

# A multi-scalar approach to place branding: The case of “Esperienza Italia” in Turin

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*This paper has been published as: Giovanardi, M. (2015). A multi-scalar approach to place branding: The 150th anniversary of Italian unification in Turin. *European Planning Studies*, 23(3), 597-615. DOI: 10.1080/09654313.2013.879851*

## **Abstract**

This study draws from an interpretation of scale as a social construct to elaborate a multi-scalar approach to place branding that represents a growing set of theories and managerial practices aimed to leverage the reputational capital of places. The paper unveils that far from consisting in clear-cut processes which occur within a pre-given and fixed set of scalar boundaries, city, regional, country and supra-national branding actually converges in a complex mechanism of intertwined practices and discourses. By grounding its theoretical investigation in a case study about the celebration of the 150th anniversary of Italian unification, this paper furthers the understanding of place branding from a multi-level perspective, addressing the tendency of previous studies to treat scale as a fixed hierarchy of nested levels. The findings show that scalar boundaries remain significant for the purpose of coordination and identification among the institutional actors involved. And yet, the investigation highlights that scalar boundaries do not constitute a structure of ontologically-given contexts, but rather are the outcome of an ongoing dialectic process among place stakeholders through which scalar relations are constantly reproduced and nurtured during the staging of the place branding project.

**Keywords:** scale, scaling, place branding, place marketing, Italy, scalar boundaries.

## **Introduction**

Over the last decade, the literature on place branding passed through different stages of evolution. On the basis of the analysis of peer-reviewed articles published between 1990 and 2009, Gertner (2011) describes its development as going from a “gestation period” (p. 5) to a phase of

“maturity” (p. 12), in which a growing number of articles have been seeking to further refine the theoretical models sketched during what he terms the “adolescent period” (p. 8). In particular, within the area of urban and regional studies we are witnessing a shift away from the (hyper)critical stance that, following David Harvey’s (1989) perspective, drove the social and geographical research on place branding and marketing for years (e.g. Philo & Kearns, 1993; Ward, 2000; Greenberg, 2000; Jensen, 2007). Indeed, recent contributions (e.g. Clifton, 2011; Giovanardi, 2012; Eshuis & Edwards, 2012; Pasquinelli & Teräs, 2012) have investigated the opportunities and pitfalls related to the distinctiveness of places and the building of their reputational capital in more nuanced ways, problematising the traditional tendency to rely on a materialist perspective and specific ideological assumptions. In spite of this more nuanced approach and the renewed attention for meticulous grounded analyses, the study of place branding cannot yet be considered to be a fully authoritative domain of knowledge, as long as a number of empirical, methodological and theoretical challenges remain to be tackled (Vicari Haddock, 2010).

Besides the most frequently debated challenges, such as the problems of the effectiveness and the measurability of branding campaigns, scholars have often failed to provide a general view of the complex institutional settings and governance arrangements in which place branding practices are embedded, or they sought to do so in ways that do not fully grasp the complexity of these arrangements. In this respect, this paper identifies scale as a crucial perspective that has been largely disregarded, or at least misunderstood, within place branding literature. The concept of scale requires further understanding in order to better capture the peculiarities of place branding, the actors involved in it and their relationships. Scale is a core concept of geography (Jonas, 2006; Leitner & Miller, 2007; Howitt, 1998) together with, among others, environment, space and place. Marston *et al.* (2005) offer a useful definition of scale as “the result of marking territories [...] through boundaries and enclosures, documents and rules, enforcing agents and their authoritative resources” (Marston *et al.*, 2005, p. 420). Shifting from contexts to processes, scaling can be thought of as a series of procedures that constitute a “technology of bounding” (Herod & Wright, 2002, cited in Paasi, 2004, p. 538) and has been at the centre of the debate on the rescaling that characterises the Western democracies. From this perspective, sociologists and political geographers (e.g. Brenner, 2001; Sheppard, 2002; Swyngedouw & Heynen, 2003; Kazepov, 2010) have focused on scaling and rescaling processes that underlie the production of differentiated spatial units and their embeddedness in relation to smaller/larger units “within a multi-tiered, hierarchically configured geographical scaffolding” (Brenner, 2001, p. 600).

While there now appears to be some consensus that scale is not a fixed category but is rather a socially constructed dimension that implies interaction among various levels of regulations (Paasi,

2004), studies on place branding tend to either focus on only one specific spatial level (e.g. national, urban, regional or other spatial levels), or to render a simplistic hierarchy of scalar boundaries as predetermined and permanent. This paper aims thus to deepen and rearticulate the concept of scale and scaling in the analysis of place branding theories and practices by, first, critically evaluating the most widespread understandings of scale and scaling in the literature and, second, proposing an alternative understanding based on a relational approach to scale (Howitt, 1998) which considers scale *dialectically* rather than only *hierarchically*.

This paper's theoretical exploration is developed by reporting relevant findings from a case study on "Esperienza Italia", which was a multi-level place branding initiative aimed to celebrate the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Italian unification in 2011. By doing so, the study not only addresses the need to conduct additional empirical studies to enrich the analysis of place branding, as signalled by Pasquinelli and Teräs (2012, p. 17) in a recent issue of this journal, but also responds to Syssner's call to develop a multi-level approach to place branding, an effort that would "explore the complex relationships within and between place-branding initiatives at various levels [of regulation]" (2010, p. 45).

