that brand through real actions and projects. Hereby it is important to create some sort of synergy among all channels of the hexagon: Competitive Identity encompasses the making of connections between, and aligning all regional parties in order to disseminate the same message about the region. At first sight it might seem unfair to analyse a branding strategy which is developed from such a different perspective through Competitive Identity criteria, but beside the differences there are several aspects of the branding strategy of Regiobranding Zuid-Limburg that fit quite well in Competitive Identity.

The first step in the process to come to Regiobranding Zuid-Limburg is an example of this: together with key stakeholders of the region the current and desired images of the region were identified. Stakeholders were even the initiators of a joint branding strategy for South Limburg. After this first step however, the approach of Regiobranding Zuid-Limburg deviates from a Competitive Identity approach: the process to come to the desired image has another format. The practical involvement of stakeholders decreased and whereas

communication has its place in Competitive Identity only after actions or projects worth talking about have been realised, in Regiobranding Zuid-Limburg it is the first and main practice. Although this communication is followed by several real actions and projects, the fact that most of these can be classified as symbolic actions underlines the focus on communication. In general the branding of South Limburg thus lacks substance, but the outline shows that as time progressed this gained importance. After the quickscan in 2010 the branding practices of Regiobranding Zuid-Limburg became more compatible with Competitive Identity: more cooperation was sought with stakeholders in executing projects and the identity of the region was taken as a starting point for the message to be sent instead of positioning South Limburg against the Randstad. This made the branding more relevant and 'tangible' for the receivers of the message and the own inhabitants of South Limburg. From a Competitive Identity perspective however, the positioning of South Limburg should have been more unique and specific. Thereby, the message should have been propagated in a more integral way. Whereas Regiobranding Zuid-Limburg now found regional parties willing to spread the message about certain aspects of the work-life-balance (i.e. cultural organisations about the 'life' part, economic organisations about the 'work' part etcetera), the message would have come across stronger when it would have been propagated by all channels of the hexagon in cooperation with each other.

CHAPTER 5 LIMBURG BRANDING

5.1 Chapter outline

Just as the previous chapter, this chapter starts with an outline which is descriptive in nature. The course of the process around Limburg Branding so far is depicted based on important decision moments in section 5.2. However, since Limburg Branding is still in the planning phase, this section will be a lot shorter than the analogous section in chapter 4 and has a different format. For the same reason details will play a more important role, like the way in which the leitmotiv was established.

In section 5.3 the concept of borders is elaborated on from a geographical perspective. Since the border location of Limburg is the core of the strategy of Limburg Branding and thus the starting point for all further steps in designing and implementing it, this subject is deepened and analysed.

In section 5.4 the preliminary plans for Limburg Branding are analysed through Competitive Identity. Even though Competitive Identity was leading in developing these plans, analysing them is useful since in practice they can deviate from this approach due to power relations and practical choices. The choice was for instance made to give the hexagon no important role in the design of the strategy, because of the pitfall of thinking in target groups. The hexagon was mainly used as a tool to stress the importance of collaboration of all stakeholders. First, the branding practices are analysed through the regional hexagon and second, the positioning of the region through the leitmotiv *“Limburg. We don’t see borders, we see interfaces”* is analysed through Anholt’s criteria.

Lastly, this chapter ends with a conclusion: in section 5.5 the process so far as well as the provisory content will be elaborated on through Anholt’s criteria.

5.2 An outline from beginning to business plan

5.2.1 The initial phase (January ’11 – November ’11)

Already in the elaboration of the coalition agreement 2007-2011 the goal was set to create a branding strategy for the province of Limburg (Provincie Limburg, 2007^B, p. 54). The idea was to create such a strategy for Limburg as a whole and the individual regions North-, Middle- and South Limburg within four years. South Limburg was at that time the only region wherein already plans were being made for a joint branding strategy. Ultimately, only Regiobranding Zuid-Limburg was realised. This was despite concerns of some members of Provinciale Staten about the choice for South Limburg instead of the whole province

(Province of Limburg, 2008). However, this remained an internal discussion since no representatives of North- or Middle Limburg opposed the plans.

It took until 2011 for Limburg Branding (the working title for a branding strategy for the whole province of Limburg) to be discussed again, because Regiobranding Zuid-Limburg was only funded for a period of four years which would end in 2012. Decisions about the future continuation of branding in Limburg thus had to be taken. In January 2011 a conference about branding was held with representatives from government, business and semi-government from North- and Middle-Limburg, in which was found that there was sufficient support for Limburg Branding (Provincie Limburg, 2011^C). In the coalition agreement 2011-2015 it was therefore established that Regiobranding Zuid-Limburg would be evaluated and expanded to Limburg Branding (Provincie Limburg, 2011^D, p. 12)*. However, it is important to note that at this point in time it was thought that the expansion of Regiobranding Zuid-Limburg into Limburg Branding would entail nothing more than an amendment of the statutes and the upscaling of the governance structure of Stichting Regiobranding Zuid-Limburg. This changed in the last month of 2011, when the actual process to establish Limburg Branding started.

5.2.2 The preparatory phase (December '11 – November '12)

The actual start of the process to establish Limburg Branding was in the last month of 2011. A starting document for internal use was formulated wherein the goal of Limburg Branding was explicated: Goal of the project is to create brand awareness, a unique and attractive image and a strong reputation based on the core values of Limburg, with the aim to retain and attract residents, visitors and businesses. By 2015 Limburg should have an attractive profile for these target groups and a stronger brand than in 2010 (Provincie Limburg, 2011^B).

The contract for developing the new branding strategy was granted to a partnership of three international consultants: Simon Anholt, Robert Govers and Jeremy Hildreth. With the hiring of these consultants, several earlier ideas about Limburg Branding were abandoned. Since Anholt, Govers and Hildreth proposed the Competitive Identity approach, an amendment of statutes and an upscaling of the branding projects of Regiobranding Zuid-Limburg turned out to be not enough for creating Limburg Branding. Thereby, the thinking in target groups and goals was rejected.

