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Developing Island Identities Through Citizen Approaches? The Contribution of Cultural Rights Exploratory Approach by Two Islands in Brittany

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The identity of insular territories is generally built from top-down and ‘institutionalised’ political logics. However, in the challenge for differentiation between territories and islands, these approaches have their limits. It appears necessary to coordinate external economic and tourism development issues with local territorial issues, by identifying cultural resources as understood by cultural rights. To deploy a renewed island territorial marketing, would be a question of implementing participatory projects and methodologies to meet the following challenges: How to create a common culture? How to promote citizen tourism? How to reveal the identities involved? Our research proposes to analyse the challenges of this ‘reverse’ territorial marketing. In an exploratory phase of the research process, we question how can the island’s website, particularly the homepage, as a place of digital expression of desired identity contribute to a renewed imagination, excitement and to enhance positive behaviours? What is the contribution of the aesthetic dimensions of cognitive design versus relational, experiential and emotional design? We present the results of an exploratory study of two islands in Brittany conducted through a qualitative and a quantitative approach.

Key Words: aesthetics, homepage, website, place branding identity, tourism, Brittany, islands, cultural rights, visitor and citizens attitude

Introduction

Academic work on territorial marketing as a tool for the strategic development of a nation, region, department, commune or city developed in the late 1990s (Kotler et al., 1993) and led researchers to consider the territory as a tourist destination, as a brand (place branding). The image of a tourist destination is a global assessment that is crucial for the formation of preferences and the choice of tourist destination (Jenkins, 1999; Echtner & Ritchie, 2003; Bartikowsky et al., 2008). In a context of global competition, being able to create a good image has become a survival challenge for tourist destinations (Chevrier, 2007). It plays a crucial role in the decision making of the future traveller in terms of perception, preference and choice of destination (Milman & Pizam, 1995; Jenkins, 1999; Tasci & Gartner, 2007). These reflections lead us to question the specific case of small islands, an area of research that has not been sufficiently explored to date.

The identity of island territories is generally constructed from top-down and ‘institutionalized’ political logics. The decisions based on the images of the territory come from tourism observatories and are the result of political choices. While territorial marketing is mobilised, it is most often part of a supply-side approach by combining different levers of action such as tourism or heritage resources, economic attractiveness, the residential economy and cultural events, such as festivals. However, in the race for differentiation between territories and islands, these approaches have their limits, particularly in terms of perceived authenticity (one of the main expectations of tourism consumers today). Then, we question how external economic and tourism development issues can be coordinated with local territorial issues, in a way that is inclusive of the populations and resources involved, particularly by identifying cultural resources as understood by cultural rights?

Thus, strategic approaches to attractiveness should be favoured in a holistic and ecosystemic perspective to enable the synergy of local resources (in terms of imagination, stories, cultural, craft and artistic know-how). To deploy a renewed island territorial marketing, it
would be necessary to implement participatory projects and methodologies to meet the following challenges:

How to create a common culture?

How to promote citizen tourism?

How to reveal the identities involved?

The study of residents’ attitudes or perceptions (Ap, 1990) towards tourism has been the subject of a great deal of research for more than forty years (Garzia et al., 2015). Some have focused on island residents (Ribeiro et al., 2017; Castillo et al., 2012; Nunkoo & Gursoy, 2012). They have shown their influence as factors in the attractiveness of a destination (Getz, 1994).

Among the many communication tools for this image, the website is now an essential strategic lever, both from the point of view of the local community (Law, Qi & Buhal's, 2010) and that of the visitor (Zhang, 2015). What about the resident’s point of view? What do they think of the representation of their island on the web? To what extent would residents’ active participation in a co-creation process (Turner & Shockley, 2014) allow a more authentic, realistic visibility, thus enriching their sense of well-being in their living space as well as the visitor experience (Sugathan & Ranjan, 2019)?

