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COMMITTEE WORK
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Nation branding and cultural diplomacy: Portugal and Morocco as a case study

In the book *Diplomacy in a Globalizing World: Theories and Practices*, « nation branding » is defined as « the application of corporate marketing concepts and techniques to countries, in the interests of enhancing their reputation in international relations ».

It is a relatively recent concept, which emerged in the 1990s, when states decided to reassert their national identity, in a context marked by a certain cultural uniformisation under the impact of globalization.

Simon Anholt, who is often credited with the paternity of this term (1996), also defines it as the « national identity made tangible, robust, communicable and, above all, useful ». From this analysis, he has created a Nations Brands Index, which since 2005 has assessed the global reputation of fifty countries based on how they are perceived in different areas (exports, governance, culture, population, ...)

The main objectives of « nation branding » are to improve countries' reputation, in order to boost their economy and enhance their cultural and political influence in the world. It is often a co-construction between public and private actors, and research has shown that an equilibrium should be found between both in order to brand a country efficiently. Indeed, « a genuine national brand image can only be achieved if it involves the genuine participation of the citizens of that nation and represents the national, social and cultural diversity that exists within their territory », said Boukarnaoui Hanaa and Attouche Hicham, from University Mohamed V (Rabat, Morocco).

From Professor Amina Boubia course, we've learned about Moroccan plurality and diversity, and how Morocco's state actors are leveraging the power of a lively popular and diverse culture at all levels to increase the country's visibility in international relations.

We have decided then to look at the Portuguese cultural diplomacy and nation branding strategy, in order to see, in a second part, how these two countries, which share mediterranean heritage and are only separated by 300 km can cooperate to reinforce their mutual influence in the international scene, and participate to promote a mediterranean identity.



I/ Moroccan nation branding : A cultural and diversity perspective

Morocco, a nation steeped in cultural diversity, proudly integrates this wealth into its national brand. This diversity is not a recent phenomenon; it dates back to many centuries. Today, it finds expression in the various cultural facets that Morocco showcases to the world, thereby enhancing its national identity.

a) Historical background

Morocco's nation branding strategy revolves around the promotion of its rich historical heritage, with a strong emphasis on acknowledging the plurality of its cultural identity. This approach reflects a decades-long struggle by Moroccans to define their true national identity. For instance, it wasn't until 2001 that the Moroccan state officially recognized Amazigh culture, and in 2011, Tamazight became an official language, signaling a significant shift towards embracing diversity rather than suppressing it.

The country's historical narrative is a tapestry woven with the influences of various cultures, including the indigenous Amazigh people, Roman Empire, and the various muslim states. This diverse heritage is prominently featured in Morocco's nation branding efforts.

One notable aspect is the design and content of its museums, such as the "Musée des cultures et de civilisations," which serves as a comprehensive showcase of Morocco's historical epochs. The immersive experience offered by these museums, coupled with their spatial layout mirroring historical timelines, ensures that the country's history is portrayed accurately and engagingly.

Furthermore, Morocco's use of Tamazight in public signage since 2021 is a strategic move to reinforce the language and culture within the national identity. This initiative not only promotes linguistic diversity but also symbolizes the country's commitment to honoring its diverse heritage as a core aspect of its nation branding strategy.

Another aspect of its nation branding strategy lies in protecting its heritage from misappropriation because of the blur line of differences between north african countries: the world cup 2022 t-shirt incident is a great demonstration of this strategy¹.

b) Moroccan cultural diplomacy: festivals and football as tools of soft power

Popular culture is also utilized by Morocco as a tool to enhance its global image. One prominent example of this approach is through Moroccan festivals. Mawazine, for instance, stands as the largest festival in Morocco, held annually in the capital city of Rabat, attracting numerous international stars who come to perform in Morocco. In fact, Mawazine attracts renowned international artists and performers from

¹ 'Adidas row : Morocco demandes change to Algerian jersey design', BBC, 30 sept. 2022 [[Adidas row: Morocco demands change to Algerian jersey design \(bbc.com\)](https://www.bbc.com/news/health-61888888)]



various genres, drawing attention from global audiences. By hosting such a diverse lineup, Morocco showcases its openness to cultural exchange and its ability to bring together artists from different parts of the world, in addition to portraying Morocco in a positive light by showcasing its modernity, creativity, and dynamism. Indeed, through Mawazine, Morocco presents itself as a progressive and forward-thinking nation that embraces the arts and values cultural diversity.