Input for the new branding strategy was generated through meetings of three groups: an Identity group, a Friday group and a Saturday group. The Identity group exists of Limburg

* In the new coalition agreement of 2012, after the fall of the previous coalition, this goal was retained (Provincie Limburg, 2012^A, p. 6).

writers, historians, academics, former politicians etcetera who brainstormed in one session about the identity of Limburg. The outcome of this session formed the input for the discussions in the Friday and Saturday groups*. The Saturday group exists of approximately ten people with executive power and creative ability, whereby every point of the hexagon should be represented. In the Saturday group the exact strategy will be outlined. The Friday group consists of approximately forty people, who give feedback and when appropriate give a voice to groups that are not represented in the Saturday group. While these three groups engage in shaping the content of the strategy, a fourth group, the steering group, is responsible for the organisation of the process and decision making. This group consists of representatives of Limburg municipalities, Stichting Regiobranding Zuid-Limburg, Limburg business stakeholders and the Province of Limburg (Provincie Limburg, 2012^B). Even though in all groups an equal representation of North-, Middle- and South Limburg was pursued, South Limburg parties seemed to be more engaged in the group discussions and had clearer opinions about branding in general.

This interactive process resulted in a branding strategy with as leitmotiv: *"Limburg. We don't see borders, we see interfaces."* (Govers et al., 2012, p. 16). In the brainstorm session of the Identity group the border aspect of Limburg was one of the first things that came to mind and in the Friday- and Saturday groups the possibilities of this leitmotiv were recognised: borders are an integral part of Limburg's history and therefore unite the whole region. At the same time this leitmotiv provides a lot of possibilities to hitch on, which makes it attractive to all Limburg stakeholders. This does not mean that no disadvantages were recognised: the main objection heard was that exploiting the border position has been tried and failed many times before, which makes it risky to use it as the starting point for branding. However, there was no other alternative which had the support of all stakeholders, which made the positives prevail.

The leitmotiv guides the Competitive Identity initiatives internally in order to position Limburg as a unique European region of Holland. Because of Limburg's history with constantly changing borders and (therefore) its connectedness with neighbouring regions across the border, this strategy reflects a prominent part of the identity of Limburg according to the stakeholders. To create brand awareness, Limburg has to be profiled as a region that has learned how to deal with borders. This can be done through resolving border challenges – worldwide, regionally and locally – by focusing on identifying, studying and overcoming the issues that arise from geographical divides (Govers et. al., 2012, p. 17). This strategy is carried out through substance and symbolic actions on every point of the hexagon. Although

* The groups were named this way to avoid any reference to hierarchy or 'business as usual'.

they are only plans, the proposed initiatives are listed and analysed in the remainder of this chapter.

5.2.3 The next phase? (December '12 – July '13)

As has become clear in the previous sections, Limburg Branding is still in the planning phase. Govers, Anholt and Hildreth will present their final report on the Competitive Identity of Limburg short after the presentation of this research, in which the substantive vision of Limburg Branding will be covered. A draft version of this final report is used in this research. A business plan which is currently being made will address the structure of the new branding organisation. Herein the roles of all involved parties will be defined, as well as the financing model. Due to the need for political decision making and time for recruitment and staffing, the new organisation will not be able to start until July 2013. Stichting Regiobranding Zuid-Limburg will keep things running until Limburg Branding is completely settled.

5.3 Borders: a geographical reflection on the leitmotiv chosen

As mentioned in the previous paragraph, the leitmotiv of the new branding strategy will be *"Limburg. We don't see borders, we see interfaces."* Since Limburg Branding will thus have everything to do with Limburg's border location, the border concept is elaborated on in this paragraph to gain more insight in the choice for this leitmotiv and the possibilities it brings with for branding.

Just as was the case with the concept of scale, the border concept has gained interest in the last decades of the previous century. This renewed interest was driven by ongoing globalisation processes, the end of the Cold War and the intensification of European integration: processes which require a reassessment of the role and importance of borders in different situations (Bouwens, 2008, p. 15). Whereas borders were once understood as just territorial or constitutional demarcations, nowadays the fact that borders are also social and cultural demarcations is recognised as well (Bouwens, 2008, p. 23). Borders are thereby viewed as socio-spatially constructed (Van Houtum et al., 2005, p. 4), which implicates that the process of bordering is at least just as important as the actual border itself. Van Houtum, Kramsch and Zierhofer state in this respect that 'b/ordering' should be considered as an active verb: borders are continually reproduced through peoples everyday social practices (van Houtum et al., 2005, p. 3).

The concept of b/ordering deserves further explanation. What is meant by this is that borders are to be considered as a 'tool' for ordering. Through borders it is decided what is to be included and excluded, which creates a certain order. This ordering influences several processes, like the shaping of identity: the distinction of 'others' through a border is what

outlines one's own identity (van Houtum & van Naerssen, 2002). However, it is important to note that different kinds of borders exist and that they do not always coincide. Cultural, ethnic or language borders are for instance not always in parallel. Thereby these borders can have different characters: some borders might be more open or closed than others. These characters can change, because bordering is a dynamic and continuing process. Bouwens (2008, p. 26) therefore defines borders as follows: *"Borders are not static and impermeable dividing lines [...], but rather filters with a strongly varying degree of openness and closeness in time and space."*

The previous definition touches the paradoxical character of borders: while borders create political, social and cultural distinctions, they also imply the existence of new networks and systems of interaction across them (Baud & van Schendel, 1977, p. 216). This aspect is what makes border regions such interesting places. The fact that those regions are from a national point of view located at peripheral areas, gives them their own dynamics. Cultural diversity, transnational interaction and an ambivalent attitude towards the own country are for instance aspects which most border regions have in common (Martínez, 1994).

Box 6: Øresund region

The Øresund region is often highlighted as a 'best practice' in cross-border place branding. This Euregion is located at the borders of Denmark and Sweden and is divided in two parts by the strait of water called Øresund. Since the 1990's the authorities have pursued a joint branding strategy, in order to enable the region to compete with other European metropolises as the first "cross-national integrated large-city region" (Øresund Network, n.d.). With the construction of the Øresund bridge in 2000 the physical infrastructure for more cross-border cooperation was established and the bridge became a regional symbol. This symbolism in combination with the attention for 'human' aspects (investments in health, leisure and innovation) and the Nordic touch (the 'Ø') are seen as the success factors for the branding of the region. Compared to the rest of Sweden and Denmark the region experienced higher growth rates in the emergence of new firms, the number of publications on the region raised and more and more 'policy travels' were organised to the region (Hospers, 2004).

