

Producing nature: Brand marketing of nature parks in Spain

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Abstract

In recent decades, the neoliberal conservation model has become the dominant global approach to nature conservation. The emergence of this paradigm has led to the imposition of a market logic, based on neoliberal philosophy, coinciding with a significant decrease in public investment in conservation. This, in turn, has brought about major transformations in the management of protected areas, resulting in a combination of private interests and initiatives for environmental protection. The complex current scenario is mobilizing a hegemonic discourse about nature in which socio-ecosystems are impacted by market strategies and the logic of competition. In this context, sustainable development is presented as a means for reconciling conservation goals with those of economic development. Branding in protected areas is presented as another option for the 'nature business' under the aegis of sustainable development. In this article we present a comparative analysis of how programs, brands and logos were created in the nature park networks of three regions in Spain (Andalusia, Catalonia and the Valencian Community). We examine the different strategies implemented by the respective territories to achieve their goals in environmental policymaking, by analyzing the realization of official programs. To conclude, we question whether neoliberal conservation may actually be reversing its own purposes: protecting in order to commercialize instead of conserving to protect.

Keywords: natural brand, marketing, nature parks, environmental politics, consumption

Résumé

Au cours des dernières décennies, le modèle de conservation néolibéral est devenu dominant. L'émergence de ce paradigme a conduit à l'imposition d'une logique de marché, basée sur la philosophie néolibérale, coïncidant avec une diminution significative des investissements publics dans la conservation. Cette situation a entraîné des transformations majeures dans la gestion des zones protégées, qui se sont traduites par une combinaison d'intérêts privés et d'initiatives de protection de l'environnement. Cette situation complexe mobilise un discours hégémonique sur la nature dans lequel les socio-écosystèmes sont influencés par les stratégies de marché et la logique de la concurrence. Dans ce contexte, le développement durable est présenté comme un moyen de concilier les objectifs de conservation avec ceux du développement économique. Le "business de la nature" utilise des outils de marketing, ou branding, dans les zones protégées. Dans cet article, nous présentons une analyse comparative de la manière dont les programmes, les marques et les logos ont été créés dans les réseaux de parcs naturels de trois régions d'Espagne (Andalousie, Catalogne et Communauté valencienne). Nous examinons les différentes stratégies mises en œuvre par les territoires respectifs pour atteindre leurs objectifs dans le domaine de la politique environnementale. En conclusion, nous nous demandons si la conservation néolibérale n'est pas en train de s'éloigner de son objectif : protéger pour commercialiser, au lieu de conserver pour protéger.

Mots-clés: marque naturelle, marketing, parcs naturels, politique environnementale, consommation

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Resumen

En las últimas décadas, el modelo de conservación neoliberal se ha impuesto globalmente en las áreas protegidas. La llegada de este paradigma ha supuesto la imposición de lógica del mercado, bajo el prisma de filosofía neoliberal, coincidiendo con una significativa disminución de la inversión pública en la conservación. Esto ha conllevado importantes transformaciones en la gestión de las áreas protegidas produciéndose un maridaje entre los intereses e iniciativas privadas y las políticas ambientales de protección. El complejo escenario actual moviliza un discurso hegemónico de la naturaleza en el que los socioecosistemas son atravesados por las estrategias del mercado y la racionalidad de la competencia. En este contexto, el desarrollo sostenible vuelve a presentarse como un medio para conciliar los fines de la conservación con los del desarrollo económico. La creación de marcas en las áreas protegidas se presenta como una opción más del negocio de lo natural bajo el amparo del desarrollo sostenible. En este artículo presentamos un análisis comparativo de cómo se crearon los programas, marcas y logos en las redes de parques naturales de tres regiones en España (Andalucía, Catalunya y la Comunitat Valenciana). Mediante el análisis de los programas oficiales implementados y la descripción del diseño de un producto modificado y presentado como natural, se examinan las diferentes estrategias llevadas a cabo en los respectivos territorios para lograr sus objetivos en el campo de las políticas ambientales e institucionales. Al final, se cuestiona si la conservación neoliberal invierte sus propios fines: de conservar para proteger, a proteger para mercantilizar.

Palabras clave: marca natural, marketing, parques naturales, política ambiental, consumo

1. Introduction

In the last third of the twentieth century, the Fordist-Keynesian formula showed clear signs of exhaustion in a context of overaccumulation, energy uncertainty, and ecological overshoot. During the following decades, neoliberal policies were consolidated, reorienting the rules of the global economy and aggravating ecosystemic imbalances. Clear evidence of unsustainability in the predominant model of growth, strong social and media pressure, and a succession of serious accidents and hazards intensified by climate change across several continents, led to environmental concerns being foregrounded in international political agendas. Since then, the longstanding and much-critiqued concept of sustainable development and nature conservation policies have occupied prominent positions, in different ways but using similar arguments, with the aim of achieving sustainability and ensuring biodiversity.

However, far from fulfilling these goals, the profound restructuring of the system has moved in the opposite direction, advancing towards the construction of a "neoliberal nature" where its intervention entails building stricter barriers between two inextricable spheres (society/nature), given the focus on market logics and the dominant role of private interests in management (Igoe & Brockington 2007; Büscher *et al.* 2012; Büscher & Fletcher 2015; Apostolopoulou 2020). The new rules of the game, accelerated by the 2008 global financial post-crisis, led to privatization, commercialization, de-regulation, re-regulation and renegotiation of the benefits of "nature" between civil society, the state, and the market (Castree 2008a, Cortés 2018). Furthermore, the so-called new paradigm of neoliberal conservation is based on an obvious contradiction: the number of protected areas has risen exponentially (Bingham *et al.* 2021), while investment in conservation has dropped (Büscher *et al.* 2012; Cortés 2018). In this article we will only address one aspect of the transformations between capital, market, and nature, considering the emergence of "natural" brands and products as the epitome of neoliberal conservation policies.

