Introduction

Cities, regions and countries are increasingly engaged with the management of their image and, in many cases, this coincides with an attempt to build their reputation as innovation hubs. In place branding the reference to innovation is, indeed, crucial: places are branded as ‘the’ location where innovative activities can flourish, either because of previous performance or because of emerging favourable conditions. Nonetheless, we know very little about the actual linkage between branding initiatives and innovative developments. It seems quite safe to say that there is no straightforward connection of such a kind that we may dare (or hope to dare in the future) some econometric regression.

As often happens in policy analysis, it is the causal relationship between the two phenomena that is unclear and needs to be investigated, by looking into the set of values, attitudes and mentalities that shape, constrain and trigger innovative behaviour at both individual and institutional level. Such is the objective of this chapter.

In the next paragraph we recall and discuss the main features of the place branding phenomenon, in particular in relation to innovation. The following paragraph suggests that the linkage between place branding and innovation as the engine of economic development may be better defined in relation with the ‘soft infrastructure’, a concept that we also try to analyse in its dynamics. This chapter discusses innovation policy dimensions by arguing that place branding is one possible way to influence the soft infrastructure and its evolution, and that the soft infrastructure may either support or pose barriers to innovation.

Place branding and innovation

Place branding is an emerging topic in economic development research, especially at regional and local level. For some time place branding issues have been dealt with mostly within practice; it has been an opportunity for many consultancy firms e.g. Future Brand, Saffron and GfK Roper,
selling place branding ‘solutions’ to local and national governments worldwide. From a theoretical point of view, the field has been mostly considered as instrumental to ‘place marketing’ and therefore has been dominated by the ‘market analogy’, which has underpinned the equally dominating reference to the marketing literature.

In many cases place branding has made reference to the innovative character of local industries, to the role of education and research institutions and more generally to the propensity to innovation within the local society. The innovation brand often coincides with the branding of an ‘intelligent island’ where intensive investments in the structuring of a national innovation system and education capabilities are coupled with a local buzz about the meaning and value of ‘innovation’ for the local economy; these were the elements assumed to make Singapore an ‘intelligent island’ attractive to foreign investors (Wong et al. 2006).

A sort of rhetoric of innovation has been entangled and shows a global reach. Such rhetoric, however, has been changing over time by adopting different perspectives on innovation and, above all, showing different expectations about what the innovation place should be. Different waves of innovation branding were identified (Pasquinelli and Teräs 2011); during the 1990s, the spatial focus on the high-tech cluster prevailed and innovation brands used to communicate the will of becoming the new or the next Silicon Valley, thus representing local economic systems as rapidly growing and capable of reshaping local socio-economic reality. There has been a tendency towards the creation of ‘Silicon Somewhere’ (Hospers 2006b) brands: Silicon Glen (Scotland), Silicon Seaside (South Norway) and Silicon Kashba (Istanbul) are only a few examples giving evidence of the (perceived) power of the ‘Silicon’ and/or ‘Valley’ imagery. The ‘valley’ evokes a physical agglomeration of firms depicted as ‘naturally’ inclined to network knowledge and expertise, as well as the ‘two-guys-in-a-garage’ story, sometime even suggesting an unsolvable conflict between the upcoming high-tech phenomenon and traditional local economy (Pasquinelli 2010).

The second wave of innovation branding started at the beginning of the 2000s, when the concepts of creativity and ‘creative city’ were fully endorsed by public governments worldwide. The human being and the living urban contest have been at the core of innovation brands, thus putting young highly educated professionals – their personal and professional aspirations – at the core of the brand message. The innovation brand has been conceived as in charge of delivering an ‘inspiring message’ so that a series of ‘inspiring capitals’ emerged (e.g. Edinburgh Inspiring Capital, Oulu Inspires), inviting talents to move into the place and turn their aspirations into reality (e.g. Pittsburgh. Imagine what you can do here). The case of Singapore highlights a path towards a notion of innovation as a capacity to attract and nurture knowledge-intensive companies forming a dynamic creative and cultural hub, even in a context where opportunities for creativity and experimentation conflict with the state propensity towards control on society (Wong et al. 2006; Ooi 2008).