## **Theoretical background**

### *Previous studies: scale as a fixed hierarchy*

It is not surprising that place branding literature has been consolidated in as many different "sedimentations" as the complexity of place admits, both as a theoretical concept and an empirical foundation for the implementation of varied types of policies. The implementation of place marketing and place branding processes usually insists, for the most part, on certain levels of regulation, such as the urban level, the regional level and the national level. This is mirrored in the recognition that most of the studies to date focus mainly on one level of regulation resulting in the adoption of the following labels: nation or country branding, regional branding and city branding. In particular, the nation and the city have been the objects of two streams of literature presenting similarities but also a certain degree of specificity. This, for example, can be seen in the parallel development of the concepts of "city brand equity" (Lucarelli, 2012) and "country brand equity" (Papadopoulos & Heslop, 2002), or in the managerial-oriented literature on how to brand a "country" (e.g. Olins, 2002; Fan, 2006) or a "city" (e.g. Kavaratzis, 2004; Parkerson & Saunders, 2005; Dinnie, 2011). Once more, this parallelism is illustrated by the existence of two specific

strands of studies in which criticisms are raised against the practice of nation branding (e.g. Aronczyk, 2007, 2008; Kaneva, 2011) or city branding (e.g. Evans, 2003; Jensen, 2007; Turok, 2009). The intermediate level of “region” features a lower number of studies within place branding literature, but it nonetheless represents a significant unit of analysis, especially within urban research (e.g. Hospers, 2006; Lloyd & Peel, 2008; Giovanardi *et al.*, 2013; Pasquinelli, 2010; Mahnken, 2011). Moreover, very few authors have focused on bigger or smaller spatial levels such as supra-national areas (Andersson, 2007) or neighbourhoods (Eshuis & Edwards, 2012).

A second group of studies include those which consider more than one level of regulation. Simon Anholt (2007) identifies both cities and nations as entities to be branded, but develops a specific tool-kit for each of them (the “Country Brand Hexagon” and the “City Brand Hexagon”). The author describes the relationships between the two types of branding by discussing the cases in which a city (e.g. Prague) possesses a stronger image than the country where it is located (Czech Republic) and vice versa. Similarly, “city” and “country” are the two core units of analysis in Peirce and Ritchie’s (2007) study on the branding of national capitals. The authors look at how the capital cities of Canberra and Wellington draw on stories of nationhood as a symbolic repertoire for developing their destination-branding strategies. Both studies, however, understand scalar boundaries as given, predetermined and unchangeable, in a view that frames city branding and nation branding as involving two separated sets of procedures and mechanisms, implemented by distinct sets of actors. This partial and simplified understanding looks at scalar boundaries as a hierarchy of nested places.

A similar understanding is featured by those studies considering countries in relation to supra-national levels of regulation. O’Shaughnessy and O’Shaughnessy (2000) discuss the embeddedness of nation-states within wider areas that they call a “region”, acknowledging that, for example, “Latin America may be more important than any one of its regional components” (p. 58). Therkelsen and Gram (2010) consider how European nations are being branded within the European tourism marketing initiative, as shown by the website <http://www.visiteurope.com>. The authors conceptualise a structured hierarchy of places through an Euler diagram in which cities and rural areas are contained in nations, and nations are contained in regions that in turn are part of supra-national levels such as the European continent (Therkelsen & Gram, 2010, p. 116).

This static and structuralistic understanding of scale in place branding is also portrayed in studies that consider the hierarchical relationships from the country downward through its sub-parts, such as regions and cities. Caldwell and Freire (2004) analyse how countries, regions and cities are perceived differently by international students, and each of these classifications must be therefore treated as an autonomous spatial product. The same three units of analysis are at the core of

Herstein's (2012) article titled "The thin line between country, city and region branding", perhaps the most explicit and recent effort to unravel the issue of scale within place branding literature. Herstein develops a "country-city-region matrix positioning", in order to "enable[s] marketers to understand when these concepts affect each other and which one of these concepts is more meaningful, and accordingly should be stressed, in the comprehensive country branding process" (2012, p. 150). If this tool has the merit to call for a new approach which takes a holistic perspective towards the three concepts of country, region and city, the normative perspective of brand management contributes to render an even more hierarchical pyramid of national, regional and urban levels, in which each level can only deliver independently produced image-related policies.

A slightly different view on scale emerges, to some extent, from the work of Boisen et al. (2011). The authors argue against the "territorial trap of methodological territorialism" that conceptualises places as part of a "geographical hierarchy of places" (Boisen et al., 2011, p. 137). They state that "spatial identities sometimes often correspond to the territorial-administrative levels, but they often overlap, contradict or complement each other, both in terms of the space these 'places' occupy, and the context in which they are deemed relevant by their audiences" (ibid., p. 138). However, the picture offered by the authors to illustrate their view (ibid., p 137) represents places as "dots" containing other places, each of which, in turn, include other places. The resultant representation of this scalar hierarchy, in fact, still seems to portray scalar boundaries as something fixed and static, a perspective that the present study seeks to overcome.