What is known as "capitalism without capital" (Haskel & Westlake 2017), "cognitive capitalism" (Scott 2014) or "artistic capitalism" (Lipovetsky & Serroy 2015) has spurred, among many others, three processes that are relevant to nature conservation: the urge to appear or to remain on the green map, the race to produce intangibles, and an obsession with highlighting nature brands. All three must be viewed as interrelated. First of all, the fear of being left out of the economic circuits at all scales – national and international – seems to have taken hold of neoliberal policies, and mechanisms have been set up so that private interests prevail over the public good, following the maxim of gaining a visible (legible and recognizable) position in the market. Declarations of protected areas are now viewed as business opportunities, and their listings in global organizations such as IUCN or UNESCO contribute to certifying their "quality" and placing them on the map. Secondly, no dichotomic distinction has eluded this new logic of capital in regard to intangible assets (urban-

rural, culture-nature, body-soul, etc.). Treanor (2005) aptly pointed out that neoliberalism ventures far beyond changing economic structures: it is a philosophy in which the market rules supreme. In any case, it is a complex ideological project, with representations, practices and discourses at different scales of space and over time (Harvey 2005; Ferguson 2010; Durand *et al.* 2019). Metaphorically speaking, we could say that neoliberalism behaves like a neutrino: we can't see it, but it can pass through all fields implementing the immaterial in all spheres. And here, the notion of nature has an advantage, because it represents, certifies, and combines coveted intangible values. Thirdly, nature brands, and all the marketing developed around them, have led to a race in which territories search for signs of identity in their goods and services in order to offer products as natural as they are appealing, differentiated and connoted by authenticity (Fillitz & Saris, 2013; Frigolé, 2014; Del Mármol & Santamarina, 2019). In some cases, this fixation with the brand itself can even displace what that brand is supposed to be representing.

In this context of post-Fordist production, activations of natural heritage have been on an exponential rise following new market demands (Heinich 2009). The latest *Protected Planet Report 2020* highlights that, in the last decade, more than 21 million km² have been protected. In fact, natural heritage ties in quite closely to the demands of neo-capitalism by offering immaterial values *per se*. In addition, the increase in the number of Protected Areas (PAs) is a response to the concern over the loss of biodiversity and the overall deterioration of the environment. Climate change, global warming, pollution, deforestation, water scarcity, overexploitation, poverty, irrational consumption, and inequalities, among other problems, have led us to consider that we are witnessing a new geological era, the Anthropocene, caused by human excesses (Alexiades 2018). The result has been an increase of environmental conflicts, on the one hand; and on the other, a call for the heritage activation of natural assets, thus legitimizing declarations of PAs – although, as the latest Protected Planet Report subtly warned, protection does not guarantee conservation (Bingham *et al.* 2021).

For at least the past twenty years, we have been witnesses to the neo-liberalisation of nature (Castree 2008a; Castree 2008b; Apostolopoulou, 2020), which has only exacerbated the allegations that hegemonic conservation policies have failed to halt the loss of biodiversity (Mora 2011). The characteristics of 'neoliberal nature' have further increased the subordination of nature to capital as part of commodity fetishism (Brockington & Duffy 2010). This commodification of nature is carried out through the simultaneous use of both green and un-green grabbing – through the use of supposedly ecological agendas or the direct exploitation of ecosystems (Apostolopoulou, 2020).

Nature-based businesses are a profitable, healthy investment in financial terms. So much so that there is a demand for consuming original products, associated with authenticity, with pre-Fordist times, and with a nostalgia for a utopian past ('retrotopia') (Bauman 2017). All of these values are on the rise, making protected areas an attractive niche market (Buscher *et al.* 2012; Cortés & Beltran 2019). In recent decades, the nature tourism industry has been growing nonstop, linked to other ways of "experiencing nature" (nature sports, natural wellness or gastronomy experiences, etc.) and in keeping with the expectations of demanding consumers in search of multiple experiences (Kutzner & Wright 2010; Espeso-Molinero 2019). With this demand, the rural development policies promoted by the European Union have spurred an increase in economic activities associated with an idyllic rural setting (Frigolé 2007; Del Mármol 2017a). As we will see below, brands are a good example of this process, with a powerful natural product marketing effort developing around them.

In this article, we present the development of programs, brands, and logos for the Nature Parks (NPs) system in Andalusia, Catalonia and the Valencian Community using a comparison as part of a broader study that seeks to examine the different conservation models developed by the Spanish State, based on ethnographies in six NPs within the selected autonomous communities.² More specifically, we perform a systematic analysis of the legislation, documentation on programs and brands, websites for products and services, tourist pamphlets, and nature-based marketing campaigns conducted by institutions in the three NP areas under study. The strategy

² All three autonomous communities possess a coastline. For example, the Valencian Community is an autonomy defined by geographers as mountainous despite being a coastal strip. In the Valencian case, emergency protection was granted to the coastal areas because of tourism policies already implemented during final years the Franco dictatorship. The first marine reserve in Spain was declared in this autonomous community.

implemented for analyzing the contents follows grounded theory, which makes it possible to identify social phenomena using a set of analytical constructs (Babchuk 2011).



Figure 1. The locations of the protected areas studied in each autonomous community. 3. NP del Estrecho; 7. NP Los Alcornocales; 52. NP Alt Pirineu; 58. NP Massís del Montseny; 84. NP El Montgó; 95. NP Serra Calderona. Source: Europarc España

In the following sections, we address the similarities and differences between the three territories in terms of the use of nature marketing in the NPs. Next, we present nature marketing as the set of practices and methods aimed at fostering the commercialization of a product that is modified and then qualified as natural by means of the branding process. After that, we analyze the implementation of programs and brands in the three territories, comparing their philosophies and official regulations, to examine how what we could refer to as a 'natural nature' is built. In our view, producing natural nature involves establishing a long list of mediations for supplying, packaging, and enhancing products with values that are like the notion of nature itself, in our cultural praxis. Next, we consider the different strategies put in place to achieve these goals, examining everything from the choice of typefaces to the actions taken. Lastly, we close with a few conclusions about the opportunities, limitations, and risks of 'nature' businesses.