The creative city brand script has progressively transformed into the ‘smart city’ one, being unanimously endorsed in a multilevel policy arena. The rhetoric of smartness is based on the immanent role of technology (and especially ICT) in every manifestation of people’s daily life, involving the entire local community and affecting urban life (Caragliu et al. 2011).

Branding the smart city has become an arena for competition among cities (Peacock 2011). Cities participate in contests, such as the Smarter Cities Challenge by IBM, that are launched by TNCs willing to enter the market of urban technologies and technological services. City governments make efforts to create the conditions to become urban innovation laboratories for global firms, which thus have the opportunity to test and sell their technology to relevant public clients. This was, for instance, the case of San Francisco whose Mayor agreed in 2009 with CISCO for the implementation of Cisco Smart+Connected Communities in the city, i.e. a
Branding the innovation place

‘solution using intelligent networking capabilities to bring together people, services, community assets, and information to help community leaders address world challenges’. Since then, Cisco solutions have been implemented in several ‘smart’ cities all around the globe.

In China the ‘smart city’ discourse is being looked at as a necessary answer to the challenges faced by Chinese mega-cities (Wei and Li 2012). For similar reasons, South Korea has been collaborating with Samsung and other global players to build the U-City brand (Peacock 2011). Being a strategy for urban regeneration and economic development, the ‘smart city’ is an opportunity for co-branding that involves a city and a technological partner: strong technological corporate brands, e.g. Cisco, Siemens, Samsung and IBM, enrich the city brand with innovation values by means of a collaborative association.

Overall brand uniqueness has tended to decrease, notwithstanding the apparent quest for differentiation (Turok 2009). Based on ‘credo of creativity’ (Peck 2005: 740), all cities willing to follow the ‘high roads’ of economic development in the age of the knowledge economy, shape an urban narrative around symbols and values that fit with the assumed preferences of the global creative class. In contrast, place-based innovation strategies, as in the case of Pittsburgh, US, tend to allow an urban collective process of adaptive reinterpretation of local identity, i.e. symbols and values that are linked to the old industry (the steel industry in Pittsburgh), so that the innovation place is not represented as antithetical to traditional local vocation (Treado 2010).

In regional policies homogenization and standardization of innovation brands went in parallel with the diffusion of ‘best practices’ (Hospers 2006a), encouraged by EU cohesion policy and structural funds programmes that have boosted a pan-European competition played on an ideal-type of innovation. In the next years a potential counter-trend to differentiation may emerge as the result of the reorientation of regional innovation strategies along the paradigm of smart specialization (Foray and Goenaga 2013). We may expect that the search for policies linking innovation to specific regional vocation and assets to be mirrored by a new wave of innovation place brands where the vocational specialization of a territory needs to be made visible and generally understood.

Identity and images

Place branding interacts with crucial and complex variables of local polities. In particular branding tries to manipulate the place identity that is ‘constructed through historical, political, religious and cultural discourses . . . and . . . influenced by power struggle’ (Govers and Go 2009: 17). To do so, branding attempts to shape place images, i.e. the perceptions of the place in people’s minds (Anholt 2007), which tend to result in a ‘simplification’ of a large number of associations and information about the place (Warnaby and Medway 2008). As a practice of brand image management, branding has to deal with two relevant mechanisms. A branding input determines multiple (and uncontrollable) images in relation to diverse brand associations triggered in audience minds (Jevons et al. 2005). The image is also influenced by forces that are exogenous to the branding process and are unpredictable and out of control, e.g. dramatic economic crisis, global cultural turns or diplomatic issues (van Ham 2008).

Place image is self-reinforcing since actors’ behaviours tend to conform to their expectations which are highly influenced by perceptions. When consolidated, the image is likely to become a self-fulfilling prophecy (Bellini 2004) so that perceptions are made a reality and become an integral part of the place identity according to a perception–expectation–action circuit. In a context of change re-branding actions may (or may not) trigger innovative images about the place, thus communicating change and encouraging a positive attitude towards innovation. This is especially true for the internal image (the perceptions of insiders, i.e. residents, local entrepreneurs.

