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Destination design since the 1960s. Image and identity from the perspective of communication design in the Emilia-Romagna Adriatic coast

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Abstract

This study investigates the evolution of destination branding along the Emilia-Romagna Adriatic coast since the 1960s, with particular attention to Ferrara and its coastal areas. It analyses how visual communication – encompassing graphic design, photography, and typography – has contributed to shaping the tourism image of the area over time. The research follows a diachronic approach, examining promotional materials from different decades to trace the transformation of branding strategies and the role of visual language in constructing a destination's identity.

Through an analysis of archival brochures, leaflets, and guides, the study explores how visual decisions were made in relation to four key thematic constructs: culture, nature, entertainment, and relaxation. The findings reveal a progressive shift from spontaneous and fragmented promotional efforts to more structured and coordinated branding strategies, reflecting broader changes in tourism marketing. Notably, it emerges that materials aimed at international audiences were often direct adaptations of Italian-language versions, rather than being specifically designed for foreign tourists. This raises questions about the effectiveness of such strategies in communicating a distinctive and appealing identity on a global scale.

Furthermore, the study highlights the impact of technological advancements, from analogue print media to digital platforms, in redefining the tools and aesthetics of tourism promotion. The research ultimately emphasises the critical role of strategic communication and visual consistency in enhancing a destination's competitiveness. By providing insights into the historical evolution of tourism branding, the study contributes to ongoing discussions on how communication design influences the perception and success of tourist destinations.

Keywords: Tourism design; visual identity; destination branding; communication strategies; Emilia-Romagna coast

[1] The essay resulted from the joint work of the authors. Paragraphs 1-2 are attributed to Veronica Dal Buono, paragraphs 4-5 are attributed to both; paragraph 3 to Laura Bortoloni.

1. Introduction. Emilia-Romagna Adriatic coast: tourist imaginary and the role of visual communication design

When we use the term *tourism* in the sense of *tourism offer*, we refer to a product with a strong intangible and experiential component, where the client plays a critical role. Pencarelli and Splendiani (2010) argue that, in tourism, the product that is demanded and offered is an experience-product, (…) an intangible and experiential product in which the client actively participates. (2010: 95, [own translation])

Tourists' mental images of a destination are shaped by their expectations, which can be influenced by a complex blend of narratives, descriptive texts, opinions, and visual stimuli such as photographs, illustrations, and videos. These linguistic and visual elements weave together to create a traveller's imaginary world, preparing them for an experience that will later be assessed, either consciously or unconsciously, in comparison to the reality of their actual visit (Gravari-Barbas and Graburn, 2012).

The personal mental representation each individual constructs and nurtures regarding a destination forms the basis of their tourism choice. The subsequent experience will be evaluated positively or negatively depending on how well the tangible services and products offered align with the tourist's anticipatory expectations. As Mark Twain illustrated in "The Innocents Abroad, or the New Pilgrims' Progress" (1869: ch. XIV), tourists often compare their preconceived images of a place with the reality of their visit.

> We went to see the Cathedral of Notre Dame. We had heard of it before. It surprises me sometimes to think how much we *do* know and how intelligent we are. We recognised the brown old Gothic pile in a moment; *it was like the pictures*.

As D'Eramo underlines (2017: 42), Twain articulates a cognitive process inherent in the human need to compare one's mental image of a destination with empirical reality.

Among the various factors contributing to the construction of a destination's identity (as word of mouth, travel programmes, film induced tourism…), tourism promotion materials (TPMs) play a significant role. In tourism marketing, images and visual representations accompany the narrative and are complementary to it (in some cases, such as with maps, the visual component dominates over the written one).

This research analyses the Emilia-Romagna coast by examining the relationship between image and text — considered in its graphical and visual composition — in the creation of territorial identity, through the lens of visual communication design. It investigates the evolution of identity construction strategies aimed at attracting international tourism, from the pre-digital era to the digital age. Graphic design culture possesses the tools to observe a brand, addressing not only design but also critical reflection on destination branding (Bonini Lessing, 2009: 10). In our analysis, the linguistic choices made to promote tourism are observed in relation to the images (photos or illustrations), colours, typography and maps. These visual choices are studied for their ability to connote the tourism promotion message (Candelo, 2009: 3). The analysis focuses on institutional materials designed for a non-Italian audience, examining how the messages have been adapted for an international audience.