2. Nature branding: identity, awareness, and loyalty

One of the successful examples of branding linked to a natural area is that of Tasmania, an Australian island state. In the mid-1990s, the brand "Tasmania. Discover Your Natural State" was developed, including a logo featuring the extinct Tasmanian tiger "to represent the spirit of mystery and discovery that the destination promises" (Walker *et al.* 2015, 29). This depiction suggested discovery of a virgin territory along with the personal revelation that the visitor would experience; an epiphany of sorts. Even the earliest versions of the nature-based brand linked travel to natural surroundings with the inner path that the contemporary tourist would embark on. All these movements focus on an authentic origin but are mediated by consumption of its specific products. Accordingly, the campaign was actually aimed at building brand equity based on the quality of certain natural products (fish and wine) and of the area's arts and crafts, all under the image of a "clean, green, pure, peaceful and largely unspoiled environment" (Walker *et al.* 2015, 27).

In the case of Tasmania, whose aim, according to the objectives stated by the Australian Tourism Department, involved "changing perceptions and misconceptions of the state", we realize the importance of creating "brand loyalty" by using powerful symbols that establish "brand awareness" and "perceived quality" for the brand (Aaker 1991). The purpose of this strategy is to simplify and stimulate decision-making for potential visitors, pre-empting preconceived notions by creating emotional ties to the product's attributes, its intangible qualities, and the benefits it can provide for consumers, as well as to the personality and lifestyle in which it envelops the visitor, for which the brand is a condensed symbol (Aaker 1991; Walker *et al.* 2015, 24). All these elements are indications of the interest in producing intangibles for the market segment occupied by nature marketing, which is clearly focused on mobilizing a stock of symbols and on building loyalties.

There are examples of this model's current success. A study conducted among visitors to a region in Italy with two nature parks and several other protected areas showed that the origin of the food products associated with a nature park, quality certification, and branding influenced consumer confidence and buying behavior (Temperini *et al.* 2017). In recent years, it has even been suggested that marketing designers should introduce nonvisual stimuli into their campaigns promoting local brands (Medway 2015), to provide a more enriching experience involving consumer items such as food, beverages, and crafts.

Nevertheless, these products and services offered to visitors in natural areas are more than just tours, food, and crafts. They are also configured in the imaginary as initiation experiences which, by metonymical association, invite people to connect with the original, authentic world belonging to the part of the unchanged past (natural or cultural) they are visiting. In other words, given their added value, not only the items bought or the foods eaten, but rather the moments experienced through the services that the consumer receives, build awareness of the product and boost loyalty. Here, once again, we encounter the phenomenon of an aura³ (Benjamin 1968; Comaroff & Comaroff 2009) that envelops objects, landscapes, and experiences. The intangible and imagined value of products (and services) is enhanced. They are not mass-produced, but created in an original, unique way, if possible by the hands of an age-old culture linked to the natural area. In addition, this aura does not fade with its commodification: "neither for consumers nor for producers does the aura of ethno-commodities simply disappear with their entry into the market" (Comaroff & Comaroff 2009, 20).

Another consequence of this touristification of natural spaces is that the tourists' gaze (Urry, 2003) aestheticizes the world and turns their visit into a staging for their experience: everything can (or must) be photographed in order to be admired or be admired enough to merit recording an image. Ultimately, naturalized nature is the technological creation of a landscape that is framed and experienced as natural, as a consequence of the "corporeality of experience" afforded by the practice of photography (Crang, 1997: 359). These representations of the so-called naturalness of nature parks, such as the Instagram posts made by tourists, have the power to produce changes in their relationship with these spaces, as they suggest particular ways of seeing

³ The authors use "aura" in the same sense as Benjamin (1968), to "connote the awe or reverence experienced in the presence of unique, authentic works of art in the age of mechanical reproduction" and that embodies an "elusive quality" (Comaroff & Comaroff, 2009: 159).

the non-human world and construct a romantic tourist gaze that offers an escape from everyday life (Fälton, 2021).

What is important here is to not ignore the fact that the aestheticizing drive is inherent in the branding phenomenon – what Lipovetsky & Serroy (2013) refer to as the "aestheticization of everyday life": "everywhere, the real is constructed as an image, integrating an aesthetic-emotional dimension that has become key in the competition between brands. That is what we call artistic or trans-aesthetic creative capitalism"⁴ (Lipovetsky & Serroy 2013, 12). As part of this process, aesthetic-touristic consumption is steadily rising all over the world, turning places into landscapes and spreading a "kind of aesthetic fetishism and voyeurism" which is part of the two faces of Janus in capitalism today: an artistic type of capitalism is strengthened to break with the Fordist mode of regulating the economy, whose purpose is a "new way of operating that involves a rational and widespread harnessing of the aesthetic-imaginary-emotional dimensions in order to make a profit and conquer markets" (Lipovetsky & Serroy 2013, 12).

Before we continue, we must have a look at the background for the rise of branding. Place branding gained momentum based on the experience of city branding. Though it began in the late twentieth century, and from the 2000s in an increasing number of cities, especially in Europe, it began to transfer marketing-related knowledge to the operational environment of cities (Kavaratzis 2004, 2009), including in Spain (Bañales *et al.* 2015; Ruiz & Santamarina, 2013; Sáez *et al.*, 2013). Urban marketing was soon associated with conveying an image of a city that could build the perception of an imaginary, all of which was key for city branding. The purpose was twofold: to make residents identify with their city and to compete effectively in attracting investment and tourism. What is most significant about this phenomenon is that the concept devised to develop it was that of corporate branding (Kavaratzis 2004, 64) – that is, the main focus was on the business dimension of city branding, true to its origins in marketing. Over the years, a city's brand has become a key requirement for success: perception affects a city's appeal for tourism and the arrival of resources in general (Herget *et al.* 2015). Furthermore, we must not ignore the fact that a destination's brand exists primarily "in the eyes of the beholder" (Herget *et al.* 2015, 120). This implies that the branding process must be plausible, not contrived – in other words, it must appear to simply convey the city's idiosyncrasies and be capable of presenting and nourishing its identifying features in order to maintain or change its reputation.