81
etc.), where ‘evaluative’ components reflecting actual experiences mix with ‘preferential’ components reflecting desires, visions and projects about the area (Ashworth and Voogd 1988; Bellini et al. 2010).

On the other hand, external images (the perceptions of outsiders, i.e. individuals not living in the city or region but still having a perception about the place) contribute to positioning the region/city within the competitive arena of global innovation hubs, global value chains and collaborative innovation networks, both as such (like in the case of the Øresund region aggregating even German universities: Berg 2000) and through the association with products (like in the case of the iconic Apple devices labelled as ‘Designed by Apple in California’: Pike 2010).

Greater complexity originates from the interaction between external and internal images as well as between images as perceived by different audiences (e.g. tourists vs. inhabitants or tourists vs. investors). Typically tourists may require for some kind of timeless authenticity in contrast with the need for modernity and innovation by the residents (Lazzeroni et al. 2013). The mismatch between internal and external images is also clear in the case of the Øresund region that, branded as ‘The Human Capital of Scandinavia’, has been celebrated in Europe as ‘best practice’ in establishing a knowledge economy (Pasquinelli 2013), whereas it determined a lack of enthusiasm among inhabitants who did not visualize the region in their daily life (Hospers 2006a), and even a sort of ‘irritation’ for an ‘artificial region’.

The politics of branding

In a context of change, where socio-economic discontinuities may be necessary or even unavoidable, one should expect that different social groups translate their (possibly diverging) expectations into potentially conflicting visions for regional/local development. As a consequence, multiple place images may coexist and compete.

A process of interaction and negotiation leads a community to select the values that compose the brand identity, revealing power relations and conflicts among territorial agents (Ooi 2004; Hospers 2006a; Jensen 2007) and often rewarding local hegemonic narratives (Ward 2000; Therkelsen and Halkier 2008). In other words, branding processes are far from being fully inclusive (Kavaratzis and Ashworth 2005). On the contrary, they can be purposely exclusive, allowing specific social groups to own the brand and to use it as a symbolic source of legitimization. In some cases the dynamics may favour ‘progressive coalitions’ that support substantial change, the emergence of new social groups and/or new paradigms in the economic structure. In other cases conservative groups prevail and place branding can be instrumental to lock in the present power structure.

Local and regional governments usually play a key role in building the place brand as they contribute to building ‘spaces’ and artefacts that, symbolizing innovation and change in the urban context, improve place perceptions. However, their role is very controversial: progressive coalitions may not have the consensus of citizens’ majority, thus creating democratic dilemmas; on the other hand, political elites may drive the system to maintain the status quo regardless of a collective interest in innovation and change.

Multiple narratives merged into a ‘story of urban transformation’ in the case of Aalborg, Denmark. Tensions, due to the multiple perceptions of the urban context and diverse expectations on the regeneration process, emerged during the transformation of Aalborg from industrial and peripheral city to cultural centre of the knowledge economy. The urban vision of culture-led development lacked public validation and a huge part of the local community considered the urban transformation as an ‘elitist’ project (Jensen 2007).
The case of Tuscany, Italy, shows ‘how different images and visions are built upon a very selective narration of the region’s history and shared values’ (Bellini et al. 2010: 109). The emphasis on the romantic, anti-modern, timeless image of Tuscany shows an inability to articulate multiple discourses on the region. Cultural heritage is interpreted in relation to the ‘preservation of the past’ and, when an attempt was made to brand regional high tech industries as ‘Arnovalley’ at the end of the 1990s, the narrative of the Silicon Valley of Tuscany was preferred to the mobilization of symbols rooted in regional heritage, leading to a failure (Pasquinelli 2010).

Beyond competition

Along with increasing awareness about the role of territorial complementarities for constructing a competitive advantage (Gordon 2011), a co-opetitive approach – i.e. mixing a competitive attitude with a cooperative one – has also been adopted in place branding. The collaborative network of territories is the framework for boosting a process of transformation and change that needs a regeneration of symbols, values and images (Pasquinelli 2012; Bellini and Hilpert 2013). The reputation of individual territories and their actors can favour inter-territorial networking and ‘brand alliances’, which can be seen as ways to improve the regional profile of innovative place.