The perceptions tourists form about a destination, based on both linguistic and visual stimuli, contribute to the broader concept of *destination identity*. A tourist destination can be seen as a package that integrates the territory with various services and products, even before becoming part of the formal tourism industry (Pencarelli and Splendiani, 2010: 3). This identity is shaped not just by what the place physically offers but by the images and narratives attached to it, influenced by both existing cultural references and strategic branding efforts.

Drawing on the experience economy model (Pine and Gilmore, 2013: 22), the perception of a destination goes beyond its physical characteristics, encompassing the emotional and cognitive impressions it evokes. These impressions are shaped partly by an imaginary constructed in times prior to tourist promotion, partly by the lived experience of tourists but, we suggest, mostly by the branding strategies and destination design. The promotional tools used will also have brought in symbolic references from a variety of fields, such as literature and cinema, enriching the destination's identity and messaging.

The tourist image, on the other hand, is a composite interplay of the communication intentions of the designers, the on-site activities conducted by the operators, and the individual tourist's own experiences.

The tourist image, enhancing the concept already expressed by Urry (1990) and Dann (1996), integrates their focus on tourist perception with the influence of branding strategies and destination design, highlighting how the tourist image is the result of a complex interaction between the

communicative intentions of communication designers, the practical activities of operators, and the individual experiences of tourists.

One goal of this research is to understand how these tools have evolved over time and how the interplay of language, image, and branding has shaped perceptions of the Emilia-Romagna coast. Amlesu's four mental representations, culture, nature, entertainment and relaxation, "the pillars of tourism" (2011: 128) serve as the thematic filter through which the documents are analysed. This framework allows for a focused exploration of how each of these elements is represented and communicated in the tourism promotion materials associated with the Emilia-Romagna coast.

The research will focus on the following questions: how the constructs of culture, nature, entertainment, and relaxation apply to the Emilia-Romagna coast; how these constructs are communicated through recognisable and explicit visual design tools; whether there is a noticeable connection between iconographic, graphic, and chromatic elements and the emerging themes in promotional materials; and how the evolution of visual languages has marked the different phases of tourism promotion.

Additionally, as destinations evolve in their branding and identity formation, the Emilia-Romagna coast can be viewed as a dynamic *corporate* entity. Over time, distinct territorial brands have emerged, represented by distinctively different symbols and logotypes. The research will also assess the current positioning strategies of both the Region of Emilia-Romagna as a whole and the individual entities within it, in terms of destination branding and city brands.

2. Review of the literature on regional distinctions, development and branding strategies

The Region of Emilia-Romagna, as the name itself highlights, is made up of two distinct areas, both geographically and sociologically, with distinct identities and cultural characteristics. Taking into account only the provinces of the region that face the Adriatic Sea, the area of the Province of Ferrara belongs to Emilia, while the Provinces of Ravenna, Forlì-Cesena and Rimini belong to Romagna.

Although more recent promotional strategies tend to refer to Romagna as including the entire Emilia-Romagna coast, the Romagna Riviera is commonly (and historically) referred to as only part of the coast south of Reno River, watercourse flowing south of the Po River and into

the Adriatic Sea, which marks the geographical boundary between the provinces of Ravenna and Ferrara.[2] The coast in the Province of Ferrara, located further north, includes seven beach areas known as the Lidi di Comacchio (or Lidi Ferraresi), which are part of the Delta Po Park.

The Riviera romagnola is a renowned coastal tourist destination. Patrizia Battilani, a specialist in the history of tourism, has coined it as the "joyful coast" in contrast to Ferrara's "silent coast" (2015), which has received less media and promotional attention. This has led to a perception of tranquillity and peace, compared to Riviera romagnola. The joyful coast was already seeing significant growth in tourism in the 1950s, while the silent coast[3] only became a tourist destination in the late 1960s, attracting mainly family tourism and second homers (Rodella, Corbau, and Simeoni, 2017: 36). The Ferrara area has a varied, changing, hybrid identity (Gavioli, 2011: 93) and has never been considered a single, organic territorial entity compared to Riviera romagnola. Both the joyful and the silent coasts will be discussed in this paper, with a special focus on the Lidi di Comacchio. TPM from the Ferrara tourist board will also be included in this analysis. Ferrara itself is 60 km from the coast, but its promotional material has at times included the coastal area, including the seven Lidi.