As regards parks and protected areas, we can easily apply three of the six key components of city branding, according to Kavaratzis (2004): what it is seen to be (by outsiders); whom it seeks to serve; and what is promised and expected (from it). In addition, the authors describes three levels of communication: first-hand observation; advertising tools; and communication by people and the media. It seems obvious that nature marketing focuses on the level of the users' own communication about their nature-related experiences and on advertising tools.

Marketing experts point out that to develop a brand for a place, slogans and logos are useful tools within the strategy, but they are not the strategy itself: it is important to have a joint strategy encompassing both the functional and the symbolic attributes of the brand (Kavaratzis & Ashworth 2005, 508). In other words, the relationship between identity and brand image requires a communication strategy that conveys its attributes: how the brand is perceived by the consumer, who recognizes and appreciates its 'values', and how it contributes to building, cementing, developing or transforming the consumer's lifestyle. This is achieved to a large extent by developing emotional ties to the brand based on experience. Therefore, there is a close connection between a brand's success and its contribution to shaping the consumer's lifestyle. Once customers recognize themselves totally or partially in a brand's symbolic attributes, they will acquire brand awareness and develop brand loyalty, the ultimate goal of any marketing strategy.

Marketing theorists would agree on this point as regards natural areas. Extensive research has been conducted on the need to build brand strategies for managing ecotourism, although there is not yet a consensus among experts as to the effectiveness of brand strategy in terms of protecting and managing Natural World Heritage (NWH). It has even been suggested that brand equity has rarely been valued as a beneficial tool for protecting a NWH site (Wang and Yuan 2020). However, there are empirical studies that claim to prove its

⁴ All quotes originally in Spanish and Catalan throughout this article have been translated by the authors.

effectiveness. According to customer brand loyalty theory, the value that tourists perceive for natural areas has a positive impact on the satisfaction with and trust in the brand these offer, also affecting brand loyalty (Li 2021). Therefore, brand satisfaction is a direct antecedent of brand loyalty.

In the current stage of capitalism, brands play a key role in building a consumer's identity (Bauman 2007; Elliot & Wattanasuwan 1998). Brands shape a lifestyle that is consumption-oriented and shared by user communities with similar interests, for example on social media. This occurs to such an extent that these groups can be tagged by a specific product – that is, their identity and sociability can be developed based on or according to the paradigm adopted by a brand concept, as is usually the case with applications such as Instagram. Brands can shape the symbolic and experiential universe of large user communities. In the case of natural areas, branding seems closer to consumer identity and loyalty development based on the allure of an original, authentic, natural lifestyle (healthy, aware, etc.).

3. Nature marketing strategies in nature parks

Branding applied to NPs has many precedents in other contexts. Two conclusions that are often reached. On the one hand, it is generally accepted that the declaration of an area as an NWH site recognizes an evolving cultural landscape comprising multiple landscape identities and interests, ranging from agro-pastoral to nature conservation, which are managed through planning and promoted by leveraging the brand (Porter 2020). On the other hand, a need has also been asserted for NPs' brands to include entire regions, not only the strictly protected area. This enhances the potential for greater inclusion of associated products and services; in addition, it can lead to the need for more generic brands to comprise broader cultural and geographic environments rather than certain parks with specific names (Kihima 2014).

The three areas considered in our research show clear differences in their nature marketing practices. These disparities go beyond the strategies they use; their respective socio-political contexts and different traditions in terms of nature conservation must be considered as well. Catalonia stands out as a pioneer in promoting conservation policies within Spain since the end of the nineteenth century (Santamarina 2019), and with the advent of democracy it was the first autonomous community to be granted control of nature conservation, in 1980.⁵ Andalusia and the Valencian Community were granted these powers in 1984 and 1985 respectively.⁶ A deeply-rooted culture of conservation, linked to nationalism, and the early transfer of powers concerning conservation, reflected in the Statute of Autonomy of Catalonia,⁷ contributed to regulations soon established by Law 12/1985⁸ on Natural Spaces.

The case of Catalonia differs from those of Andalusia and Valencia insofar as it contains two PAs within the borders of its autonomous community: the Nature Park Network of the Barcelona Provincial Council (*Xarxa de Parcs Naturals de la Diputació de Barcelona*) and the System of Protected Natural Areas of Catalonia (*Xarxa d'Espais Naturals Protegits de Catalunya*).⁹ They both coexist under the Law of 1985 and neither one of them has a brand. However, they do have specific programs to promote their goods and services within the NPs, as well as typefaces and logos that identify the two networks as well as the different NPs. Since 1992, the Provincial Council NP network has been running a program named Experience the Park (*Viu al parc*), which comprises activities such as "Park to Table Experiences" (*Experiències Parc a taula*) (Figure 1). And since 2014, as part of the Catalogue of Experiences and Discovery (*Catàleg d'experiències i descoberta*) programme, the Catalan network has been offering a Catalogue of Experiences for Discovering the Park's Local Products (*Catàleg d'experiències per descobrir els productes locals del Parc*).

⁵ <https://www.boe.es/eli/es/rd/1980/07/31/1950> Accessed 25 July 2023.

⁶ <https://www.boe.es/eli/es/rd/1984/04/04/1096> and <https://www.boe.es/eli/es/rd/1984/02/08/2365>. Accessed 25 July 2023.