The exploratory research proposes to analyse the challenges of ‘reverse’, harmonious and effective territorial marketing. The aim will be to analyse the existing representations to enhance their capacity to generate new sources of differentiation of the island territory. How can the aesthetics of the homepage, as a place where the desired identity is digitally expressed, have an impact on attitudes and on the behavioural responses of potential visitors and contribute to a renewed imagination?

The research focuses on the visual aesthetic factors of the homepage. These contribute to the practicality and readability of content (Tractinsky et al., 2000; Kim et al., 2003), determine image (Schenkamn & Jonsson, 2000) and have affective, emotional and behavioural consequences such as the desire to go to the site (Damak, 2018). What is the contribution of the aesthetic dimensions of cognitive designs when compared with relational, experiential and emotional designs? The work in aesthetics in the field of human-machine interaction according to the SOR paradigm - Stimuli-Organism-Response (Merhabian & Russel, 1973; Vieira, 2013) gives valuable perspectives for research to be carried out in the field of territorial communities, in particular the
islands of Brittany that are often overlooked today; the case of the websites of the islands of Brittany in France is justified by the strategic challenge that these places represent today in terms of the tourist attractiveness of the region, the awareness of the need for more active citizen participation for a harmonious, efficient and sustainable tourism of these places and therefore the need to develop more academic research on these subjects.

The theoretical framework and research hypotheses and then the methodology are all of an exploratory nature. This is a study on the perception of the aesthetics of website homepages of two small islands in Brittany - Belle-île en Mer and Ile aux Moines - and their influence on emotional and behavioural dimensions. Following the presentation of the results, we conclude with the theoretical and managerial implications, limitations and future research.

**Theoretical Framework**

The theoretical framework is organized around four research themes (Figure 2):

1. Challenges of ‘reverse’ territorial marketing for citizen tourism through the prism of cultural rights;
2. The visual aesthetics of the website homepage - design characteristics - as a place to express the identity of a local community;
3. Attitudinal responses (perceptual, affective and behavioural) to the visitors’ homepage
4. Representations of tourism residents on their island and global attitude towards the website.

**The challenges of ‘reverse’ territorial marketing for citizen tourism through the prism of cultural rights**

Today, all territories are confronted with the need to differentiate themselves to consolidate their economic attractiveness and promote tourist flows. However, the limitations of top-down approaches are now well established. They are most often based on speeches created by communication agencies and chosen by elected politicians. However, to increase political legitimacy, it is now a question, in a time of valuing participatory and citizen-based approaches, of involving the actors involved in the ecosystem more broadly. These represent a very fertile ‘imaginary reservoir’ in terms of image. This includes identifying cultural resources as understood by cultural rights:

*The rights of a person, alone or in common, to choose and express his or her identity, to access cultural references, as well as all the resources that are necessary* (Meyer-Bish, 2010:6).

Culture thus covers:

*the values, beliefs, convictions, languages, knowledge and the arts, traditions, institutions and lifestyles through which a person or group expresses its humanity and the meanings it gives to its existence and development* (Fribourg Declaration, 2007, art. 2.a).
This new quest for attractiveness reinterprets the games of actors, who are associated with the creation of the territory. The narrative from the present imagination becomes a project tool, forged by designers who will reveal the implicit and latent cultural resources of the territory. They could be tangible and intangible. These local democracy operators will thus bring people’s cultural rights to life. They will be able to address populations that need to be empowered to propose and build projects themselves (strengthening their empowerment). They will then be able to relay these collaborative productions to instances that have the legitimate power to act. The use of cultural rights is therefore essential to regenerate the foundations of a territory’s identity.

The visual aesthetics of the website homepage, a place to express the identity of a local community - an island

Territorial identity is a very vast field, practitioners and researchers in geography and sociology are wondering what makes up the ‘essence of a territory’. We can consider that the identity of a local authority, as a brand, delimits a field of competence, potentialities and legitimacy, lasting over time (Kapferer, 1998). A website interacts with its users through the visual components that are essential to the expression of this identity (Breakenrige, 2001).