However, the qualification of 'best practice' is questionable considering the fact that despite all the positive developments, the region still cannot compete with other European metropolises. This seems to be caused by the most outstanding aspect of the region: the border. The border has for the inhabitants themselves proven to be more of a barrier than a driving force. In the practice of cross-border interaction, barriers connected to for instance laws and institutions have come to the fore. Hospers (2004, p. 277) calls this the 'Øresund paradox': "the region's branding strategy is widely seen as a 'best practice', but in the region itself it is received with little enthusiasm".



**Figure 10: Øresund region
(Øresund Network, n.d.)**

The fact that Limburg's border location is chosen as a starting point for the branding strategy is thus justifiable, since the border is a distinctive aspect. However, this fact induces more border regions to use this vantage point in their branding strategies, so it is important that

Limburg gives its own twist to branding itself as a border region. The example in box 6 shows that branding a region through its border location is not a sure way to success. A pitfall for Limburg might be the interpretation of its border location as being 'borderless'. Even though European policy is directing its member states more and more to the disposal of their borders in several fields, the border is precisely what makes border regions so special. It is a fact that Limburg is a border region, but the way in which this fact will be used to position the region depends on the exact content of Limburg Branding. Even though Limburg Branding is still in the planning phase, the following section will provide some insights.

5.4 Analysis

5.4.1 Introduction

It might seem unnecessary to analyze Limburg Branding - which is developed from a Competitive Identity perspective - in the same way as Regiobranding Zuid-Limburg in the previous chapter. However, due to power relations and practical choices it cannot be stated beforehand that this branding strategy will fit perfectly within the bigger framework of Competitive Identity. This analysis will have a slightly different form than the comparable analysis in the previous chapter though: the proposed actions and projects in the draft report of Anholt, Govers and Hildreth (2012) are namely already spread over the different channels of the hexagon and this division will be maintained. It is thereby important to emphasize that only the actions and projects listed in the draft report of Anholt, Govers and Hildreth (2012) are included in the analysis. The draft report was accomplished with a planning schedule, so in this analysis only actions that are suggested to launch with once Limburg Branding starts are included. These actions and projects are however in proviso, which means it is unsure whether they will actually be implemented or not. This is even more so because this list of actions and projects is not established in consultation with stakeholders. Since a final choice has not been made yet, the actions and projects mentioned in the draft report are however the best choice for this analysis: these are the most elaborated and for now the most likely to be implemented. For the remainder this paragraph has the same structure as paragraph 4.3: after the influencing factor power relations is elaborated on, for each channel the corresponding actions and projects are identified and analysed.

After the analysis of the proposed actions and projects, the positioning of the brand Limburg is analysed. As became clear in the outline, the chosen leitmotiv for the branding strategy is "*Limburg. We don't see borders, we see interfaces.*" Statements are made about this positioning through Anholt's criteria as enlisted in section 2.2.1: creative, ownable, sharp, motivating, relevant and elemental.

This paragraph ends with a short conclusion, wherein is reflected on the overall branding strategy of Limburg Branding.

5.4.2 The branding practices

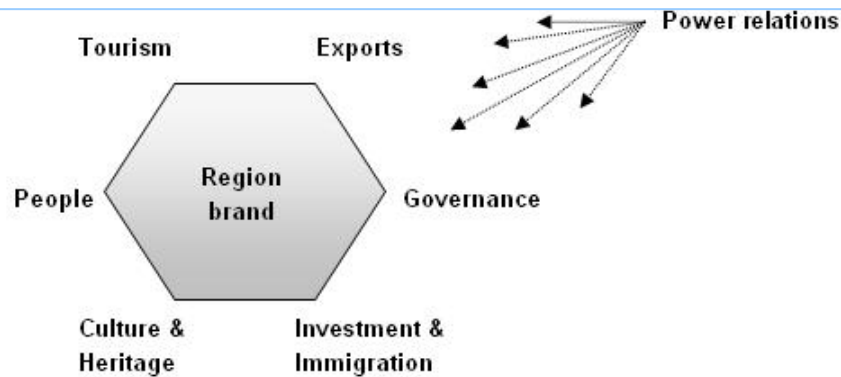


Figure 11: The hexagon of regional Competitive Identity

Power relations

As argued in section 2.3.3, power relations are an influencing factor in the regional model of Competitive Identity. These practices, institutions and relations have an influence on the six channels of the hexagon. Concretely the influencing factor power relations refers to the actors involved, the tasks and responsibilities assigned to them and their interrelationships. Since some aspects of this factor influence all or several of the six channels, it is useful to provide an overview before the individual channels of the hexagon will be analysed.

Since Limburg Branding is still in the planning phase, the power relations are not yet completely clear. The interrelationship between Province, municipalities and other stakeholders is for instance yet to be determined in the business plan, wherein the governance structure of Limburg Branding will be defined. The formal and informal distribution of tasks and responsibilities and the financing construction will determine the distribution of power among all parties involved. However, what can be concluded already is that the new branding organisation has a greater ambition in influencing policies of regional partnerships than Regiobranding Zuid-Limburg did. This has to do with the fact that this branding project is designed from a Competitive Identity perspective, in which 'governance' is identified as one of the channels through which a brand is established.

What can also be concluded already is that South Limburg organisations have had the most influence in the development of the branding strategy up until now. This is probably due to the fact that South Limburg already has experience with branding through Regiobranding Zuid-Limburg, which makes it easier for stakeholders to engage in the new strategy because they already know to some extent what to expect. North- and Middle Limburg have had a more waiting attitude towards Limburg Branding in the process so far.

Stichting Regiobranding Zuid-Limburg itself also has an important influencing role in the design of the branding strategy. The foundation has built a strong network in the past four years together with the South Limburg stakeholders, which it uses to protect the successes the foundation has achieved from fading to the background. Concretely, this has for instance led to the promise that a so called 'facility point' will be included in Limburg Branding, where stakeholders can get advice on how to make their projects on brand. This was namely one of the main activities Stichting Regiobranding Zuid-Limburg developed in the last couple of years.