⁷ These powers were acknowledged in Title I of the Statute, specifically in Article 9, Section 10. <https://www.boe.es/buscar/doc.php?id=BOE-A-1979-30178> Accessed 25 July 2023.

⁸ Available at <https://portaljuridic.gencat.cat/eli/es-ct/l/1985/06/13/12>. Accessed 25 July 2023.

⁹ On their website, they use the term "park network" (*Xarxa de parcs*) to refer to this system.



Figure 2. Cover for Park to Table Experiences. Provincial Council of Barcelona

These pioneering efforts reflect the spirit of Law 12/1985. Among their premises, the Catalan legislation acknowledged that

...a large part of the spaces with nature-related value are located in socioeconomically depressed areas, many of which are losing population [...] now more than ever, for their inhabitants, protection must not bring on additional burdens to aggravate their difficult situation; on the contrary, they must lead to an effective improvement in their living conditions.

This ruling involved two key aspects: first of all, it placed protected areas within marginalized rural spaces that were left out of economic circuits; secondly, conservation was expressed in terms of capital – or, at least, on the pretense of capitalization. Far from halting rural development ("now more than ever"), natural areas were presented as an opportunity for renewing local activities. To legitimize the development-conservation debate, reference was made to the global context, pointing out that "numerous experiences worldwide prove that it is possible to reconcile development of these areas with protection of their natural assets." In the context of this narrative, the programs and activities promoted online make sense: nature marketing would be fulfilling the need to integrate the entire territory into the new market logics and demands.

For the Andalusian and Valencian NPs, on the other hand, branding has been used as a differentiation device for boosting local economies within PAs (see Table 1). From 2001 onward, Andalusia created and regulated the "parques naturales" (nature parks) brand for its network – the Network for Protected Areas of Andalusia (RENPA) – established by Law 2/89,¹⁰ under the aegis of the Junta de Andalucía (the Regional Government of Andalusia). In the Valencian Community, branding appeared ten years later, in 2011, and was applied to the PAs as a whole, established by the Generalitat Valenciana (the Government of Valencia) in Law

¹⁰ <https://www.boe.es/buscar/doc.php?id=BOE-A-1989-20636> Accessed 25 July 2023.

11/1994.¹¹ And, in general terms, as we will see in the next section, their legislation on branding replicates that of Andalusia, with only minor variations – and one significant difference.

	Year	Current Regulation or Program	Categories
Andalusia	2004	ORDER of 15 December 2004, regulating the legal regime and the licensing procedure for the Parque Natural de Andalucía brand.	1. Artisanal products 2. Nature tourism a) Restaurant and leisure services b) Restaurant services c) Leisure activities d) Active tourism companies 3. Natural products
Catalonia	1992	Provincial Council NP network "Parc a Taula" (Park to Table) Experiences	Lodging, restaurants, wineries, businesses and producers
	2014	Experiences for discovering local products	Local production: a) Food b) Crafts
Valencian Community	2011	DECREE 26/2011, of 18 March, issued by the Consell, on the legal regime and the licensing procedure for the Parcs Naturals de la Comunitat Valenciana brand.	1. Natural products 2. Artisanal products 3. Nature tourism a) Nature tourism lodgings b) Restaurant and catering services c) Active tourism d) Heritage interpretation and environmental education

Table 1: Current regulations and categories of the Parques Naturales brand in Andalusia and the Valencian Community. Compiled by the authors.

Regarding Andalusia,¹² the preamble to Law 2/89^a announced "a conservation policy that is compatible with economic development," claiming that "conservation [...] must go hand in hand with the promotion of economic wealth." Under this premise, the law highlights the need to rely on local populations and, specifically, on the economic sectors in order to implement conservations policies. Furthermore, in addition to the plans for regulation and management specified in the state-wide legislation, it includes "Integral Development Plans and Promotion Programs." In this context, the promotion of the brand is the result of a desire to "generate economic wealth" by boosting local production, with added values, in keeping with market demand.

The Valencian Community essentially follows along the same lines in terms of development vs. conservation, but it is important to highlight two novel features of this relationship in the explanatory

¹¹ <https://www.boe.es/buscar/doc.php?id=BOE-A-1995-3325> Accessed 25 July 2023.

¹² It is important to bear in mind that the Andalusian and Valencian laws for PAs included the guidelines set by the new state-wide framework for nature conservation: Law 4/89 of 27 March for the Conservation of Natural Areas and of Wild Flora and Fauna, which many considered to be the "Spanish constitution for nature" given the instruments for planning, regulation, and management it included. As we have already indicated, the Catalan law was approved in 1985, before this state regulation, and therefore did not follow this model.

memorandum for its 1994 legislation.¹³ On the one hand, the language used includes international paradigms – sustainable development and eco-development – set forth to halt environmental degradation: conservation must be "compatible with maintaining and developing socioeconomic activity, with criteria for sustainable use and [...] eco-development." On the other hand, the government makes the commitment to "allocate specific funding" if the declaration "generates individual sacrifices." Hence, there is the assumption that conservation will lead to changes in production when the area is rezoned. The term "sacrifices" is revealing, given all the connotations it suggests, and it is invoked as a guarantee for the new management model. In any case, the introduction of the NP brand follows a similar pattern to that of the Andalusian argument.

4. Producing natural nature

In Catalonia, as we noted above, from the last decade of the twentieth century until now, specific programs have been set up to promote NPs products in their two networks. Both "Park to Table Experiences" and "Experiences for Discovering the Park's Local Products" are initiatives that preceded the branding process. Despite not being legislated, these efforts seek goals and provide goods and services that follow a similar logic to that of branding.

The Barcelona Provincial Council NPs network refers to "a sustainable development program"¹⁴ aimed at highlighting "natural, cultural, and landscape values." It is important to note the triad being presented, not only because it establishes impossible categories, but also because it takes their attendant values for granted. Gastronomy is used as a lure, but it involves "producers, wineries, lodgings and restaurants." Accordingly, it suggests "experiencing the local gastronomy, getting to know the producers that live and produce [...] and visiting their venues: their work contributes to the economic and rural development of Catalonia." Both the products and the producers are objects as well as subjects of intervention, as part of a subtle shift of values between them. And again, there is an appeal made for development in economic and rural terms.