The case of the Ruhr in North Rhine Westphalia, Germany is an example of a network of towns and cities collaborating for the mobilization of resources – including symbolic resources – for change (Pasquinelli 2012). By capitalizing on regional culture and its economic potential, the Ruhr region ‘has undergone a major transformation and has changed from a grey industrial area into a modern and trendy culture metropolis’, a ‘conglomeration’ of creative businesses, leisure facilities and technological innovation (Krajewsky 2008).

A network of territories helps local communities to visualize and imagine change and innovation. In the case of Val di Cornia, Italy, the network of five municipalities gave local communities the opportunity to build a heavily renewed perception of their area, based on symbols and values, such as environmental sustainability and the preservation of cultural heritage, that, contrasting with the imagery of the old steel industry, embody the local way to interpret innovation and change (Bellini and Pasquinelli 2011; Pasquinelli 2011).

The ‘soft infrastructure’

The growing literature on place branding is providing an impressive wealth of case studies and an increasingly deep knowledge of its technicalities. Yet a more fundamental issue seems to be untouched and unresolved. Does place branding really matter? Besides all evaluations about the appropriateness, the communicative effectiveness, the market response etc., are we able to give evidence that place branding makes a difference in local/regional development, in the same way as we can give evidence of and measure the effects of other policies?

At the present stage this ‘final’ evidence of the relevance of place branding is still missing, marking a strong contrast with the diffusion of the branding practice. In our opinion, however, this is due to the still unclear causal connection between place branding and development that requires a more careful consideration of some preconditions of innovation that are partially overlooked in the literature. These preconditions are summarized in the concept of ‘soft infrastructures’ and we suggest that place branding is one way to impact on it. In other words, the aim is to emphasize the linkage between place branding and innovation as an engine of local and regional economic development, a linkage that, in our opinion, is framed by the ‘soft infrastructure’ of innovation.
The infrastructural endowment of regions plays a significant role in boosting their innovative capacity. From an economic perspective, both hard and soft infrastructures affect firms’ transactions and the marginal rate of return on investments (Lin 2011). If hard infrastructure is composed of highways, port facilities, airports and telecommunications, soft infrastructure coincides with institutions, regulations, social capital and with the so-called cultural value system.

According to Cooke (2001), infrastructural and suprastructural characteristics are ‘ideal-type conditions for systemic innovation’. That is, key elements of a systemic innovation are the quantity and quality of the infrastructures that the region can control and manage, including regionalized credit facilities, administrative and taxation capacity, as well as the hard infrastructure, e.g. transport and telecommunications. On the other hand, ‘softer or knowledge infrastructures’ play a role, such as universities, research institutes, science parks and technology transfer centres. ‘Soft’ identifies knowledge as cognitively accumulated infrastructure within the region. In Cooke’s words, the cultural dimension contributes to systemic innovation and is defined as the ‘suprastructure’; this refers to the ‘mentalities’ of regional actors and, in particular, to the institutional and organizational culture characterizing the region (2001).

In fact ‘culture’ is mainly understood as industrial culture, entrepreneurial culture or systemic/institutional culture, in relation to the interactions among different economic and institutional actors that are bound by an economic (development) purpose. However, as soon as one suggests the existence of something such as a ‘culture of innovation’, the above-mentioned dimensions seem insufficient. In our opinion, it is therefore wiser to expand the notion of culture to include the whole cultural value system (Lin 2011) and a wider range of ‘mentalities’ (Cooke 2001), thus considering the broader soft infrastructure as generated and embedded within the whole regional community – including social, political, economic actors, i.e. a multifaceted collectivity – in multiple contexts, beyond the mere industrial and productive context. In turn, this view is consistent with an understanding of innovation as an interactive and iterative process within a multi-actor ecosystem.