Exports

According to the definition given in section 2.3.3 the channel of exports refers to products coming out of the region and being exported. In the draft report on Competitive Identity, no actions or projects concerning exports have been suggested. This is rather strange, while export is indeed part of the Limburg economy. Representatives of Limburg often take part in trade visits and an annual Limburg Export Prize is awarded to an entrepreneur with a clear vision on exports. Limburg is not famous for its exports, but innovations and reforms to change this image would surely fit into the bigger framework of Competitive Identity as substance or symbolic actions.

Governance

The channel of governance refers to regional authorities, partnerships, workgroups or institutions through which the regional brand is established. Anholt, Govers and Hildreth (2012) propose three projects for this channel which are classified as substance: the creation of a Limburg Institute for Border Research and Advocacy (LIBRA), twinning with other border regions and cross-border administrative reforms. They also suggest two symbolic actions: retail discount for foreign nationals and prioritising of cross-border nature reserves. These projects and actions are elaborated on in the remainder of this section.

Limburg Institute for Border Research and Advocacy (LIBRA)

LIBRA would become a think tank and international resource/research institute/library on border related issues, the idea of "the end of the nation state" and the importance of city and industry networks. This research centre could be useful as a way to establish credibility of the strategy, but particularly become a resource to be used for preparing other initiatives, projects and symbolic actions. LIBRA could for instance organise the "International Borders Conference" (Anholt, Govers & Hildreth, 2012, p. 22). Anholt, Govers and Hildreth classify this project as substance.

LIBRA could enable Limburg to become a major player in solving border related issues. Besides the main activities of the institute which can be classified as substance, activities and projects with a lot of communicative power like an International Border Conference could be linked to this project. Therefore, LIBRA is considered in this research as a project at the intersection of substance and symbolic action.

Twinning

Limburg could “twin” with interesting border regions elsewhere, like the demilitarized zone between North- and South Korea, Gaza or Checkpoint Charlie in Berlin (Anholt et al., 2012, p. 22). Anholt, Govers and Hildreth classify this project as substance.

Even though this project has not yet been further developed, one could assume that Anholt, Govers and Hildreth aim with this twinning project for an exchange of ideas and viewpoints between Limburg and the twin region since this is the usual aim of twinning (Council of European Municipalities and Regions, n.d.). However, practice will show to what extent this will actually be the case. If twinning leads to a real partnership with a fellow border region, this project would be innovative and emblematic of the strategy. Therefore it would be classified in this research as a symbolic action rather than just substance. However, if twinning would lead to a purely symbolic relationship with a fellow border region, this project would not fit into Competitive Identity: actions and projects should only be undertaken for real reasons in order to be relevant and effective.

Cross-border administrative reform

Cross-border administrative reform should get priority in the general provincial policy. The Province of Limburg has already signed an agreement with the Dutch national government in order to address international border frictions. This should be expanded (Anholt et al., 2012, p. 23). More concrete steps to how this process should be shaped are however not elaborated on by Anholt, Govers and Hildreth. They classify this project as substance. This classification will be retained in this research, since administrative reforms enable the execution of the strategy in all possible fields.

Retail discount for foreign nationals

The retail sectors in Limburg, Belgium and Germany should allow for cross-border retail discounting to foreign nationals (Anholt et al., 2012, p. 23) in order to stimulate cross-border sale streams. This project is classified by Anholt, Govers and Hildreth as a symbolic action.

This action underscores the image of Limburg as a region which deals with borders in daily life. At the same time it stimulates cross-border flows of people, which gives this action

a real purpose. Since it is innovative and emblematic of the branding strategy, it is also in this research classified as a symbolic action.

Cross-border nature reserves

Cross-border nature reserves should be prioritised in Provincial policy. At the same time, tourism linkages should be actively created (e.g. Maas-Schwalm-Nette) (Anholt et al., 2012, p. 23). Anholt, Govers and Hildreth classify this project as a symbolic action.

In this project the branding strategy is executed through innovations and reforms in the Provincial policy. The project is emblematic of the strategy and the link with tourism gives it communicative power. The classification symbolic action is thus correct and maintained in this research.

Investment and Immigration

The channel of investment and immigration is operationalised as referring to ways in which investment and recruitment of talents is encouraged through the branding strategy. Anholt, Govers and Hildreth (2012) propose two projects for this channel which are classified as substance: the creation of a new generation of global citizens under the heading 'Maastricht Generation 2.0' and the exploitation of higher education models under the name 'Limburg Learning model'. They also suggest three symbolic actions: Innovation on Talent Immigration/Integration, stimulation of cross-border EU projects and the visualization of cross-border networks.

Maastricht Generation 2.0

Limburg should create a new generation of global citizens through education (thus non-language courses) in English, German and French and compulsory Mandarin and Spanish language courses in primary and secondary education. This can possibly be done through cross-border exchange (Anholt et al., 2012, p. 19). This project stems from the bid book of VIA2018 and is classified by Anholt, Govers and Hildreth as substance.

The idea for Maastricht Generation 2.0 is new and innovative. It entails an education reform which makes the new generation Limburgers border people pre-eminently. The classification as substance is thus maintained, although this project also provides opportunities for symbolic actions to hitch on.

Limburg Learning model

Existing higher education models that focus on interfacing between students from different cultures should be exploited to have them cooperate as opposed to the usual clustered groups according to home culture. The Transnational University Limburg could be revitalized

for this project (Anholt et al., 2012, p. 19). Limburg Learning model is classified by Anholt, Govers and Hildreth as substance.

Just as the previous project, this project entails an education reform and the reinvigoration of existing models. It is thus a not completely new, but important project in executing the branding strategy of Limburg Branding. The classification as substance is therefore retained in this research.

Innovation on Talent Immigration/Integration

Under this heading cross-border employment should be stimulated. This could be done through cross-border employment information desks, a web portal that lists employment opportunities that are particularly cross-border, setting up a buddy system for cross-border assistance and/or the creation of video-portraits of people working in such jobs (Anholt, Govers and Hildreth, 2012, p. 19). This project is classified as a symbolic action by Anholt, Govers and Hildreth.