This project also includes a yearly award with four categories: best dish, best experience, best cooperation or participation, and best enhancement of the territory,¹⁵ which seeks to further reinforce a value already in circulation. The Provincial Council Network also promotes certified products such as Designations of Origin (DOs) within its municipalities, highlighting them on its website. The System of Protected Natural Areas of Catalonia offers similar statements, for example: "Local producers, of both crafts and food products, allow visitors to engage in innovative, unique experiences." Furthermore, in the "Enjoy the Park" section in some of the PAs' websites, "Producers and Artisans" are mentioned using a similar narrative, and, much like in the Provincial Council Network, the different forms of protection for each PA (DO, CCPAE [the Catalan Council of Organic Agricultural Production], GFS [Sustainable Forestry], etc.) are presented as a guarantee. Jointly with the certifications, the distinction, the difference, the experiences, the values and development together provide the substratum for branding.

The first effort to promote the branding of PAs came from Andalusia. Between 1999 and 2000, the pilot project "Marca Parque Natural de Andalucía" (Nature Park of Andalusia Brand) was started up by the regional Department of the Environment, funded by the ADAPT Community Initiative (a project aimed at adapting businesses to development in Andalusian nature parks). As noted in the executive summary, "to develop the brand, a listing and an assessment of the craft activities and natural products were completed for the areas

¹³ It is also interesting to consider the difference it establishes between rural and seaside areas, with opposite environmental impacts. While "large expanses of inland rural land [...] lose population or are economically and socially marginalized" (a statement similar to the one in Catalonia), seaside areas "are developed at a staggering pace [...] subjecting their natural environments to often excessive pressure." The mention of the coast reveals an acknowledgement of chaotic development in the Valencian territory, and the loss or deterioration of the wetlands (which are considered a source of balance).

¹⁴ "Sustainable" is constantly added to the term "development" in all the territories considered in this article, without actually being defined, but is used as a reified and self-evident concept.

¹⁵ <https://parcs.diba.cat/documents/5268243/348235348/Premis+Parc+a+taula+resum.pdf/ac68ae91-e575-d3b1-0c7c-93cfd786ef65?t=1616497232664> Accessed 25 July 2023.

comprised in the Nature Parks."¹⁶ One year later, the *Order of 1 August 2001* was issued to regulate the procedure and the approval of the brand.¹⁷ Finally, this order was replaced by the *Order of 15 December 2004, regulating the Legal Regime and the Procedure for Granting the Licence to Use the Parque Natural de Andalucía Brand*,¹⁸ which has remained in force until now. The spirit of the regulation, stated in the preamble, reflects its underlying doctrine. In just a few paragraphs, the productive conservation model and the brand are introduced, justifying the need for them: "the idea of conservation must be understood in a broad sense, and therefore must go hand in hand with the promotion of economic wealth, considered as an integral part of the whole, so that the organized use of natural resources can benefit the municipalities [...] that foster sustainable development [...]." The language has a ring of the commercial sphere, reinforcing its wording by including "wealth" (which in our cultural practice suggests abundance or excellence). In addition, there is a mention of organizing the "natural resources" for their "use." In other words, if nature is reorganized – overseen – it can be used as a commodity. Aside from the nature/culture duality, we see that everything is solved with the empty phrase 'sustainable development.'

Next, we find "the designation of Nature Parks as a seal of quality." The use of "designation" and "seal of quality" refers to the regulations for Protected Designations of Origin and Protected Geographical Indications. These not only verify the value of the product itself, but also, by metonymic restitution, transfer the specific qualities of the place to the product, increasing its intangible value (Del Mármol 2017b; Parga-Dans & Alonso 2017). The attendant marketing strategy involves symbolic certification of what is 'natural', regulated by the RENPA, jointly with its supposed innate virtues (pristine and authentic). Encouraging "the production and marketing of original products" involves constructing a designation based on the pristine (original), because by equivalence the original is assumed to be authentic – and the demand for consuming authenticity has skyrocketed in advanced capitalism (Frigolé 2014; Santamarina & Moncusi 2015; Del Mármol & Estrada 2018; Santamarina & Vizcaíno 2021). Furthermore, as Del Mármol & Estrada (2018) point out, the logics of DOs are yet another form of "heritagization"; the creation of heritage through the certification of product authenticity.

Finally, the text acknowledges its pioneering role in creating a "unique label", legible for the consumer, to identify the goods and services defined by the "environmental values of the parks." These values are implicitly taken for granted and defined as "natural, artisanal and authentic." In terms of the narrative, we can see how an analogy is drawn between the natural, the artisanal and the authentic. Thus, NP branding promotes the revalorization of local practices by linking them to the past – a past that is longed for and connected not only with authenticity, but also with the increasing nostalgia for pre-Fordist times (Bauman 2017; Korstanje 2019). As we can see, the effort to brand the NPs aims at reinforcing experiential value through a key triad in response to new market needs. Authenticity, the past, and tradition make nature an effective brand and a means of nature marketing for rural development.

If we look at the Valencian regulations, we see that they mirror what we described for the Andalusian brand. In its preamble, *Decree 26/2011, of 18 March, issued by the Consell, on the legal regime and the licencing procedure for the Parcs Naturals de la Comunitat Valenciana brand*¹⁹ states that the products will "include the brand's distinct label, recognizable by consumers and associated with natural values, respect for the environment, and authentic, autochthonous products" or "is aimed at use of the nature park designation as

¹⁶ It was a transnational project, partnering with the Federation of Regional Nature Parks in France, and included other efforts including training. For further information, visit <http://www.juntadeandalucia.es/medioambiente/site/ima/menuitem>. Accessed 03 March 2023.