A radically different account of the scalar arrangements of place branding as interactive, dynamic and negotiated is suggested by Syssner (2010). This study explicitly seeks to inscribe place branding in a multi-level perspective that recognises the fluid, multiple and overlapping existence of different spatial levels. Syssner admits that "many place branding activities highlight spaces that are above, below or outside their territorial competence" and contribute to creating a "complex web of branded places" (2010, p. 43) through two techniques. The slogan "Enköping – the closest city in Sweden" is an example of "spatial positioning", in which a city is branded by pointing to the country-level, being above the urban territorial competence (p. 39). The use of a landmark building, or a museum, located in the city centre would be, instead, an example of "spatial anchorage", in which the branding strategy stresses a spatial element as being within the territorial competence of the city. The need for an approach that is able to capture place branding governance processes that actually cross the administrative borders has also been emphasised by Pasquinelli (2013) through her analysis of "inter-regional branding".

Responding to Pasquinelli's call for the need of primary research in order to unfold place branding beyond the borders (2013, p. 15), the next sections of this paper builds upon Syssner's

suggestion to further elaborate an alternative, less rigid approach to scalar boundaries in place branding research. Extending and refining this perspective is desirable in order to give ample recognition to the multifaceted and multiscalar nature of place branding activities, in line with an acknowledged awareness of scalar complexity that can be witnessed in other domains of urban and regional research, such as spatial planning (Carmo, 2001; Kärrholm, 2011), innovation policies (Morgan, 2004; Fromhold-Eisebith, 2007), the political construction of urban space (Nielsen & Simonsen, 2003) and multi-level governance (Jessop, 2005). Furthermore, relying on a “monolithic” perspective of scale and scaling would be in stark contrast to the emerging understanding of space (not only in the place branding literature but also in geography in general) as relational, networked and continuously shaped and re-shaped by the interactions among the actors and institutions involved in its production (Sassen, 2002; Doel & Hubbard, 2002; Crouch & Malm, 2003; Sheller & Urry, 2004, 2006; Kalandides, 2011; Aitken & Campelo, 2011).

#### *Place branding and scale: towards a relational approach*

A constructivist, relational perspective on scale and scaling can be further elaborated by drawing from studies which emphasise the constructed and processual nature of scale (e.g. Delaney & Leitner, 1997; Howitt, 1998; Paasi, 2004; Martin, 1999; Jessop, 2005). Over the last fifteen years, we have been witnessing a shift from a fixed conceptualisation of scale to a relational one (Paasi, 2004, p. 536-537). If, according to the former conceptualisation, scale was merely a nested hierarchy of bounded spaces of different sizes, the latter advances a constructionist perspective of scale, one in which scalar boundaries are not ontologically pre-given but, instead, socially constructed (Delaney & Leitner, 1997, p. 93). Accordingly, this approach understands scaling as a negotiated process among different types of institutional actors. Howitt (2002), for example, defines scale as an “event” that implies interactions and a relationships of movement, while similarly Brenner (2001) stresses the importance of the process of scaling/rescaling of the economy and state through which spatial contexts dynamically change. This does not imply that scale does not matter, as disputed in Marston et al. (2005)’s highly contested suggestion. On the contrary, it indicates that scalar relations are a key element to understand spaces and place, as far as we recognise that they are continuously constructed and reconstructed through institutional practices and discourses (Paasi, 2004). As Paasi further explains:

“Scales are historically contingent; they are produced, exist and may be destroyed or

transformed in social and political practices and struggles” (Paasi, 2004, p. 542)

This interactionist perspective on scale may allow us to develop an alternative understanding on how nation branding, regional branding and city branding relate to each other, since it can be employed to problematise the standard view according to which different “types” of branding (continent, country, region, city) are nested one into the other like in a Russian doll-style pyramid (e.g. Therkelsen & Malm, 2010; Herstein, 2012). Following Howitt’s (1998, p. 52) criticism, this rigid understanding dominating the literature might not be a fully adequate representation of the multiple agents who are actually engaged in the provision of resources for the development of the place branding processes that this paper examines. Moreover, such a constructivist perspective might be helpful to acknowledge the marketing of places as one of many processes that are involved in the (re)shaping and (re)scaling of territoriality and governance. The potency of this argument is illustrated in the next sections, which ground the analysis in a case study about a multi-layered place branding project in Italy.

### **“Esperienza Italia”: Celebrating the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Italy’s unification**

#### *Overview of the case study setting: Turin and the Piedmont region*

This paper locates its investigation of place branding scalar arrangements in the Italian city of Turin, epicentre of the Piedmont region and first capital of Italy, from 1861 to 1865. Turin, which was the host city of the winter Olympic Games in 2006, can be considered a typical example of an industrial town which sought to reposition itself on an international level by engaging in marketing-oriented strategies and portraying an image of a creative, post-industrial city (Vanolo, 2008). Consistently with this vision, a committee named “Italia 150” was created in 2007 with the aim to organise a well-structured programme of events to celebrate the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Italian unification (“Experience Italy”). The initiative, which is composed of different exhibitions, shows, conferences, concerts and many other attractions, was staged from March to November 2011 and had its main epicentre in Turin. The celebration was combined with the renewal of heritage buildings and sites in the region that took advantage of a national funding programme. As a whole, the project benefits thus from a combination of national and sub-national funding). Event hallmarking and interventions on built environment are two among the most widespread tools that place marketers employ to implement branding-oriented place management (see Ashworth, 2009). As the representatives of the committee explain, the effort put towards the organisation of this