From the perspective of tourist hospitality, the joyful Riviera is mainly hotel-based, while Ferrara's silent coast offers accommodation mainly through privately owned secondary residences (Galvani, 1995: 28). This aspect has shaped the region's promotional strategies. Nonetheless, the silent coast has followed the same evolutionary phases of tourism as identified by Battilani (2015), including the rise of mass tourism, periods of decline, and the ongoing transformation into a postmodern tourism paradigm.

The southern area of the Province of Ferrara, known *bassa* (low plains) has long been associated with difficult living conditions (Scandurra, 2020: 17). This territory, characterized by marshy and reclaimed landscapes, has seen limited tourism development, remaining an intermediate zone between the city of Ferrara and the coast of the seven Lidi di Comacchio.

[2] The Romagna Riviera, for example, excludes the coastal areas in the Province of Ferrara. It unfolds from the Province of Ravenna – particularly Cervia – down to Cattolica, notably including Gabicce. Although Gabicce is part of the Marche Region, it marks the region border, lying just before the natural separator of Mount San Bartolo.

[3] This area only partially overlaps with the protected area of the "Po Delta Regional Park of Emilia-Romagna", an institution that would be established decades later, in 1988, preceded in 1978 by the Regional Law of December 7, 1978, No. 47, concerning the Protection and Use of the Territory, relating to wetland, delta, and valley areas.

In the most recent promotional documents produced by the Region of Emilia-Romagna, we notice a connection between topics such as nature and outdoor, wellness and the *riviera*[4]. The focus on the environment is part of a traditional representation of the Po Delta ("Il Po del '900: arte, cinema, letteratura": 1995) with an emphasis on its rich ecosystem as a landscape by human and natural efforts, adorned with bodies of water, lush vegetation, and remarkable wildlife. This depiction of the Po Delta echoes the narratives established by journalists, filmmakers, and photographers who explored and *unveiled* these areas in the 20th century (Scandurra, 2020: 246). From such an environmental perspective, the Ferrara area has been promoted as a tourist destination with potential yet to be exploited, whereas the Romagna part, has been perceived to have attained a level of developmental maturity (Punzo and Usai, 2007: 150).

Our interpretive approach to the documents aims to capture these reflections, through the observation of tourist documentary material. In the next paragraph, we will describe how the research and classification phase of the sources and data took place.

3. Data and methodology

The research followed three key stages: identifying primary and secondary sources, analysing archival materials, and categorising TPM based on visual and linguistic elements. The approach is qualitative and diachronic, enabling an examination of how communication strategies have evolved over time. This process aligns with the research aim of understanding how language, image, and branding interplay in shaping perceptions of the Emilia-Romagna coast.

The data found came mainly from four sources: the Italian National Tourist Board (ENIT), the Archive of the Province of Ferrara, the Tourist Information Office (IAT) of the Municipality of Ferrara, and the Municipality of Comacchio.

The materials in English span from the 1960 and clearly refer back to earlier publications in English, which highlights the international dimension of tourism promotion at that time, compared for example to that of Salento (see Katan and Egidio, this issue).

[4] https://emiliaromagnaturismo.it/en/riviera/green-areas-riviera-municipalities [retrieved December, 2024].

The selection criterion was that of "overall quality of the visible". This concept refers not only to the aesthetic and communicative effectiveness of the entire booklet or brochure but also emphasizes the importance of design in achieving a cohesive message. The overall impact of the material is assessed in terms of harmony and compositional consistency between text and visual elements, such as photographs, illustrations, maps, and logos. The role of the graphic designer is crucial here, as they are responsible for the visual coherence and the way the message is framed and communicated.

The cataloguing was carried out using a basic template, integrated with entries for graphic design and layout. [Table 1, Appendix]

From the 1960s to the 1990s, prior to the advent of digital systems, tourism promotion predominantly relied on analogue mediums such as brochures, foldable leaflets, and guides which did not always explicitly state their creation dates. Therefore, the creation dates have been deduced, derived from the identification of logos from governmental or other institutional entities, along with other contextual factors such as visual design.