¹⁷ <https://www.juntadeandalucia.es/boja/2001/99/d2.pdf> Accessed 25 July 2023.

¹⁸ http://www.juntadeandalucia.es/medioambiente/web/aplicaciones/Normativa/ficheros/orden_procedimiento_marca_Parque_Natural_Andalucia.pdf. Some time later, new natural products were included, but without changing the regulations. The Resolution of the General Directorate of Natural Spaces and Citizen Participation included honey and salt in the artisanal product category.

http://www.juntadeandalucia.es/medioambiente/porta_web/web/temas_ambientales/espacios_protegidos/dinamizacion/Marca_parquenatural/resol_modif_orden_decreto_artisanaria.pdf?lr=lang_es Accessed 25 July 2023.

¹⁹ http://www.dogv.gva.es/datos/2011/03/23/pdf/2011_3301.pdf. Two months earlier, a technical committee had been set up to draft it through the *Agreement of 29 January 2010, issued by the Consell*, according to which the Technical Committee of the Parcs Naturals de la Comunitat Valenciana brand was set up. Accessed 25 July 2023.

a seal of quality that differentiates the production and marketing of products from these areas, thus supporting development of a sustainable economic model." As we can see, the only difference is that it introduces the concept of the 'autochthonous' to reinforce difference and authenticity, while the narrative is basically the same. However, there is a substantial difference between the regulations in the two regions. Whereas in Andalusia, as we will see next, an image was specifically designed for the NPs brand, in the Valencian Community both the parks and the products use the same illustration (the schematic outline of a generic bird), eliciting a direct association of the parks with the products.

5. The brand: packaging nature

Mitchell & Ramey (2011: 41) define greenwashing as a "deliberate act by an organization to obscure potentially harmful information or deliver information in a way that portrays a false image that the organization is green or eco-friendly." Although greenwashing is fairly easy to identify for consumers – especially for those with a higher awareness of misleading advertising – and may decrease corporate reputation and carry ethical harm (Gatti *et al.* 2019; Greer & Bruno, 1996; Szabo & Webster, 2021), it is also true that, according to certain studies, images of nature elicit a response that draws out the consumers' affinity with nature and have a greater impact than greenwashing on their attitudes towards brands (Schmuck *et al.* 2018). Therefore, it is hardly surprising that several government bodies have chosen to create a NP brand to boost local products, creating specific guidelines for its application which reveal a taxonomic selection of natural values determined by a standardized hierarchy.

In Andalusia and the Valencian Community, we find, respectively, the "Guide to the Visual Identity of the *Parque Natural de Andalucía* Brand"²⁰ (with the Spanish acronym GIGMA) and the "Guide for the Visual Identity of the Brand"²¹ (Spanish acronym MIGMV). Both documents are intended for local producers and explain how the brand was built and what its design aims to convey. In fact, they do not differ much from what is stated in the regulations, further emphasizing the virtues associated with 'naturalness.' In any case, these texts are much more straightforward, using marketing language aimed at generating product awareness and loyalty: "positioning is the art of designing the offer and the brand image so that they occupy a distinct position in the consumer's mind" (MIGMV) or "the brand ventures beyond the actual materiality of the products" (GIGMA).

As we can see, "positioning [...] in the consumer's mind" and "venturing beyond materiality" are interrelated axioms that extol the potential of the economy of intangibles, one of the key features of cognitive capitalism. In the first case, it involves creating an effective image capable of raising brand awareness in the user; in the latter, that image has to be able to reproduce the 'auratic' value of cultural products (Comaroff & Comaroff, 2009) (paradoxically, by differentiation) ensuring their potential for marketing and consumption and building customer loyalty throughout the entire process.

In addition to these axioms, these documents emphasize the notion of the brand "as a marketing tool that is helpful for implementing a sustainable development model" (GIGMA) or of "the commitment to implement economic models that are respectful of the environment" (MIGMV), combining these models without any major difficulties. The aim is to couple economic development with sustainability, by implementing the brand.

Values are identified with and transferred to products following a metonymic logic of spatial contagion, by displacement of attributes (mistaking the part for the whole). In other words, the qualities that are expected from a nature park are transferred to the product by associating it directly with the place – "the image of a Nature Park (respectful of the environment, natural, healthy, simple), the territory (regional, traditional, authentic)" (GIGMA) – in such a way that the distinctive attributes are determined by the context of their origin: "the use of materials and products sourced within the Nature Parks – authentic, healthy, well made, genuine" (MIGMV). Again, we find a succession of epithets that emphasize authenticity. Authentication through the reification of 'nature' or of the 'nature' that is expected and desired in a park (which is qualified as natural)

²⁰http://www.juntadeandalucia.es/medioambiente/portal_web/servicios_generales/doc_tecnicos/2021/manual_marca_parque_natural/guia_identidad_grafica_corporativa_MPN.pdf Accessed 12 March 2023.

²¹<http://agroambient.gva.es/documents/20550900/92729561/45641-72540-Manual+de+Identidad+Grafica+de+la+Marca/0387922d-8790-4c0d-86b4-3ed468f4752e> Accessed 12 March 2023.

underpins the entire narrative by granting 'truth' to the form and content of the place. Nature meets a series of requirements that shape an imaginary of 'naturalness.'