The emergence of territorial marketing, an opportunity to generate holistic stories

Territorial marketing is the appropriation, by territories (and their institutions) of the principles of commercial marketing (Kotler, 2006). The best definition would undoubtedly be:

how to make my city, my territory, a beautiful and desirable thing and history for those who live there and for those I wish to seduce and attract? (Meyronin, 2015).

Thus, according to the author, territorial marketing would be deployed according to three dynamics:

- an identity that must be defined, forged, promoted, developed and defended;
- actors that must be convinced, federated, mobilized, valued but also attracted;
- projects that must be thought of, positioned, led, promoted and generated.

Importance of the homepage

The first visual impression of the homepage is crucial because it instantly exposes the identity of the place. Tractinsky et al. (2006) show that users form an immediate stable aesthetic impression of web pages. Thus, the homepage of a local authority, the first front door, the ‘showcase’ of the place, a visual object of identity expression of the place, should create a relationship of empathy and constitute an attractive interface with the visitor (Nielsen, 2000). Visual and aesthetic attributes should create pleasure, appeal, desire and contribute to future choice.

The visual and aesthetic attributes of a homepage

Visual attributes are defined at the most concrete level by buttons, icons, shape, typography, colour, layout, presence or absence of text and images and their organization in space. They also operate at a more abstract level such
as balance, contrast and harmony. The concept of visual attributes emanates from Gestalt Theory, which states that the whole is more than the sum of its parts (Koffka, 1935; Kohler, 1929). In the Internet domain (Park et al., 2005; Pearson et al., 2000; Kim et al., 2003; Lindgaard et al., 2006), users perceive a screen page as a whole and not as a group of separate elements (Lavie & Tractinsky, 2004; Pearson & Schail, 2003). Park et al., (2005) summarise the studies that explore the subject to around 11 visual attributes from design theories: balance, harmony, symmetry, movement, rhythm, contrast, proportion, unity, simplicity, density, regularity. Lavie & Tractinsky (2004) and Tractinsky et al., (2006) develop a two-dimensional scale - classical aesthetics and expressive aesthetics - to measure the overall aesthetic quality of web pages based on individual visual attributes. Classical aesthetics corresponds to order and clarity, a classic notion of what constitutes aesthetic design. Expressive aesthetics is manifested through originality, creativity and the ability to break conventions. In addition, studies have been carried out on structural design (Mayé, 2013), this involves the detailed decomposition of the object's structure - the shape, typography, colour, element layout, presence or absence of text and images and their organization in space (Kim, 2000).

Attitudinal responses (emotional and behavioural) of the visitor to the aesthetics homepage

The explanation of emotional and behavioural responses to the aesthetic elements of design have been developed by various approaches (behaviourism, gestalt theory, psychoanalysis, information theory, cognitive psychology, experimental aesthetics). The distinct contributions of these approaches reflect the complexity of the aesthetic phenomenon.

Emotional responses to the aesthetics of the homepage

These are understood through satisfaction (Liu et al., 2014), emotions, moods, feelings and preferences about the homepage. The emotional state is expressed through degrees of pleasure (versus displeasure) and excitement. One of the criteria for choosing a destination (in addition to accessibility and perceived risk) is emotional intensity. In addition, one of the explanatory variables of tourism consumption behaviour is the search for sensory stimulation. Thus, the choice of design factors and their combination will influence the level of attention, pleasure, stimulation and preference in web design. Despite the likely existence of an innate preference for order and unified designs, Berlyne (1971; 1974) shows that novelty, complexity and variety of form produce stimulation. These factors interact to determine pleasure. Moderate familiarity is preferred to extreme familiarity and novelty. We assume the following:

H1a: The more positive the expressive aesthetics of the homepage, the more stimulating the page is compared to the classic aesthetics.

Cognitive theories (Martindale & Moore, 1988) stipulate that prototypical (or stereotyped) stimuli are often more appreciated and meaningful than atypical stimuli. A prototype is defined as the central trend in the category, a concept highlighted by Reed (1972), Rosch (1973) and Ladwein (1995). Since prototypical are close to a classical aesthetic (Heckert, 2006) we assume the following:

H1b: The stronger the classic aesthetics of the homepage, the more pleasure it brings to the page.