celebration by the public authorities must be seen as a follow-up to the Olympic Games. Indeed, the celebration of the unification was thus seen as an opportunity for “capitalising on and strengthening the endeavour of transforming the territory made in 2006”. The correlative development of the Olympic Games and the celebration of Italy’s 150<sup>th</sup> year date back to the first strategic plan, which in 2000 triggered a long-term innovation plan by expressing a shared vision among a large number of key stakeholders in the area.

It is worth noting that the Italian unification took place in 1861 after a turbulent process through which all the territories belonging to the Italian peninsula were finally brought under the same Kingdom of Italy. The Piedmont Kingdom, ruled by the Savoia royal family, played a leading role in the unification process by propelling and sustaining it until the unification was finally accomplished. It is perhaps not by chance that the very same actors (the Piedmont region and City of Turin) have been on the forefront of the 2011 celebrations, thus making a point for the recursive nature of history described by the Italian philosopher Gianbattista Vico at the beginning of the 18<sup>th</sup> century (Collingwood, 1993).

The overall aim of the initiative was to showcase everything in which Italy excels: masterpieces of art, creativity, innovation and fashion, lifestyle quality, history, food and scenery (press release, 12 November 2010). The temporal dimension is something to which the organisers attribute particular importance. In their own words, in fact, “the staging of the past, the present and the future of the country” will “mark the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Italy’s unification”, a statement in which we clearly recognise Brian Graham’s definition of heritage as “the contemporary use of the past” (Graham, 2002, p. 1004). The choice of this case as a proper empirical field to analyse how scalar relations are constituted and constitutive of place branding processes is due to the vast heterogeneity found in the number of institutions that are part of the committee “Italia 150” and had supported the marketing initiative to different extents. These institutions represent different areas of the Italian territory and cover all the levels of regulation that span from the national government to the local government of the Turin municipality: the Ministry of Cultural Heritage, the Piedmont Regional Council, the Turin Provincial Council, and the City of Turin. Furthermore, the committee also featured the Turin Chamber of Commerce, Unioncamere Piemonte, four universities of Piedmont and two bank foundations as members.

## *Data and Methods*

This study draws on “interpretive methods” (Yanow, 2009, p. 431) to analyse different types of primary and secondary data collected by the author from July 2011 to October 2012. The data comprise: a thorough selection of official documents produced by the Italy 150 committee; a selection of advertising pages that appeared in magazines and on websites during the event; one day of participant observation within *Officine Grandi Riparazioni*, the venue of the main attractions composing the event (including the exhibitions “Making Italians: 150 years of Italian history” and “Stazione futuro”; “World Wide Torino”, a rich programme of international events involving a network of foreign partners); and the transcription of in-depth interviews held with five representatives of the bodies involved in the staging of the “Esperienza Italia” project. This methodological approach provides a level of triangulation of data that ensures its trustworthiness.

The semi-structured open-ended interviews have been guided by a questionnaire based on themes that were identified during an earlier stage of analysis of secondary data. These data sources were used intermittently during the interviews to elicit deeper and more rounded answers from interviewees. Some of them were involved in the organisational and practical dimensions of the “Experience Italy” project as directors and middle-managers, while other informants were more strategically and politically involved, having thus a higher level of significance in decision making. The choice of informants to be interviewed started as a process of “convenience sampling” (Neuman, 2011, p. 267) during the participant observation and continued as a snowball sampling. The choice of informants was supposed to get access to various level of regulation implied in the delivering of the place branding project. Informants at the national level proved to be impossible to reach. This difficulty is indeed inherent in social research (see for example Seidman, 2012, p. 44) and suggests that getting access to or making contact with participants might be problematic also in the absence of ethical issues. However, archival methods have been used to integrate the lack of qualified interviewees working for the Italian national government.

The insights gained during the participant observation in Turin also generated themes that had been subsequently discussed with the interviewees, in a circular method of data collection. Consistently, the collection and analysis of official documents also continued after the interviews. The analysis relied on the triangulation of these different data sources in order to detect meaningful discourses and enunciation practices produced by institutional actors involved in the organisation of the event at different levels of regulation. The analysis sought to pay particular attention to the ways in which institutional actors, and the respective organisations, positioned themselves within the actor-network which underpinned the governance of the branding project. In this respect, this

analytical approach comes close to what scholars in the field of psychology and organisational studies have termed “discursive positioning” (Harré and von Langenhove, 1999, 2007; Davies and Harré, 1990; Bisel and Barge, 2010) in an effort to understand the discursive production of the self, thus adopting a focus on the individual that this paper extends to also consider how institutional actors construct and transform social reality through their discourses and enunciation practices. This approach is also in line with the adoption of a relational approach to space that captures the interactions among the several heterogeneous institutions that might play a role within place governance, thus transcending a narrow territorially-focused thinking (see for example Healey, 2006).