There are three elements that become essential for this narrative: health, tradition, and originality. All three are conveyed by the notion of naturalness, with nature presented as a naked, indisputable truth. In and of itself, nature is a source of authenticity, and authenticity is a condition that ratifies truth (Santamarina & Moncusi 2015). It is important to note that the key boundaries in our cultural praxis are treated as self-evident (Comaroff & Comaroff 1991), their self-evidence being a powerful device for reproduction: it need not be explicitly stated, because it works (Nature = health + ritual + primordial). The category of nature or of nature park exists because it is defined in a broader semantic context, and therefore makes sense within a framework of cultural intellection. In this case, the realm of the natural is built upon the constant insistence on its own naturalness, hence the plethora of qualifiers. Moreover, using "natural nature" as a referent provides extraordinary symbolic effectiveness, ensuring the agelessness attributed to protected areas (Hutton *et al.* 2005; Igoe 2006). All the other epithets add value to the brand, further emphasizing the products' positive features: "high-quality, good, unique, original, and respectful with the consumer/user" (GIGMA). The aim is to give them "a unique identity" by granting them "a series of distinctive attributes" (MIGMV).

In Andalusia, we find a detailed explanation of the aim of the proposed design. The justification is most revealing: "roundness is the most widespread form in nature. The point is often used as a referent and a marker [...] it provides an abstract representation of everything that exists in nature [...] it is a symbol of naturalness, simplicity, conceptual clarity, 'cleanliness' [...]" (GIGMA). It is significant that the entire preceding tautology is topped off with the notion of 'cleanliness'; order par excellence (Douglas 2003). Again, order is associated with pristine nature in opposition to disorder, introduced in supposedly enclosed/marked islets such as parks (Santamarina 2009). The description is profuse, but we wish to focus on the emphasis placed on pre-Fordist times: "the effect is hand-drawn, like items produced with an artisanal process. The colour range [...] suggests nature (healthiness) in all respects [...] the typeface evokes what is natural, artisanal, handmade" (GIGMA). Again, we find a ternary series. "Handmade" takes us to its opposite, "mass-produced", as in chain production and Fordist times. Artisanal, in turn, suggests manufactured, made by hand, suggesting the notion of tradition. Artisanal implicitly conveys local knowledge and memory transfer, moving away from industrial and standardised patterns, thus becoming natural and a product in high demand (Comaroff & Comaroff 2009).

In short, the brand operates as a form of metonymic restitution, endowing NP products with cherished values such as those of the past, authenticity, and tradition (Bauman 2017; Del Mármol & Estrada 2018; Jiménez-Esquinas & Sánchez-Carretero 2018; Korstanje 2019; Santamarina & Vizcaino 2021). The demand and the market for 'nature' in post-Fordist capitalism has been growing steadily, driven by the western imaginary of naturalness (Igoe 2006). In fact, the natural has become an important niche market, encompassing experiences, emotions, and yearnings that stimulate consumption, and where authenticity is key for marketing 'nature.' Hence the many fairs, offering products and services, held in nature parks (in the Andalusian and Catalan models) or a combination of the parks and nature park networks (in the Valencian model) (Figure 2). These fairs receive a growing number of visitors every year, diversifying not only their products and services,²² but also their activities as part of the programming aimed at attracting more consumers.²³ They are also present at high-profile, high-impact events such as the International Tourism Fair.²⁴

²² See, for example, <https://www.lavozdelasubbetica.es/articulo/subbetica/junta-promocionara-marca-parque-natural-andalucia-como-sello-calidad-compromiso-ambiental/20210613084911025267.html> Accessed 25 July 2023.

²³ See the media coverage for the fairs held in the Valencian park network: <https://www.europapress.es/comunitat-valenciana/noticia-parques-naturales-llevar-domingo-plaza-ayuntamiento-paisajes-prottegidos-comunitat-valenciana-20190201172456.html> Accessed 25 July 2023.

²⁴ <https://www.europapress.es/andalucia/sevilla-00357/noticia-treintena-empresas-marca-parque-natural-andalucia-muestran-productos-fitur-20130130122548.html>, as well as other types of fairs, such as the Fine Food and Beverages Fair, Salón Gourmets. Accessed 25 July 2023.



Figure 3: Poster for the seventh show of products with the *Parques naturales de la Comunitat Valenciana* brand. Source: Conselleria d'Agricultura, Desenvolupament Rural, Emergència Climàtica i Transició Ecològica, Generalitat Valenciana.

6. Conclusions

Neoliberal conservation policies entail the paradox of upending their own aims: instead of conserving in order to protect, they protect in order to commodify. At first glance, the circle of this paradox is complete when the commodification of protected areas – along with the products that marketing rhetoric associates with them – is intended precisely to be their safeguard against an economic system – consumer capitalism (of intangibles) – that produced these exclusion-protection areas and, at the same time, made them functional. Clearly, nature-based business opportunities have paid off, but not without a cost. Commodification of so-called nature inevitably leads to its trivialization and spectacularization, partly through the reductionist attribution of a hierarchy of natural values to ecosystems that are only significant on a human scale and within a specific socioeconomic context. In doing so, they create a series of stagings and plots in which nature enacts a supposedly unalterable primeval performance. As a result, natural heritage assets are turned into stage sets for providing consumers with original experiences.

The intense pressure and demand for what is experienced as 'nature' and 'natural' have led to a greater disconnect between the human and the nonhuman, within the fallacious opposition of culture to nature. However, it has also brought about the adaptation of landscapes to cater to consumers' tastes, the reinvention of goods and services in natural areas (natural by metonymic contagion of the form and the content), the gentrification of nature and the commercialization of everything, neatly packaged into a flexible or pliable way which is produced to highlight the 'natural.' The gradual privatization and commodification of nature and the expansion of nature-based leisure make it increasingly difficult to solve the ever-recurring dilemma of development versus sustainability. In our view, this dichotomous approach needs to be broken to ensure sustainability itself.

Taking a closer look at the paradox, we realize that by producing 'natural nature', public institutions and private organizations work nature itself (or, to a fair extent, nature-related rhetoric) into a serialized planning effort aimed at creating networks of areas open to consumption and catalogues of interchangeable products, cut

out with the same template to offer supposedly original, unique features. Policies associated with a neoliberal conception of nature, in which nature is produced under the protective notion of a free market, will undoubtedly bring about further tensions between local development and conservation by attempting to reconcile practices that are based on contradictory premises.

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