The first branding "Ferrara Terra e Acqua" [Ferrara Land and Water] (1998) serves as a crucial marker for dating. Subsequently, within the complex promotional framework encompassing Ferrara, its province, and its coasts, the period spanning 2003 to 2005 saw the initial appearance of the logotype specifically created for the Emilia-Romagna Po Delta Park.

During this period, various specialised promotional materials were produced, either singularly branded or in collaboration with other organisations; simultaneously, there was a growing recognition and valorisation of the Po Delta's natural heritage, expanding the interest in tourism beyond traditional beach vacations.

The filter of the constructs of culture, nature, entertainment and relaxation (Amlesu, 2000) provide an additional layer for reading the documents. The connection between iconographic, graphic, and chromatic elements and the emerging themes in promotional materials is explored. The study also traces how iconographic trends have evolved in line with the changes in tourism experiences promoted in the new millennium.

4. Evolution of visual language and branding processes

The research focused on the progression of strategies deployed to entice non-Italian tourists, from the pre-digital period to the advent of web communication. It examined the composition of text and image, the formats and media employed, their functionality for multilingual translation, and the application of colour, typographic and iconographic systems (including illustrations or photography), all aimed at defining a "coordinated image", which serves as the graphic expression of the broader corporate identity (Henrion and Parkin, 1967: 7). These documents highlight the evolution of iconography and were compared to the prevailing visual tastes of the time.

This research examines a period marked by one of the most significant technological shifts in the history of graphic design and printing. From the 1950s onwards, letterpress composition and printing were gradually replaced by phototypesetting techniques, which enabled faster production of films and plates for lithographic printing – the process used for most of the materials analysed in this study.

A second major transformation occurred from the mid-1980s onwards, with the advent of digital composition, which revolutionized not only visual possibilities but also the availability and distribution of typefaces. Titles, which were previously hand-drawn and culturally embedded, began to be replaced by widely available international typefaces. This was made possible by the proliferation of digital fonts, which introduced standardized, globally accessible options and diminished the role of manual, culturally specific lettering.

During the 1980s and 1990s, professional design studios progressively adopted computer-based tools and desktop publishing platforms. This shift led to new methods for text composition and image processing, though early versions of the software imposed significant constraints. Limited to basic grid structures and elementary visual effects, these tools initially curtailed the creative possibilities available to designers. Nevertheless, they also introduced novel opportunities for graphic composition, laying the groundwork for a new phase in the production of tourism-related materials.

Example 1980s. Visual language development, overcoming digital constraints. As an example, we will analyse a cardboard leaflet entitled Italia Riviera Adriatica dell'Emilia-Romagna (Figure 1), although it is written in English, designed and produced by Studio Touripla - Tourist Planning

Rimini. It features photographs taken by Gianni Grazia and produced by Renografica-Bologna in 1980. Among the TPMs recovered, this folder stands out as one of the most significant examples of 1980s graphic design. The work exemplifies and reflects the qualitative potential of design at the time, demonstrating how emerging technologies were beginning to influence graphic design, despite the limitations of early desktop publishing software. The commission for this work was provided by the "Region of Emilia-Romagna Local Authorities and Tourist Bodies of the Adriatic Riviera of Emilia-Romagna - Consortium for the promotion and collective tourist propaganda of the Adriatic Riviera of Emilia-Romagna". Notably, the consortium's logo is prominently displayed on the portfolio's cover.

The artefact consists of a folder with a handle and pocket (22 x 40 cm), which contains 22 slightly smaller, foldable and non-foldable, information cards. These cards are dedicated to entertainment activities, to the cultural and natural heritage of the area. The publication was available in four languages: Italian, German, English, and French, all within the same folder.

The unique design of the layout suggests an overall vision and narrative for the various destinations. The storytelling is polyphonic, where the portrayal of the territory is constructed through its various aspects, not just the seaside. The cover presents a title ingeniously crafted with a sans-serif type, designed to form a logotype that delineates the trajectory and contour of the riviera, serving almost as a secondary logo. The layout is extremely strict in the formats, adhering to the dimensions even when switching languages; the focal point of interest is the photographic collection. The photographs, of exceptional calibre and in stark contrast with other materials in the corpus, elevate the value of this particular publication. The photographic assemblage is not only aesthetically compelling but is also richly varied in its depiction of environments and populated landscapes. Furthermore, it includes meticulous close-ups of artisanal instruments and gastronomic offerings, captured in carefully staged shots – a type of photography that is rare in the tourism promotional materials examined during the research.