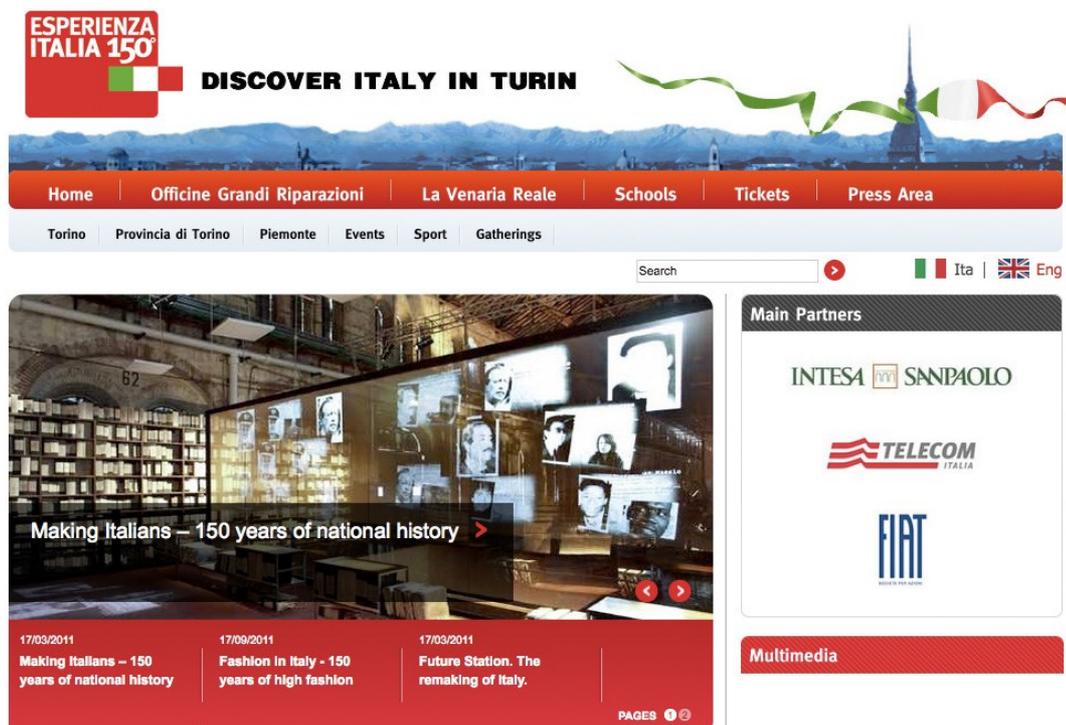
### **A multi-scalar analysis of place branding**

The findings discussed in this section reveal that in the context of the branding initiative “Esperienza Italia”, scale and scaling are significant in two respects. First, by analysing “Esperienza Italia” it is possible to witness a processual and dynamic (re)definition of place branding “governance relations” (see Gonzàles & Patsey, 2005, p. 2059), which far from being constrained within fixed hierarchical boundaries were actually constructed through the discursive practices of different institutional actors belonging to different levels of regulation. On the other hand, the scalar hierarchy among national/regional/local territories remained significant for the actors involved in the place branding process since it is useful for the purposes of coordination and identification. The latter aspect will be illustrated in the next sub-section. Afterwards, this study will focus on scale as a constructed element during the celebration of the 150<sup>th</sup> Italian anniversary, which is certainly the most remarkable evidence emerging from the empirical work.

#### *Scalar boundaries as contexts*

The overall initiative “Esperienza Italia” can be understood as the result of procedures and mechanisms taking place at different levels of regulations. In this way, scalar boundaries provide a context within which stakeholders inscribe themselves. For context, we mean here a set of both constraints and opportunities posed to actors (Kazepov, 2005, p. 5) through which they can rely on a shared cognitive, normative and regulative framework in order to form mutual expectations and consolidate recursive routines and practices. An illustration of this can be found in how the official

website's layout of "Esperienza Italia" had been articulated. Considering the home page as a visual discourse produced by the committee, we can notice the scalar representation in the navigation menu located under the main menu. The city ("Torino"), the province ("Provincia di Torino") and the region ("Piemonte") are displayed from the smallest to the largest level of regulation and this representation mirrors the way in which the celebration's programme was articulated. A number of attractions were staged at the urban level; the province created eleven tourist itineraries to rediscover the "Risorgimento" (the social-political process that led to the unification); the region "menu" (so appears the wording in the sub-menu) features three tourist itineraries, including a visit to "Broletto", a complex building totally renovated for the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary.



The tendency of the various organisers to position their practices and discourses within the scale boundaries is also visible in the words of the committee's media relation coordinator when she explains the effort in trying to inscribe the Esperienza Italia initiative under the patronage of the national government. The steering committee originally did not include national government representatives, and our interviewee clarifies that they presented the programme of the celebration to the Cultural Heritage Minister in 2007, hoping to receive his official approval on the plan, thereby inscribing the entire initiative under the aegis of the government. It formally entered the committee "Italia 150" in 2008, and this is signalled by a logo with three Italian flags displayed on

the home page of the “Esperienza Italia” website. This logo points to the existence of a wider national review of events organised by the national government to celebrate the unification of Italy.