Theories of perception or Gestalt Theory generally conclude on a tendency to prefer symmetrical, balanced, simple forms, with a unified design with a certain sense of good proportions (Verizer, 1993). There would be a preference for simple and moderately complex sites (Muzeyyen & Knight, 2006). However, forms that follow Gestalt laws should generate a low level of excitement (Holbrook & Zirlins, 1985). The preference for shapes would be oriented towards a moderate degree of irregularity and disorder. Thus, very conventional designs would not seem stimulating enough and too innovative designs would be too disturbing (Bloch, 1995).

Behavioural responses

Research has focused on the consequences of satisfying the overall brand experience on the intention to revisit the site, willingness to recommend it to friends (Forsythe & Shi, 2003; Yen & Gwinner, 2003) intention to visit the store (Loureiro & Roschk, 2014), positive attitude towards the brand and purchase intention (Florès, 2007). The aesthetics of the homepage, of its design through the classical and expressive aesthetic dimensions or through
certain elements (graphics, colour...), can evoke positive reactions, criticism or generate a propensity on the part of the visitor to enter into a relationship with the object or, on the contrary, to avoid it, to flee it (Liu et al., 2016). Depending on the attitude that the potential visitor will develop when discovering the homepage, he or she will decide to find out more and/or visit the site. Thus, the following are assumed

**H2a:** The more favourable the attitude towards the aesthetics of the site’s homepage, the stronger the intention to know more.

**H2b:** The more positive the attitude towards the aesthetics of the site’s homepage, the stronger the intention to visit the site.

Holbrook and Hirschman (1982) have shown that the motivations of consumers regarding tourist services are essentially hedonistic, oriented towards pleasure, amusement, distraction and change of scenery. Consequently, the discovery of a homepage with an expressive aesthetic will correspond more to the expectations of the visitor in search of the unexpected, creativity and originality.

**H3:** The stronger the expressive aesthetics of a homepage, the stronger the intentions to know more and to visit the site.

**Representations and attitude of residents to tourism on their island and towards the website**

Much research has focused on residents’ perceptions and attitudes towards tourism and its impacts (Getz, 1994; Getz, 1983). However, research on tourism in small islands is still limited compared to large islands (population >1.5 million) and global continental tourist destinations (Scheyvens & Momsen, 2008). Understanding the history of residents’ attitudes towards small island tourism is important to the success of tourism policies (Perez & Nadal, 2005).

Ap (1990) proposes applying the Theory of Social Exchange to tourism. Residents assess the expected benefits and costs realised in exchange for resources and services. Positive attitudes of residents towards tourism exist when they have satisfactory and balanced perceived returns in relation to costs. Identity Theory (Stryker, 1968; 1980) provides an understanding of how the identities of island communities influence impacts on tourism, often in economic, cultural or environmental terms (Pizon, 1978). Stets and Biga (2003) define identity as a set of beliefs attached to the self that serve as a reference, a standard that guides behaviour in various situations. The various facets of small island identity can influence communities’ attitudes towards pro-tourism (Ribeiro et al., 2017).

Then, what happens when tourism in small islands develops? Once the place becomes a tourist destination, the quality of life of the inhabitants is affected (Moo, 2015). How then can we promote pro-tourism behaviour with a view to sustainable tourism (Gursoy, Chi, Dyer, 2010)? This could be achieved according to studies, if residents’ attitudes are considered and integrated into the tourism development approach (Nunkoo & Ramkin, 2011). Co-creation experiences between residents and tourists (Sugathan & Ranjan, 2019) but also between residents and decision-makers could be relevant, particularly to promote an impact on the well-being of residents (Björk & Sthapit, 2017).

**Methodology**

This study examines two small islands in Brittany: Belle Île en Mer and Île aux Moines. These are chosen due to their reputation and their high tourist numbers, particularly in summer.