In particular the last part (the video-portraits) can be viewed as a symbolic action, because they are emblematic of the strategy and have a communicative power in themselves. However, the remaining part of this project is in this research classified as substance: for the major part this project exists of innovations and reforms which create the necessary 'infrastructure' for cross-border employment. This project is therefore viewed in this research as located on the intersection of substance and symbolic action.

Cross-border EU projects

Cross-border EU projects should be publicised and stimulated by LIOF and the Province of Limburg (Anholt et al., 2012, p. 19). This is classified as a symbolic action.

Stimulation of EU projects would be an action with a real purpose and thus fit into the bigger framework of Competitive identity, while only publication of these projects would not. Thereby this is more a general directive than a specific action, since no specific EU projects are designated for stimulation or publication. Since this action needs more elaboration in order to be classified as substance or symbolic action, this project is not classified as any of those in this research.

Visualisation of cross-border networks

Several major campus developments are ongoing (such as Avantis, Chemelot, Health Campus and Greenport) which must have significant networking links with business and other organisations in surrounding regions in Germany, Belgium and elsewhere. These should be visualised and made accessible for engagement. This could for instance be done through the visualisation of international networks on member profiles on LinkedIn (Anholt et

al., 2012, p. 19). This project is classified by Anholt, Govers and Hildreth as a symbolic action.

This classification is maintained in this research: this project is new and innovative and at the same time emblematic for the strategy. The fact that it is suitable for several forms of communication makes it a perfect example of a symbolic action.

Culture and Heritage

The channel of culture is defined as the channel which refers to the way in which cultural expressions, activities and exports are used to brand the region. Anholt, Govers and Hildreth (2012) suggest one short-term practice that fits into this channel as a symbolic action: a cultural cross-border calendar.

Cultural cross-border calendar

Anholt, Govers and Hildreth (2012, p.21) suggest that the sharing of an annual cultural cross-border calendar should be subsidised. They do not elaborate on this, but they classify it as a symbolic action.

Since a cross-border cultural agenda is emblematic of the strategy chosen for Limburg Branding and has a communicative value, the classification of symbolic action is maintained in this research.

People

The channel of people entails every aspect of the branding strategy that is linked to the inhabitants of the region. It involves the association with famous inhabitants as well as branding practices aimed towards (unknown) inhabitants. The channel refers to practices aimed at making inhabitants more suitable ambassadors for their region as well as representations of the inhabitants to the outside world. Anholt, Govers and Hildreth (2012) suggest two symbolic actions for this channel: the rebranding of Pinkpop and the rebranding of the Amstel Gold Race.

Rebranding Pinkpop

Pinkpop should be rebranded to Pinkpop Border Rock (Anholt et al., 2012, p. 21) to emphasize the border aspect of Limburg. This is classified as a symbolic action.

Even though this action draws attention to the border location of Limburg, this action is not undertaken for a real purpose: it is purely communicative. Therefore it does not fit into Competitive Identity strategy and is neither substance nor symbolic action.

Rebranding the Amstel Gold Race

The Amstel Gold Race should be rebranded to Amstel Gold Border Race. This race should cross as many borders as possible (Anholt et al., 2012, p. 21) to profile Limburg as a border region.

In contrast with the previous rebranding action, this action does fit into Competitive Identity because it is not just about a change of name: the Amstel Gold Race is actually changed from a domestic cycling contest to a cross-border cycling event. This makes this action emblematic for the strategy. Thereby does it have a great communicative power, since sports attracts the attention of a large audience and is suitable for several channels of communication. This action is therefore also in this research classified as a symbolic action.

Tourism

The channel of tourism is defined as referring to everything related to tourism and the way the tourist gaze is influenced. Anholt, Govers and Hildreth (2012) suggest two symbolic actions which can be undertaken through this channel on the short term. These are the visualisation of borders and the creation of a border app.

Visualisation of borders

Anholt, Govers and Hildreth (2012, p. 21) suggest maps and physical markers or landscape architecture should be used to visualize new (open) and old (closed) borders. They classify this as a symbolic action.

Through this action a new attraction for tourists is created which is emblematic of the branding strategy. It has a communicative value and is therefore also in this research classified as a symbolic action.

Border app

Anholt, Govers and Hildreth (2012, p. 21) suggest that borders could also be visualized through location based services and augmented reality on smart phones. Tourists could for instance collect points doing as many border-crossings in a walk as possible. This project is classified as a symbolic action.

This project is similar to the previous one mentioned: through this action a new attraction for tourists is created which is emblematic of the branding strategy. It has a communicative value and is therefore also in this research classified as a symbolic action.

Summarizing

The table on the next page gives an overview of the actions and projects in Limburg Branding and their classification (see table 4).

Channel	Action or project	Fits into Competitive Identity?
Exports	-	-
Governance	LIBRA Twinning Cross-border administrative reform Retail discount for foreign nationals Cross-border nature reserves	Yes: substance/symbolic action Yes: symbolic action Yes: substance Yes: symbolic action Yes: symbolic action
Investment & Immigration	Maastricht Generation 2.0 Limburg Learning model Innovation on Talent Immigration/Integration Cross-border EU projects Visualisation of cross-border networks	Yes: substance Yes: substance Yes: substance/symbolic action - Yes: symbolic action
Culture & Heritage	Cultural cross-border calendar	Yes: symbolic action
People	Rebranding Pinkpop Rebranding Amstel Gold Race	No Yes: symbolic action
Tourism	Visualisation of borders Border app	Yes: symbolic action Yes: symbolic action

Table 4: Actions and Projects Limburg Branding

Looking at the table, it is striking that mainly economic or policy actions and projects are suggested. The fact that most actions are proposed in the fields of Governance and Investment and Immigration does not fit into the bigger framework of Competitive Identity: a brand should be established through all channels at the same time in a coherent and coordinated way in order to be memorable and successful. The fact that no actions are suggested in the field of Exports does thus not reflect the Competitive Identity approach. The fact that no stakeholders have yet committed themselves to Limburg Branding because the branding project is not yet in the implementation phase, might have had an influence on this: most actions proposed are action wherein the Province can take charge, since the Province is for now the only certain stakeholder of Limburg Branding.

Although all actions and projects are appropriate for cooperation with and ownership of stakeholders, this is not yet worked out in the plans for the same reason. The assignment of tasks and responsibilities to different parties and their interrelationships are yet to be determined in the business plan.