The reference to a wider Italian framework is constant in the words of the media relation coordinator, explaining that “Turin and Piedmont aimed to become the stage for showcasing Italy” and is manifest in the committee’s willingness to include in the celebration a representative sample of other Italian cities in order to reach a better level of inclusiveness. It is evident that stakeholders in this case indeed define themselves in relation to a hierarchy of nested levels of regulation in which the national level is supposed to provide legitimation to the lower levels. This supports Leitner (2004) in the recognition that scalar boundaries turn out to be significant for the purpose of coordination and identification among the actors.

### *The ongoing dialectic among scalar boundaries*

If it is true that the stakeholders forming the Italia 150 committee often orient their practices and describe them according to a frame based on nested levels of regulation, then this frame is not a configuration that is ontologically given that has always existed, nor will it have a never-ending influence on the committee members. With the official birth of the committee, the dialectic among city, province and region was institutionalised, which means their communal effort in showcasing Italian beauty for the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary was thus translated into regulations that define their complementary and mutually supporting roles. This dialectic is mirrored by a continuous ongoing process of reproduction and maintenance that occurs among the members and does not prevent (as shown in the next sub-section), for example, modifications in the relationship between the three core members and the supporting ones.

The words of a Public Relations Account Executive who has worked for the committee clearly indicate that hierarchical bonds among and between spatial levels had been erased, or at least downplayed, within the committee and each of the members counts the same within the marketing project.

As “Committee 150” we are the city, the province and the region. There is a management board formed by the representatives of the three local governments and also of the three councils – (town, provincial and regional). [...] One cannot state that “Making Italians” is an exhibition of the city of Turin, although it is true that the city of Turin has put a lot of effort into it. It is an exhibition of Italia 150 and, as such, of the province too. (interviewee number 2)

The inter-scalar dynamics described by this participant are noteworthy also for another reason. While place branding literature often reports struggles among the stakeholders belonging to different levels of regulation (e.g. Giovanardi, 2011; Papadopoulos & Heslop, 2002) leading to clear-cut and rigid scalar boundaries, in the case of Esperienza Italia, the discourses and practices produced by all the sub-national actors seemed to converge, nurturing a day-by-day collaborative governance platform. Besides the existence of the committee, which in itself embodies a cross-scale commitment and engagement in delivering the project, all the sub-national actors attributed importance to the contribution given by the other partners and seek to provide a representation of the territory as a whole, when dealing with the journalists. As, for example, Turin's councillor for urban marketing recognises, "we have created important synergy with many bodies involved in the sector of tourism and commerce" (Guidebook "Extra 150", p. 32). The same attitude is expressed by the regional councillor for culture when he states that the initiatives proposed by "Turin and Piedmont" involve "the entire territory (from the Guggenheim in Vercelli, to the Broletto in Novara and Cavour's castle in Santerna – to give a few examples" (Guidebook "Extra 150", p. 29). This "team spirit" is witnessed in the words of the interviewed members of the committee, which itself constitutes the embodiment of the tight relations among the three scalar levels:

The work of this territory, which is used to working as one team across its various components, is surely valuable. For us it is quite easy, in comparison to what I have seen in other places, to sit around the same table with the institutions managing tourism at a regional and local level, with the Local Tourism Departments and so on [...]. We had a sort of spontaneous coordination, right? (interviewee number 1)

This spontaneous cross-scale coordination is further explained by the account provided by the colleague of this respondent, by pointing out that the participative process that the committee sought to foster in the region was similar to a sort of "call for papers":

We agreed on taking into consideration a series of initiatives and proposals which came from the entire territory of Piedmont and bring them under our patronage [...]. Therefore, we had the chance to talk about of things happening even in the smallest village of the Cuneo area. (interviewee number 2)

Another illustration of this cross-scale dialectic can be found in the cooperative effort during the making of "World Wide Turin". This was an initiative conceived by the city department for international affairs "to celebrate the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary together with Turin's friend-cities", a rich review of international attractions offered by international partners that, one after the other, came to



real ongoing international relationship and we shared the aim of the project". The emerging picture seems to give support to Howitt's (1998) argument that scale should be viewed as dialectic, rather than as a fixed hierarchy of levels. Here, the scalar relations are characterised by a certain degree of proximity among the sub-national actors, concurring together to shape a whole branding project that is greater than the sum of its parts.

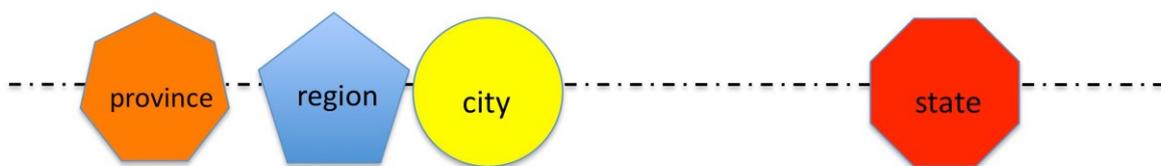
### *The "unpredictability" of scalar dialectics*

Despite a remarkable coordination that characterises the sub-national scales, the overall dialectic among the levels of regulation delivering the "Esperienza Italia" project was not completely even, linear and untroubled. This is especially the case if we observe the relationship between the cohesive group of sub-national actors and the national government. If we admit that scalar relations are an outcome of the ongoing process of (re)negotiation happening among the different spatial levels involved in Esperienza Italia, we should be ready to witness unexpected inter-scalar articulations that may contradict the scalar arrangements usually accounted by the scholarly literature on branding geographies.