Thus, the soft infrastructure is here defined as the set of values, beliefs and attitudes that, narrated through the area’s cultural heritage and reflected into images, influence innovative decisions at individual and collective levels. This occurs because innovation needs to be legitimized. Beyond contemporary common places, it is sometimes overlooked that innovation implies attitudes and behavioural patterns that are not necessarily accepted in our societies: innovators are often unconventional, anarchical, visionary, ‘different’ and ‘weird’ individuals.

The soft infrastructure can also be understood as symbolic infrastructure. The importance of this can be explained in light of Bourdieu’s notion of symbolic power (1989): the mobilization of symbols has the power to make groups by imposing a vision that, looking at the past or defining future trajectories, emerges from forms of social authority or credit accumulated in history. A crucial source of symbolic power is history, as the evidence of a long-term persistence of symbols strengthens the credibility of their meanings to ‘heritage’, in which ‘very selective material artefacts, mythologies, memories and traditions become resources for the present’ (Ashworth and Graham 2005: 4).

As recently argued (Manniche 2012), territorial innovation research has overlooked the symbolic and creative category of ‘knowing’ as epistemological practice, while emphasizing the use of analytical and synthetic knowledge. The symbolic dimension of regional systems was conceptualized as ‘symbolic knowledge’, which is part of the ‘differentiated knowledge bases’ contributing to regional innovation (Asheim et al. 2007). Symbolic knowledge refers to the creation and communication of cultural meanings, symbols and aesthetic values, a form of tacit
knowledge that is rooted within specific sociocultural contexts with little or no opportunity of transfer. The symbolic knowledge in combination with synthetic and analytical knowledge is at the basis of regional systems and their innovative capacity (Manniche 2012). The dynamics of symbolic knowledge accumulation occurs outside of the spatial circuits of economic production. In fact, symbolic knowledge accumulation occurs informally in non-commercial and daily life contexts, e.g. streets and public events (Asheim et al. 2007), where interactions among people and interactions between individuals and (urban) artefacts create a symbolic buzz. Informality, however, does not mean absence of guidance by the State and/or by other entities (such as churches, political organizations etc.).

In the literature on regional innovation the role of symbols has been only marginally analysed. Some scholars argued the relevance of symbolic capital for regional innovation and competitiveness; it was said that three intangible assets rule value creation in the knowledge economy, i.e. informational, social and symbolic capital, this last coinciding with the aggregation of myths, meanings and identities. Cultural identit(ies) work as ‘system activators’ since they facilitate local communities in interiorizing and reacting to the challenge of ‘radical innovation’, while ‘weak identities’ are considered evidence of structural fragility and weak innovative capacity. This was argued in the case of Vancouver, Canada, where booming high-tech industries have not been mirrored by consistent cultural identity, so that the ‘high-tech’ remains peripheral in the city’s self-perception (Sacco et al. 2007). On the contrary, the Silicon Valley is the example of a place where ‘technology’ became a socialized symbol per se, the main component of local and individual identities that are both reinforced by people’s loyal commitment to ‘advancing technologies, rather than to individual firms or even industries’ (Saxenian 1994, cited in Benner 2003: 28). In other words, the soft infrastructure plays a role in regional innovation since it produces symbols endorsing innovators within a regional network.

Innovation policies and the soft infrastructure are therefore deeply intertwined. On the one hand, the design and implementation of innovation policies depend upon the quality of the regional soft infrastructure and the latter can be fine-tuned with innovation by a variety of means, including place branding, aiming at symbolizing, socializing and legitimizing change. In discussing the concept of resilience in a regional economic context, Pike et al. (2010) stated that ‘the political construction of adaptation and adaptability narratives’ is fundamental for those regions in need of shaping stories of recovery and ‘meaningful narratives of change’, e.g. for old industrial regions. This seems to suggest that, under the impact of forces propelling change, there is not only an issue of adaptation and adaptability of the ‘material’ and economic dimension of the regional system (for instance, number of firms and their performance and profitability, jobs, etc.), but also an issue of adaptation and adaptability of the ‘immaterial’ and symbolic dimension, which might be impacted by ‘transformative interventions’ and, in our analysis, by innovation (branding) policies. That is, ‘in the politics of adaptation and adaptability integral to resilience, nation states are centrally important agents in framing and narrating development paths in places’ (Pike et al. 2010: 66). In the history of modern industrialization powerful contributions to the establishment of functional ‘soft infrastructures’ have been provided by economic nationalism (from Friedrich List to its most contemporary variations), by the progressive rhetoric of positivism during the nineteenth century and by the autarchic propaganda of twentieth-century totalitarianisms. Place branding (whose internal dimension shows several analogies with older kinds of ‘propaganda’) is just the latest version of the repeated attempts to sustain the symbolic infrastructure of innovation as the basis for competitiveness and economic growth.