Lastly, the table shows that most actions and projects can be classified as symbolic actions. The ratio of substance and symbolic actions should be more equal, since symbolic actions are preceded by substance according to the theory. This focus on symbolic actions reveals the importance of communication in branding: even though purely communicative actions are not part of Competitive Identity, actions with a communicative value (i.e. symbolic actions) are still predominant in the branding practices.

5.4.3 The positioning of the brand

Although the leitmotiv is determined, the exact content becomes clear when Limburg Branding is running. However, based on the preliminary plans it is possible to assess the leitmotiv beforehand. The chosen leitmotiv is analysed through the Competitive Identity perspective. Anholt provides six criteria which ensure that the strategy is compelling and motivating when most of them are met. The criteria hereby are as enlisted in section 2.2.1: creative, ownable, sharp, motivating, relevant and elemental.

Creativity regarding a place branding strategy lies in the perspective that is given to the observation about the nation or the people. In Limburg Branding, this perspective is that of Limburg as a border region. As evidenced in the foregoing, a border location can be surprising and memorable when properly developed. If Limburg Branding does not walk into the pitfall of the 'borderless region', the leitmotiv can definitely be creatively interpreted. The creativity of the strategy is thus dependent on the exact content Limburg Branding will be given in the future.

A strategy is *ownable* if it is uniquely and unarguably about the place and not anywhere else. Again, this is dependent on the exact content Limburg Branding will be given. As became clear from the box about the Øresund region, the border location is more often used in branding regions. This border location should be given a clear, new 'twist' in Limburg Branding in order to create an ownable strategy. For now, the interpretation of the border location of Limburg through the leitmotiv turns out to be too unclear: it provokes discussions, because several Limburg stakeholders interpret the leitmotiv as 'international' or 'borderless'. The fact that it is not clear to everyone in what way Limburg as a border region is being branded, means this strategy cannot be considered ownable.

A strategy can be considered *sharp* if it is "*highly focused, not generic and tells a very specific and definite story about the place, rather than a bland catch-all strategy*" (Anholt, 2007, p. 77). Limburg Branding could fall prey to being a catch-all strategy by stretching the content to please every Limburg stakeholder. However, as for now it looks like Limburg Branding is a sharp strategy considering the actions and projects enlisted in table 4. They all seem to be about diminishing barriers created by borders and they highlight the interesting aspects of being a border location.

The criterion *motivating* refers to the extent to which a strategy points people towards new and different behaviours. A branding strategy should be an active force in sustaining or changing the image of the place instead of being a passive descriptor (Anholt, 2007, p. 78). From the analysis of the power relations in Limburg Branding it was concluded that the new branding organisation has a greater ambition in influencing policies of regional partnerships than Regiobranding Zuid-Limburg did. This and the fact that Limburg Branding will give

people a new perspective on Limburg by looking at the region as a border location, make that the strategy can be considered motivating.

A strategy is *relevant* when it offers a meaningful promise to the consumer. The relevancy of Limburg Branding is yet to be determined. The actions and projects suggested do not seem to reflect a specific promise: they are only aiming at creating awareness around Limburg as a border region. Based on the plans and ideas for Limburg Branding, the strategy cannot be considered relevant.

The last criterion for a good branding strategy is that it should be *elemental*, which means it should be simple and usable in different situations. From conversations with stakeholders it follows that the purpose of positioning Limburg as a border region is not completely clear. Many stakeholders interpret the message right away as ‘international region’ or ‘borderless region’, while the main focus should be on the border according to the plan created by Anholt, Govers and Hildreth. The strategy of Limburg Branding can thus not be considered elemental.

Criterion	Extent to which the criterion is met
Creative	+
Ownable	+
Sharp	+
Motivating	+
Relevant	-
Elemental	-

Table 5: Rating of the positioning of Limburg Branding

Table 5 gives an overview of all the above. The ratings in the table are based on the most positive image: if the degree to which a criterion is met is dependent on the exact content of Limburg Branding, the rating is based on the fact that this criterion *could be* met. This is thus a rating of the *potential* positioning of Limburg Branding. What can be concluded is that the strategy of Limburg Branding has the potential to be unique and to stand out. It can attract attention, which is exactly what branding through Competitive Identity aims for. However, the strategy lacks relevance and is not elemental. These two criteria are the basis for a long lasting and successful branding strategy, so one would be wise to give the strategy of Limburg Branding some more thought in these fields.

5.5 Conclusion

Although as a result of the analysis it might seem that Competitive Identity is just about ‘ticking boxes’ and meeting certain conditions, Competitive Identity involves much more than

that. As follows from the theoretical framework, branding a place through Competitive Identity is about choosing a relevant, distinguishing positioning of the brand which matches the identity of a place and subsequently propagating that brand through real actions and projects. Hereby it is important to create some sort of synergy among all channels of the hexagon: Competitive Identity encompasses the making of connections between, and aligning all regional parties in order to disseminate the same message about the region. At first sight it might seem unnecessary to analyse a branding strategy which is developed from a Competitive Identity perspective through Competitive Identity criteria, but the results of the analysis show that practical choices and things that are yet to be determined influence the preliminary plans in such a way, that one cannot say beforehand that Limburg Branding does fit into Competitive Identity completely.

In general the positioning of the Limburg brand is developed in a process which matches the Competitive Identity thought: in an early stage stakeholders have been involved in the plans for a new branding strategy and their ideas were leading in the development of the leitmotiv *“Limbug. We don’t see borders, we see interfaces.”* However, the interpretation of this leitmotiv differs slightly among stakeholders: some interpret it as being ‘international’ or ‘borderless’. This was recognised as a pitfall in the paragraph on borders, which could lead to the paradoxical situation that the distinctive feature of Limburg (i.e. the border) is being negated in the branding practices. The extent to which this will be the case, will become evident from the implementation of the actions and projects through which the brand Limburg will be propagated. The aim is for the organisation of Limburg Branding to facilitate regional parties in executing these actions and projects and making them ‘on brand’, which fits into the bigger framework of Competitive Identity. However, cooperation of regional parties is not yet guaranteed because Limburg Branding is still in the planning phase, which means no parties have committed themselves yet to the new branding strategy except for the Province of Limburg. To what extent the branding organisation can waive the execution of projects and actions is yet to be determined when the power relations will be formally defined in for instance the business plan. At that time it will also become clear to what extent synergy between the channels of the hexagon points is reached: in the preliminary plans this issue is not yet addressed.