Another significant festival is "Le Boulevard," which differs notably by allowing more tolerance for criticism and political expression. It distinguishes itself by not being under the patronage of His Majesty King Mohammed VI and not being sponsored by brands, thus reducing potential biases. This was evident when a Palestinian flag was displayed on stage, a gesture rarely witnessed at Mawazine, highlighting its unique character. The Gnaoua Festival is also another example. As a celebration of Gnaoua music, a rich cultural heritage deeply rooted in Moroccan history, it attracts both local and international musicians, showcasing the country's diverse musical traditions and cultural vibrancy. Through this festival, Morocco presents itself as a cultural melting pot, where different artistic expressions converge to create a unique and captivating experience.

The Gnaoua Festival's international acclaim and its ability to attract visitors from around the globe contribute significantly to Morocco's soft power by highlighting the nation's cultural richness and artistic prowess on a global stage.

Another example of Moroccan soft power lies in football. Football holds a special place in Moroccan culture, deeply ingrained in its societal fabric. The enthusiasm and support shown during the last World Cup in Qatar underlined the sport's importance in Morocco's soft power strategy. The widespread support for Morocco transcended regional boundaries, sparking debates about the country's identity—whether it is primarily African or Arab. This discourse reflected the diverse cultural landscape of Morocco, making it relatable to various identities worldwide. The unity witnessed in supporting Morocco during the World Cup exemplifies how the country's cultural diversity fosters connections with diverse global audiences, thereby amplifying its soft power influence across continents.

II/ Portugal and nation branding

Portugal, a country situated in the western point in southern europe, has an expansive coastline to the Atlantic ocean, once a global maritime and economic power during the 15th and 16th century, has always been a stage of tourism and attraction. Globalization and European Union integration, culture and tourism has faced a lot of shifts regarding authenticity. In order to mitigate those external influences and cultural homogenization, “the issue of nation branding is becoming an important one”² (Gudjonsson, H. 2005: 283), therefore “it is widely recognised that country image influences consumer behavior and plays an important role in a dynamic identity building process”³. Stock (2009) also argues that nation image

² Hlynur Gudjonsson, *Nation branding*, 2005.

³ ‘Cultural heritage and nation branding – multi stakeholder perspectives from Portugal’, H. Nobre and A. Sousa, 2021.



should be managed as it enhances tourism, attracts foreign investments and stimulates international partnerships. Delving into Portugal's narrative in the world stage regarding its soft power and brand strength, in the Global Soft Power Index 2023, by Brand Finance, Portugal secured in 2022 the 42nd place and in the Anholt-Ipsos Nation Brands Index (NBI) Portugal secured the 20th position in 2023. Branding strategies are important in the economical area, because it allows them to define a structure and programme in order to achieve the recognition of a brand internationally, and the same applies with nation branding, and it is necessary to develop and follow a nation branding strategy in order to strengthen a nation's presence in the international system. That strategy comprised, for example, the creation of ICEP in 1992 that led to the desire of promoting Portugal's positive image and identity. Also the nation branding process was first implemented by the Brand Portugal Program, initiated in 1998 by ICEP. Furthermore, reliability of international institutions that are recognized worldwide, like UNESCO, to protect a cultural identity that is part of the nation branding process, is becoming more and more important.

III/ Recommendations

- Creating a mediterranean exposition or any other type of platform/forum that can promote cooperation in the Mediterranean, economically, socially, culturally and also security.
- Reinforcing a common mediterranean identity, like for example concepts that connect each country, like the mediterranean diet, that connects a common cultural aspect like food.
- Morocco included the Mediterranean identity as a part of his soft power strategy as it is basing its soft power mostly on the diversity of cultures and the identity. Mediterranean culture, dishes, wine, salad, the architecture.
- Develop the "sister cities" status (Lisbon and Morocco).
- Advise Portugal to join the "Association des Musées de la Méditerranée" to join its mediterranean counterparts (Morocco, Tunisia, Italy Spain, Greece, ...).
- Advice Morocco to sign more UNESCO conventions.



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