On the other hand, innovation policies may impact on the soft infrastructure, by fostering an accumulation of values and a projection of images that enrich or impoverish, more generally
change, the soft infrastructure. In other words, innovation policies may (or may not) trigger a virtuous circuit fuelling entrepreneurial spirit and risk propensity of regional actors (both entrepreneurs and policymakers), as well as the innovative behaviours and their acceptance within the regional community.

**The evolution of the soft infrastructure**

To frame the evolution of the soft infrastructure, an ‘ecological’ interpretation referring to two interrelated concepts, i.e. resilience³ and variety,⁴ is here proposed. Based on the notion of variety we may suggest that the richness and even redundancy of symbols, values and identities are considered as signals of a potentially resilient soft infrastructure. A resilient⁵ soft infrastructure is capable of timely reacting to opportunities for innovative transformation and adaptation, and opens to alternative infrastructural configuration, thus supporting the regional process of innovation. While a higher variety of symbols and values is likely to support diverse routes of innovation, as enabling multiple creative approaches to the interpretation and socialization of change, a limited range of symbols and values is likely to limit the capacity of regional community to reinterpret its identity in an adaptive/transformative way.

The variety of symbols and values composing the soft infrastructure impacts on the type and degree of resilience characterizing it; at the same time, variety is arguably influenced by innovation branding policies that, as said earlier, in some cases may favour the emergence of ‘progressive coalitions’ including new social groups and their values (increasing variety), while in some other cases may further strengthen conservative coalitions, promoting a limited set of traditional values and symbols.

In reaction to a process of territorial change and (necessary or unavoidable) innovation, soft infrastructures show different resilient behaviours. The soft infrastructure may return to a steady equilibrium by absorbing any innovative or evolutionary shock that thus disappears without leaving any trace. This was the case of the Arnovalley brand promoting the high-tech economy of Tuscany, which promptly dissolved and was absorbed by the strongly perceived brand of the romantic, timeless and anti-modern region. The branding process was not able to favour a process of reinterpretation of local identity and did not favour an adaptive behaviour of the soft infrastructure. As a matter of fact, innovation branding had no effects. A process of reinterpretation did not occur since innovation branding did not succeed in promoting a process of socialization of the symbols of innovation. This may be due to technical and operative mistakes, but strategic flaws were decisive: e.g., the narrative of the Silicon Valley of Tuscany was preferred to the mobilization of strong symbols rooted in regional heritage which – in fact disconnected from innovation and change – easily prevailed in people’s perceptions (Pasquinelli 2010).

Then, if the innovative push is very strong, the soft infrastructure may abandon the equilibrium and, as not being able to adapt, end up collapsing and dissolving, thus provoking a serious cultural loss. Aalborg branding initiatives played a role in the transformation from industrial and peripheral city to cultural centre of knowledge economy but arguably contributed to the erosion of the local soft infrastructure in the direction of an elitist urban transformation. This left behind values and symbols that were relevant to the part of the local community excluded from urban developments (Jensen 2007). The branding process lowered variety, marking a process of impoverishment of the soft infrastructure. Similarly, in the case of NewcastleGateshead (UK), innovation branding seems to have swept away the old industrial heritage in order to support culture-led regeneration. Old symbols of the industrial region were completely replaced by the new values of the cultural capital, thus avoiding any cross-fertilization or synergy between past and present values (Pasquinelli 2014).
In contrast, there are also cases in which the soft infrastructure regenerates by accumulating new symbols and values that are not necessarily in contrast with the ‘old’ ones, since an adaptive evolution determines a constant creative reinterpretation of the whole set of values. These are the cases in which branding has arguably played a positive role. In Pittsburgh, where the ‘creative’ and ‘inspiring’ city brand coexisted in synergy with local steel legacy, branding did not delete the symbols of the old industry and, instead, made them instrumental to the promotion of a new technological vision for the area.