6. CONCLUSION

6.1 ANSWERING THE RESEARCH QUESTION

6.1.1 Context

Place branding is a common practice nowadays. The local identity of places is gaining more and more importance as a factor in location choice for companies, residents, visitors and talent because of the ongoing globalisation process. Although the branding approaches can differ, it is evident that places must be branded: not as an external project, but fitting in with the local grassroots and identity of the place.

Just like many other authorities, the Province of Limburg has recognised the importance of place branding. While in the last four years only South Limburg was actively branded under the header of Regiobranding Zuid-Limburg, in July 2013 the Province wants to broaden this practice to Limburg as a whole under the working title of Limburg Branding. This broadening also entails a new branding approach: Competitive Identity. To ensure a smooth running of this process, through this research it is tried to contribute to the need to gain insight in the differences and similarities between both branding strategies. That way conclusions can be drawn on the level of connectivity between the two branding strategies, based on which recommendations for the implementation of Limburg Branding can be done. The corresponding research question is formulated:

To what extent is the strategy of Limburg Branding (2011-2012) related to the former branding strategy of Regiobranding Zuid-Limburg (2008-2012) from a Competitive Identity perspective and what can be recommended for the implementation of Limburg Branding?

Since the research question is twofold, it is answered in two sections. In paragraph 6.1.2 is elaborated on the level of connectivity between the two branding strategies, based on which recommendations for Limburg Branding are done in paragraph 6.1.3

6.1.2 Connectivity between the branding strategies

In this research the branding strategies of Regiobranding Zuid-Limburg and the preliminary plans for Limburg Branding are analysed from a Competitive Identity perspective. As follows from the theoretical framework, branding a place through Competitive Identity is about choosing a relevant, distinguishing positioning of the brand which matches the identity of a place and subsequently propagating that brand through real actions and projects executed by stakeholders from all channels of the hexagon. Although at first sight it might seem unfair

to compare a branding strategy that is developed from such a different perspective to a strategy that is developed on the basis of Competitive Identity, the analysis results have shown that both strategies contain aspects fitting into the bigger framework of Competitive Identity and that both strategies have aspects that (might) do not.

In general it can be concluded that Regiobranding Zuid-Limburg became more compatible with Competitive Identity as time progressed: the branding organisation started to act more out of the own identity of the region whereas previously the position of 'others' (like the Randstad) was leading and besides the ongoing practices focused on communication, substance gained importance. In executing actions and projects cooperation with stakeholders was increasingly sought and even the tourist sector got slightly involved in the branding practices by Regiobranding Zuid-Limburg.

As for Limburg Branding, it is hard to say how it will exactly fit into the bigger framework of Competitive Identity, since the branding project is still in the planning phase. Because there is no business plan yet, the final distribution of tasks and responsibilities among stakeholders and the branding organisation and their interrelationships remain unclear. However, the preliminary plans are all developed from a Competitive Identity perspective. From the draft report by Anholt, Govers and Hildreth and several attended meetings, it follows that the contours of Limburg Branding are already established: there will be less focus marketing and more on real actions, actions and projects will be executed in partnerships as much as possible and the branding organisation's main task will be making sure that those actions and projects are 'on brand'. The uncertainty about the fit into Competitive Identity stems mainly from issues that have not yet been worked out, like the commitment of stakeholders which is needed to enable working in partnerships.

The main differences between the branding strategies of Regiobranding Zuid-Limburg and Limburg Branding emanate from the chosen branding approach, the organisation of the branding practice and the positioning of the brand. To start with *branding approach*: Limburg Branding has been developed from a Competitive Identity perspective, whereas Regiobranding Zuid-Limburg was based on the more communicative approach of consultancy Berenschot. Whereas communication has its place in Competitive Identity only after actions and projects worth talking about have been realised, in the 'Berenschot-approach' it is the first and main practice which is followed by several actions and projects to support the message spread. Under pressure of stakeholders this has led to a focus on promotional activities, which will not be part of Limburg Branding. The fact that the stakeholders of Regiobranding Zuid-Limburg could influence the process this much has to do with the *way in which branding was organised*. Due to the assignment of Regiobranding Zuid-Limburg and the way the organisation was shaped, the role of stakeholders consisted of consultation and sponsorship. Stichting Regiobranding Zuid-Limburg became therefore an

executive organisation instead of an organisation facilitating stakeholders in their execution of 'on brand' actions and projects and creating partnerships, like Limburg Branding is planned to be. Stichting Regiobranding Zuid-Limburg has therefore failed to create synergy among the partners around the channels of the hexagon, which is an important aspect of Competitive Identity. The creation of synergy will be extra important in Limburg Branding, since the branding approach of establishing a brand mainly through real actions and projects instead of communication causes Limburg Branding to be less visible in first instance than Regiobranding Zuid-Limburg. An integral propagation of the message through all channels of the hexagon is thus necessary. The possible problem of visibility of the branding practices in Limburg Branding might be enhanced by the *positioning of the brand*. Whereas the positioning of South Limburg as a region with a great work-life-balance is not sharp and creative enough, it is relevant and elemental to its receivers and inhabitants. This is the other way around for the positioning of Limburg through its border location: although it is creative and memorable, it lacks relevance and cannot be considered elemental. However, to what extent this will actually be a problem remains to be seen once the plans for Limburg Branding have been worked out and implemented.

Concluding, it can be stated that the level of connectivity between the branding strategies of Regiobranding Zuid-Limburg and Limburg Branding is surprisingly fair, considering the different approaches, organisation of the processes and positioning of the brands. Regiobranding Zuid-Limburg became more compatible with Competitive Identity as time progressed, and within the framework set by the above mentioned differing aspects Regiobranding Zuid-Limburg will probably continue to become more compatible with Competitive Identity towards the transition to Limburg Branding.