We have seen above that the Italia 150 committee sought to involve the Ministry of Cultural Heritage in obtaining the support and legitimation of the national government. Indeed, in 2008 (one year after the formation of the committee), the Ministry of Cultural Heritage officially became a member of the committee. However, as the interviewees explain, the collaborative attitude changed when they realised that the government was playing "a waiting game" and avoided answering a key question about the role of Turin in the national celebration of the anniversary. "We wanted to be the only city to officially celebrate the anniversary, as we were in 1961 for the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary [...] We never had an official reply [...] they always beat around the bush". As a consequence of this perceived unfairness, the committee started putting distance, both physical and figurative, between itself and the national government, conceding that "at a point, we stopped asking".

In turn, discursive distance is articulated by the national government too, which kept a certain detachment from the Italia 150 committee. The government established an independent committee that organised a review of celebrative events, with its own logo and promotion plan. A careful look at the website of this national review (<http://www.italiaunita150.it>) reveals that it is not easy to find a link to Italia 150's website. Similarly, the press releases sent out by the national committee in Rome not often mention the Italia 150 committee or the attractions occurring in the Piedmont region.

In order to graphically render the multi-scalar arrangements characterising the branding project carried out in the Piedmont region, this paper offers an alternative to the traditional Euler diagram (see Figure 3). When considering this simplified representation of scalar complexity, one can note that the distance between the city and the region, for example, is lower than the distance between the city and the nation. This points to the inclusive dialectic that involved the sub-national levels and also to the intermittent contribution played out by the national government in the project.

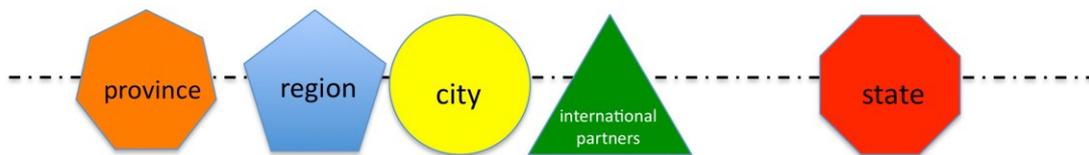


Inter-scalar dialectic appears to be a little more complex when examining Figure 4, in which a new element is featured: “international partners”. By following the standard hierarchical view, one could expect to find a supra-national scale represented at the right of the national level. Instead, this is located between the “city” and the “state”, being closer to the former and quite distant from the latter.

Let us turn again to the initiative “World Wide Turin”, which was a pivotal element of Italia 150’s campaign to showcase Italian beauty to the rest of the world. As mentioned in the previous section, the City of Turin encouraged about twenty international partners to take an active role in the “celebration of Italy’s birthday” at the most important event venue in the city centre. At the same time, Turin’s “friend cities” were given the chance to showcase their territories in a process of mutual exchange of visibility and publicity. As the head of international affairs department explains, the visibility offered to twin cities will pay off well in the long run because these cities are expected to invite representatives of Turin to their cities in return.

The important role played by the supra-national partners within Esperienza Italia was witnessed during the participant observation at the Officine Grandi Riparazioni. The author immersed himself in the party organised by the City of Glasgow, twinned since 2003. Glasgow organised a special event in honour of Italy, with Scottish music and dances. Moreover, a half-Italian, half-Scottish director gave a talk about Italian immigration to Scotland, thus portraying a joint representation of Glasgow and Italy. This clearly shows another key feature of the particular

scaling arrangements that underpin the branding process, namely a remarkable dialectic connecting the urban scale – represented by the City of Turin – and an international scale – represented by medium-sized and large cities located in different continents (such as Glasgow, Detroit, Buenos Aires, Harbin, Nagoya, Salt Lake City) and also two national states in Europe (Hungary and Poland).



This impression is reinforced by a certain proximity that can be observed if we look at the converging discursive positioning of the City of Turin and its international partners. One example of this is the advertising page produced by the City of Chambéry in France and displayed in Figure 5. Chambéry has had a close relationship with Turin since both had been capital cities of the Savoyard Kingdom. The advertising page promotes the whole *Esperienza Italia* initiative by expressing a high degree of proximity towards the twinned city through their use of the Italian language in the payoff “Destinazione Torino!”. This idea is strengthened by the close proximity of Turin’s and Chambéry’s logos at the bottom of the page. Moreover, as noted by the city head for international affairs, it should be acknowledged that this is not the first time that Turin and Chambéry have developed a co-marketing partnership through which they exchange spaces of visibility. This illustrates Turin’s proven ability to embark on what comes close to scale jumping (see for example van Schendel, 2002), the phenomenon through which local actors draw on international resources in order to reclaim power, bypassing the nation state.