A similar trajectory was undertaken by the Ruhr region (Germany) where branding the network of several towns and cities favoured an increase in the variety of symbols and values to rely on. Especially in the case of the Ruhr, a symbolic redundancy enabled a smooth transformation of the regional system and its soft infrastructure through a collective mobilization and socialization of change that succeeded in recreating an innovation ecosystem.

**Final remarks and future research**

This chapter discussed the potential contribution of place branding to regional innovation processes and regional development, by conceptualizing the ‘soft infrastructure’ of innovation. In so doing, we emphasized the two-way character of the relationship between soft infrastructure and regional innovation processes, and we tried to suggest that this is a field where conscious manipulation interacts with long-term trends in our economies and societies. In this perspective, place branding (and especially its use in promoting ‘innovation places’) deserves to be considered as much more than a new fashion in territorial policies.

The analysis of the soft infrastructure highlighted a bundle of dynamics: place branding represents only one mechanism of the process of socialization of those symbols and values that marks the evolution of the soft infrastructure. In the absence of innovation policies, no branding initiatives can properly ‘manage’ the soft infrastructure. That is, the socialization of change, even though involving symbols, values and images, is necessarily grounded in the materiality of spaces and artefacts that turn the abstract notion of innovation into reality. At the same time, however, innovation branding may play a facilitating and legitimizing role, thus contributing to making innovation (and a place-based notion of innovation) understood and endorsed by the regional community. Thus, in the absence of branding, innovation policies may result in socially and politically weaker policies, since they are unable to strategically promote the engagement of the regional community in the process of change.

Future research should further explore this perspective. The proposed framework utilized case studies available in the literature to discuss the potential role of place branding (especially in the sense of adding or removing values and symbols to/from the soft infrastructure), by adopting an ex post perspective. Further research, including dedicated empirical efforts, could devise and test analytical frameworks able to predict the potential effects of place branding on the soft infrastructure, in the direction of innovative developments.

This chapter suggested the notion of variety as systemic property influencing an adaptive evolution of the soft infrastructure, but it is evident how variety is one of the multiple factors playing a role and deserving attention. We highlighted the emergence of multiple resilient behaviours of the soft infrastructure, which need further explanation. If, from our perspective, place branding is only one of the mechanisms influencing the evolution of the soft infrastructure, historical, cultural and sociological studies should contribute to the analysis of soft infrastructure dynamics, thus opening to more interdisciplinary scholarship in the field.
Notes

3 There are two different definitions of resilience. First, the engineering resilience (or ecological resilience according to Simmie and Martin 2010), is the ‘ability of a system to return to an equilibrium or steady state after a disturbance’ or the ‘magnitude of the disturbance that can be absorbed before the system changes its structure’ (Holling 1996, cited in Davoudi 2012: 300). Second, the evolutionary resilience challenges the idea of equilibrium as it describes a process of adaptation and adaptability of the system. It implies that a system may change over time smoothly, with or without a clear and evident stress at a specific point in time (Scheffer 2009, cited in Davoudi 2012: 302). In other words, the evolutionary resilience is the ‘ability of complex socio-ecological systems to change, adapt and transform . . . in a dynamic interplay of persistence, adaptability and transformability across multiple scales and timeframes’ (Davoudi 2012: 302, 304).
4 From an ecological perspective, the principle of variety says that redundant species, meaning diverse species carrying out same functions, are deemed necessary to maintain the ecosystem resilient, so that the higher the number of species present in an ecosystem, the higher the capacity of response to shocks (Peterson et al. 1998).
5 In this case we refer to the notion of evolutionary resilience.

References