**The Quantitative Study**

This aspect of the study concerns the attitude of potential visitors towards the homepages of the 2 Breton island websites (Annex 1). Only the visual portion that appeared above the web waterline was used for the study. A questionnaire was self-administered via Sphinxonline, to a convenience sample. A total of 195 individual responses were selected (148 responses for Belle île; 47 responses for Île aux Moines); Average age: 40 years; 70% resident in Brittany and outside Brittany; 11% abroad (English version). The perception of aesthetic factors and emotional responses were measured according to scales based on key concepts proposed in the literature: Overall Design or Design Aesthetics (Nasar, 1999, Tractinsky et al., 2000; 2006; Lavie & Tractinsky, 2004; Kim et al., 2003; Schenkamn & Jonsson, 2000) and design
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both factors accounting for 85% of the total variance:

1) Pleasant affect (pleasant, good, attractive); Cronbach’s Alpha = 0.91; 2)

2) Exciting affect (fascinating, exciting); Cronbach’s Alpha = 0.82.

Behavioural responses are measured by 2 items (the vision of this homepage makes me want to know more; makes me want to go there). The data processing was undertaken using SPSS software.

The Qualitative Study

The qualitative research focused mainly on exploring residents’ attitudes towards tourism on their island. An interview guide was designed around 5 themes: attachment to one’s place of life; quality of life on the island; perceptions of tourism on the island; internet use and travel; perception of the homepage of the island’s website. 20 semi-directive interviews were conducted (10 residents from Île aux Moines, 10 from Belle ile); 7 men / 13 women; aged 13 to 78 years (average: 36 years). The verbatim were recorded, transcribed and analysed in text form.

Results

Attitude of visitors towards the homepage of the two islands studied

An analysis of the average factor scores of the overall design perception and assessment factor scores varies according to the homepage pages (Table 1).

### Table 1: Overall design perception and assessment factor scores according to homepage

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>AFFECT</th>
<th>AESTHETIC DESIGN</th>
<th>STRUCTURAL DESIGN</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pleasant Affect</td>
<td>Expressive Design</td>
<td>Disposition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ile aux Moines</td>
<td>-0.111</td>
<td>0.035</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Belle Ile</td>
<td>-0.008</td>
<td>-0.052</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Table 1A: Mean factor scores for the 2 islands of Affect (Pleasant / Exciting) Design (Classic / Expressive) and Structural Design (Disposition / Colours / Insufficient Readability / Poor Content)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Want to know more</th>
<th>Ile aux Moines</th>
<th>Belle Ile</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0.58**</td>
<td>0.39**</td>
<td>0.61**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Want to go there</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.61**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0.60**</td>
<td>0.41**</td>
<td>0.26**</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

** p<0.001; * p< 0.01

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Results

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An analysis of the average factor scores of the overall design perception and assessment factor scores varies according to the homepage pages (Table 1).
The correlations between the aesthetic dimensions of classical harmonious design (clarity, balance) are positive and significantly correlated with the attraction-pleasure effect ($R = .77; p<0.001$).

**H1a** ‘the more positive the expressive aesthetics of the homepage, the more stimulation the page generates compared to the classical aesthetics’ is validated. **H1b** ‘the more positive the classic aesthetics of the homepage, the more pleasure and attraction the page generates’ is also validated and confirms the results of Martindale and Moore (1988).

Conventional design, responding to the law of balance, is appreciated but is not very stimulating (Holbrook & Zirlins, 1985; Bloch, 1995; Verizer, 1993). It should also be noted that the attraction affect is significantly correlated with aesthetic design, as confirmed by the literature (Trackinsky et al., 2006). This is linked to the design being evaluated as simple, balanced, harmonious and beautiful.

Table 1 also shows that the intention to know more is strongly correlated with the pleasure of the page ($R = 0.58; p<0.001$) and the excitement of the page ($R = .39$; $p<0.001$).