These examples help us understand the preferential dialectic that links the supra-national scale to the triad of sub-national scales. Figure 4 thus shows how the local institutions of the Piedmont region, in particular the City of Turin, were able to take advantage of their international partners by co-opting them in a country branding initiative which, ironically, has been carried out even in the absence of a remarkable contribution from the state.

## Conclusion

The paper has drawn from an interpretation of scale as a social construct to elaborate an alternative understanding of how scalar relations are constituted and constitutive of place branding practices. Far from being separate processes that occur within a clear set of scalar boundaries, city, regional and country branding actually converge in a complex mechanism of intertwined practices and discourses through which institutional actors dynamically shape inter-scalar configurations. On one hand, actors employ labels indicating scalar boundaries due to the fact that they draw on scale as a hierarchy of nested levels as reference point which provides them with constraints and opportunities. This recognition was somewhat acknowledged in the place branding literature, which

tends to consider the strategic management of places' reputational capital by paying selective attention to delimited spatial levels, such a country, region or city. However, the analysis of the initiative "Esperienza Italia" suggests that place branding should be better thought of as a multi-scalar phenomenon since it can emerge from actions on many scales, which can no longer be seen as nested in a static hierarchy, but instead seem to co-exist and interpenetrate in a tangled and sometimes surprising manner. Indeed, the scalar arrangements through which the "Esperienza Italia" project has been developed would not fit the Euler diagram often employed in previous studies which fail to consider the overlapping areas between and among the circles corresponding to countries, regions and cities.

This inadequate understanding has long caused researchers and practitioners to neglect the unpredictability of scalar dialectics that, instead, play a remarkable role in the processes through which places draw on managerial tools for leveraging their intangible assets. By embracing a relational understanding of scale, it is possible to shed light on how, for example, sub-national place stakeholders (i.e. The Piedmont Region, The Province of Turin and the City of Turin) can collaborate with foreign place stakeholders (i.e. Hungary, European and international capitals) in the same place branding project without a full and integrated support of the national, 'intermediate' level (i.e. the Italian government), coming close to a process of scale jumping (see van Schendel, 2002). This alternative understanding is relevant in a two-fold manner. Firstly, it is insightful to address recent calls in place branding literature for better knowledge of "the ways in which place branding efforts at different spatial levels interact (or fail to interact) with each other" (Syssner, 2010, p. 45), by offering an elaborated examination of the actual multifaceted processes through which places deliver policies aimed to build reputational capital. Thinking of place branding scalar arrangements relationally would permit us to more effectively look at the reciprocal 'symbolic osmosis' occurring between a city and a country and at how these may draw on each other's image to further nurture their reputational capital, as the tag-line "Discovery Italy in Turin" illustrates. It may be that a relevant dimension of place brands lies in the dialectic interaction between and among their different 'scalar components', which create particularly distinctive combination of relationships among the image of a city, a region, a country. To overcome the limitations inherent in the case study approach adopted in this paper, further research is called to dig into these processes, by designing comparative studies on other relevant cases of multi-scalar place branding projects in Europe and in different continents.

Second, by doing so, this paper also contributes to the literature of strategic spatial planning. Indeed, the conceptualisation of place branding put forward in this article lends support to a "relational complexity" approach to strategic spatial planning in the context of urban and regional

governance (see for example Healey, 2006). The multi-scalar approach to place branding outlined here can offer fruitful food for thought for planners currently interested in emphasising the multiplicity of the webs of relations which transect territories (see for example Graham & Healey, 1999; Healey, 2006). Both in the context of place branding and in the more general domain of spatial planning, putting forward a relational approach is valuable as it may allow us to avoid narrow and static concepts of territorial cohesion that might retain old identities and disregard new, potentially enabling external opportunities inherent in the increasing spatial interconnectedness characterising the contemporary on-the-move global society (see Doel and Hubbard, 2002; Sheller & Urry, 2006).

Finally, this paper's attempt to better articulate the role of scale and scaling within place branding research must be considered only a first step in developing a much wider perspective that recognises the mutual constitutive character and the relationally intertwined dimensions of sociospatial relations in symbolically related policies and activities. For example, such a perspective, into which further research must enquire, might entail a multidimensional account that is able to consider some of the four interacting dimension of socio-spatial relations identified by Jessop, Brenner and Jones (2008) in their TPNS model: "territory", "place", "network" and "scale". For example, "network" would be certainly a relevant dimension to be acknowledged in order to explore the mutual influence between the scaling of branding efforts and the growing importance of connectivity among places, exemplified by many networked-brands that have been gaining prominence, such as UNESCO heritage site status or the Slow Food Cities.

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### Caption list

**Figure 1.** The home page of Italia150 website.

Source: <http://eng.italia150.it>

**Figure 2.** The plainshpere of “World Wide Turin”

Source: author’s photo

**Figure 3.** The multi-scalar arrangements of Esperienza Italia (i)

Source: author’s illustration

**Figure 4.** The multi-scalar arrangements of Esperienza Italia (ii)

Source: author’s illustration

**Figure 5.** Advertising poster produced by the City of Chambery

Source: [http://www.comune.torino.it/relint/pdf/Report\\_11.pdf](http://www.comune.torino.it/relint/pdf/Report_11.pdf)