

## **Identification of ambassadors' high involvement practices in territorial attractiveness strategies: a crossover between human resources management and place marketing**

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The COVID-19 crisis affecting territories questions traditional models of place marketing questioning the quality of life and safety in cities. Demographic tensions add to this health crisis, increasing citizens' mistrust of local and national policies (Karens *et al.*, 2015). As shown by alternative models of public management (Stoker, 2006; Osborne, 2006), territorial stakeholder participation mechanisms facilitate the understanding and ownership of public policies (Arnaud and Soldo, 2017). However, it is still necessary to identify the mechanisms that influence participation. Indeed, the desire to understand and characterize the links between territorial marketing practices and stakeholder participation is recent in the literature (Lucarelli and Berg, 2011; Kavaratzis, 2012). In particular, authors show the insufficient integration of citizens in these approaches (Braun *et al.*, 2013).

While a multitude of stakeholders can intervene in strategies aimed at increasing territorial attractiveness (Eshuis *et al.*, 2013), we question more particularly the involvement of ambassadors in these strategies. The objective is then to identify and propose ambassadors' involvement practices. In this sense, this work seeks to clarify the concept of territorial ambassador and to understand how territorial managers can influence their participation.

In order to answer this question, we first construct a theoretical and conceptual framework to characterize the profiles and actions of territorial ambassadors (1). Moreover, as the literature on ambassadors is recent and therefore not very extensive (Andersson and Ekman, 2009), it's not possible to identify practices of ambassador involvement, and it does not allow for the identification of ambassadorial involvement practices. We propose to mobilize the strategic management of human resources and more particularly, high involvement work practices (Becker and Huselid, 1998; Osterman, 2006; Messersmith *et al.*, 2011) in order to build a portfolio of involvement practices (2).

We then conduct an empirical study. First, a case study (Yin, 2018), carried out on the basis of secondary data, allows us to identify territorial ambassador initiatives through 6 French cases (*i.e.* Alsace, Finistère, Grand Reims, Grand Reims, Grand Lyon, Isle sur la Sorgue and Normandy) and 8 international cases (*i.e.* the Coaticook Valley and Edmonton in Canada, Baltimore and Detroit in the United States, Berlin, Eindhoven, Ireland and Manchester). In a second phase, a focus group (Miles *et al.*, 2014), carried out in 2019, made up of 45 experts in territorial marketing facilitates the characterization of the ambassador object. A participatory method allows the experts' perceptions to be identified thanks to the Wooclap platform: four questions are asked to the experts concerning the ambassadors' profiles (1), possible

actions (2), the tools for ambassador participation (3) and the roles of the territorial managers in charge of leading the ambassador networks (4).

Finally, on the basis of the various results, we propose clusters of high involvement work practices, contingent on the management of ambassadors. The results aim at modelling a city brand co-ownership process based on the gap between sense made by external stakeholders (*i.e.* residents, companies and visitors). This understanding can help public managers to improve the sense given by their city brands, in order to foster attractiveness.

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