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A negative factorial score is observed on the Ile aux Moines web page on the pleasant, expressive (original) dimensions, colours, a certain poverty of content and a positive score for the exciting character, classic design (harmonious), the arrangement of the elements and a certain readability of the sections. Concerning Belle-île, negative scores were noted on pleasant, classic dimensions, colours, lack of readability and a certain poverty of content.

Globally, the pages are perceived as rather simple, pleasant, harmonious, balanced, aesthetic, clean, clear and rather beautiful but nevertheless not very original, not very creative, not very fascinating and not very exciting, and paradoxically provide little pleasure.

The correlation coefficients presented in Table 2 reveal that the aesthetics of design on the expressive design dimension (originality, creativity, ability to break conventions) is correlated only with the affective dimension of excitation stimulation ($R = .53; p<0.001$).
Discussion and Conclusion

Territorial identity is a very vast field. Practitioners and researchers in geography, sociology, marketing and management, question what makes ‘the essence of a territory’. A website interacts with its users through the visual components that are essential to the expression of identity. The first impression of a homepage and its aesthetics has an obvious impact on emotional and behavioural responses to the site and the place.

The experiment applied to the case of 2 islands in Brittany highlighted that visual aesthetic has an important role in the evaluation of potential visitors to web pages and in the interactions that result from them in general. The classic aesthetic - clear, clean, balanced, simple, harmonious - has an effect on the pleasure provided by the pleasant, attractive character of the page; the expressive dimension - creative, original - has an effect on the ‘exciting’, stimulating appreciation. However, it seems that the characteristic most strongly related to the intention to know more and to visit the place is the classical dimension rather than the expressive dimension. This could be explained by the fact that despite a search for emotional intensity through pleasure - in the case of tourist travel, consumer motivations are essentially hedonistic with objectives such as pleasure, amusement, entertainment, distraction, disorientation (Holbrook & Hirschman, 1982) - decision-making is probably guided by a need for clarity, sharpness that reassures rather than a need for originality, and the unexpected, which can increase perceived risk. Thus, very conventional designs - classic aesthetics - are familiar and therefore pleasant but do not seem stimulating enough. As for designs that are too innovative - expressive aesthetics - they would be too disturbing (Bloch, 1995). Tractinsky et al. (2006) show that immediate positive impressions are associated with high levels of both dimensions. However, the least attractive pages are associated with low levels of expressive aesthetics.

This research is a first step in exploring this issue. It is important to highlight its limitations and consider extensions. A multitude of moderator and/or mediator variables influence cognitive, affective and behavioural responses to design (Crilly et al., 2004). The study on other populations differentiated according to age,
culture, romantic/classical personality, tendency to seek stimulation, sensory innovation, fashion effect, web expertise, resident / visitor / tourist, professional profile (Kotsi et al., 2018), as well as study of other sites would all enrich the question. This would provide a better understanding of how individuals perceive and appreciate the aesthetics of a web page and its impact on behaviour towards a local community, particularly a tourist destination such as an island.

When we observe the growing success of islands in the tourist economy, it is legitimate to question the strategic importance of the representations made by various audiences (residents, visitors), and their impact in terms of tourist attractiveness and resident well-being.

This paper is also about raising the awareness of institutional decision-makers, elected officials and representatives and local populations as well as web designers of the increased expectation on the part of internet visitors of effective and relevant professionalism for the design of efficient and rewarding digital communication tools. What are the impacts of the aesthetic choices of their website and their determinants? Can design reflect the specific, geographical, sociocultural, historical and specific identity character that reflects reality? The question of enhancing island identity through the aesthetics of a website, co-designed and promoted by residents, involved in a participatory citizen approach, opens a rich field of research. It now seems necessary to give a broader scope to territorial marketing by questioning as Meyronin suggests

*how to make ... my territory, a beautiful and desirable thing ... for those who live there and for those whom I wish to seduce and attract? (2015)*

Coordinating external economic and tourism development issues with local territorial issues, in a logic that includes the populations and resources involved, could be part of the challenges for sustainable and relevant development of territories, particularly small islands. These ways of research should be more explored in the future.

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Annex 1: Homepages studied for the research