6.1.3 Recommendations for Limburg Branding

The recommendations for Limburg Branding based on the foregoing comparison between Regiobranding Zuid-Limburg and Limburg Branding concentrate around two things: taking advantage of the similarities and learning from the differences between the two branding strategies. The following things are recommended for Limburg Branding:

- The positioning of the Limburg brand through the leitmotiv "*Limburg. We don't see borders, we see interfaces.*" should be talked through again with all stakeholders involved in the process of formulating partnership projects, in order to create alignment in the interpretation of the leitmotiv and the unambiguously dissemination of the message through actions and projects. Special attention should be given to the relevance and feasibility of the brand position.

- The branding organisation of Limburg Branding should be given the (formal) power to demand or strongly motivate stakeholders to make their projects on brand and to execute them in partnerships, in order to avoid becoming an executive organisation like Regiobranding Zuid-Limburg. Instruments to gain and maintain the commitment of stakeholders should be elaborated on in the business plan and could entail providing a financial contribution or extra manpower to projects or the clarifying of intrinsic value of making projects on brand.
- Actions and projects already initiated by Regiobranding Zuid-Limburg which are compatible with Limburg Branding, or which can easily be made 'on brand', should be continued in Limburg Branding. Applicability to the whole of Limburg and incorporation of the border aspect should be amongst the criteria for continuation. These actions and projects are quick wins for Limburg Branding, which proverbially speaking does not need to reinvent the wheel. Projects that could be eligible include the database of local products, the World Championship Cycling, the Expat service, the website eulogistics.com, the Euregional culture agenda, participation in Tefaf and the portraits series Limburgse Levens.

6.2 Recommendations for further research

In the introduction the societal relevance as well as the scientific relevance of this research were identified. Whereas the societal relevance resides in the fact that the whole of Limburg benefits from a strong Limburg brand, the scientific relevance resides in the new insights this research generates in the field of place branding and more specifically that of Competitive Identity. Although this research has been successful, the importance of the societal and scientific relevance go beyond the scope of this research. The societal and scientific relevance offer several starting points for further research, which are enlisted below:

- First of all, a follow-up research is recommended once Limburg Branding is implemented and running for a longer period of time. Only then statements can be made about the real level of connectivity between the branding strategies of Regiobranding Zuid-Limburg and Limburg Branding and what causes the found similarities and/or differences to exist.
- A second interesting starting point for further research would be to what extent a branding strategy developed from a Competitive Identity perspective keeps being adherent to the theory once in practice. This question could also be answered from a follow-up research, after which the results can be compared to other branding cases with a strategy based on Competitive Identity.

- Lastly, the fact that Competitive Identity is used as an assessment mechanism for branding strategies in this research provides a starting point for further research. The elements included in the operationalisation could be tested for reliability and efficiency, which might result in an assessment mechanism with which more objective and generalisable knowledge can be acquired.

6.3 Reflection on the research

Even though the research goal is met and the research progressed without having to make great changes in the research design, several things could have been done better or different. In this paragraph is critically reflected on the internship organisation, the research period, the operationalisation of Competitive Identity theory and the methods used, resulting in recommendations for follow-up research

Internship organisation

This research was conducted within the framework of a research internship at the Province of Limburg. Looking back on the research, this has been a good choice. During the internship I was in close contact with the people involved in the development of the branding strategy for Limburg Branding and they enabled me to get in touch with other people involved in this or both of the branding strategies studied. Also I had access to internal memo's, reports and documents and I was able to attend relevant meetings, which was very helpful in gaining insight in the processes of Regiobranding Zuid-Limburg as well as Limburg Branding.

Research period

This research was conducted in a period from September 2012 up to and including November 2012, which means I was only able to include information which was available up until November. Whereas this fact caused no problems in the analysis of Regiobranding Zuid-Limburg, it complicated the analysis of Limburg Branding. Since Limburg Branding is still in the planning phase, many aspects have not yet been worked out or decided on. The conclusions therefore remain provisory, since one cannot be absolutely sure how the process will develop in the implementation and execution phase.

Operationalisation of Competitive Identity

Competitive Identity theory has in this research been operationalised in the form of the regional hexagon and is used as an assessment mechanism for analysing the branding strategies, besides the six criteria for a good strategy formulated by Anholt. Since this might lead to an image of Competitive Identity being about 'ticking boxes' and meeting certain

criteria, it is tried to do justice to the complexity of Competitive Identity by continually sketching the context and displaying the coherence among all different aspects of Competitive identity. However, these factors have proven to be hard to include thoroughly and in an objective way.

Research methods

The research methods used are literature study, document analysis and expert interviews. The interviews have been used on the one hand as a means of validating and interpreting the information found through the literature study and document analysis and on the other hand as a way to gain extra information. However, most persons interviewed were involved in developing, evaluating or implementing one or both of the branding strategies, which led to the fact that the extra information gained from interviews was often subjective. Even though this was serviceable for gaining insight, it would have been useful to talk to a neutral branding expert about both strategies. Unfortunately I have not been able to arrange this during this research, but I would recommend this for a possible follow-up research.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A: List of respondents

Robert Govers

Telephonic interview on 10-04-2012

Robert Govers is one of the founders of the international place branding consultancy Anholt, Govers & Hildreth, which is developing the branding strategy for Limburg Branding. Govers is also the author of two evaluation reports on Regiobranding Zuid-Limburg: the quickscan in 2010 and the overall evaluation in 2012.

Yvonne Kokkelkoren

Several conversations between 09-01-2012 and 11-15-2012

As project leader on behalf of the Province of Limburg, Yvonne Kokkelkoren is involved in the development of Limburg Branding.

Alain Nijssen

Face-to-face interview on 09-27-2012

As project leader on behalf of the Province of Limburg, Alain Nijssen has been involved in the initial phase of the development of Regiobranding Zuid-Limburg. He was involved with the project from the start in 2007 until April 2008.

Wim Ortjens

Face-to-face interview on 10-09-2012

Wim Ortjens is since the establishment in 2008 director of Stichting Regiobranding Zuid-Limburg. He is also involved in the transition process from Regiobranding Zuid-Limburg to Limburg Branding.

Martin van der Velde

Conversation on 11-19-2012

Martin van der Velde is an associate professor at Radboud University Nijmegen and is specialised in border issues.