The main themes proposed in the folder reflect the four previously mentioned themes (Amlesu, 2011): culture with "Historical and art treasures", "Traditional handcrafts", nature with "The clean sea", "The land, the landscape", entertainment with "Excursions", "Sports and recreational facilities", "How to reach...", and relaxation with "The spas", "Accommodation and facilities", "Food and drink". They are followed by

an equal number of individual cards each dedicated to a specific location along the coast (Lidi di Comacchio, Ravenna, Gatteo a mare, Cesenatico, Cervia-Milano Marittima, San Mauro a mare, Bellaria-Igea marina, Riccione, Rimini, Misano Adriatico, Cattolica). These sheets present a list of activities to do and things not to miss, creating a very effective overall vision that integrates the four elements. Thanks to the consistent graphic design, the Emilia-Romagna coast emerges as a unique product, not divided into its northern and southern areas.

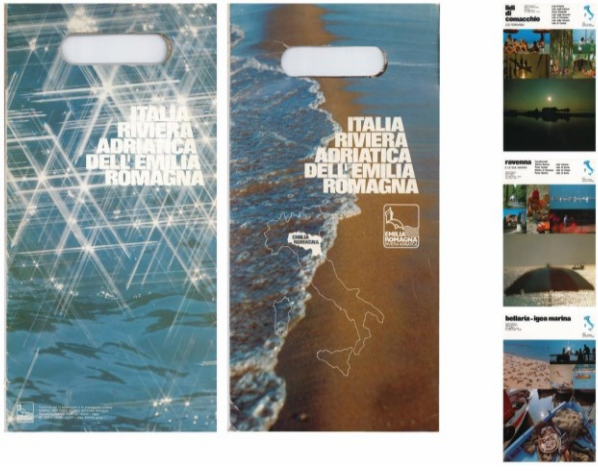


Figure 1: *"Italia Riviera Adriatica dell'Emilia-Romagna ", Studio Touripla - Tourist Planning Rimini, 1980*

The evolution of visual language of TPM can be explained by several interconnected factors. First, technological innovations played a crucial role in this transformation. The shift from black and white to colour photography (1970s), the introduction of digital graphics software (1990s), and the spread of the web have radically changed how tourist destinations are promoted. Simultaneously, transformations within the tourism sector have significantly influenced communication strategies. The advent of mass tourism, the subsequent crisis (Battilani, 2015), and the transition toward more sustainable and experience-oriented tourism have led to a shift in marketing priorities. Furthermore, the role of public institutions has been pivotal. A growing awareness of the importance of communication and branding has prompted local and regional administrations to invest in the creation of coordinated visual identities.

As previously mentioned, visual culture evolved considerably during this period. Concurrently, there was both a growth in communication

agencies and the emergence of the Italian phenomenon of "grafica di pubblica utilità" (communication design for public use), an understanding of how visual projects could enhance the effectiveness of institutional communication. Graphic designers involved in public communication were aware of how a well-coordinated and systematic visual approach could significantly improve the communication of institutions. (our translation) (Sinni *et al.*, 2021: 47).

The research findings from the archives highlight how attention to integrated and coordinated branding strategies, which take into account the unique characteristics of each area, has emerged progressively. The results suggest that the awareness of the importance of integrated communication systems has grown over time within Italian public administrations, leading to an approach that combines visual and linguistic elements with consistent branding only in the last two decades.

Ferrara's TPM. The TPM related to the Ferrara area available in the archives, consistently reflected international stylistic influences, albeit with a few years' delay. For example, design elements characteristic of the International Typographic Style (also known as the Swiss Style) such as the composition aligned on the left, and the use of grotesque sans serif typefaces, which dominated the visual communication of the 1970s, appear in brochures dating back to the 1980s, such as "Ferrara Italy" (Figure 5, Appendix). Later graphic styles were adopted more rapidly, particularly those of the 1990s, when desktop publishing facilitated the fragmentation of typography, the layering of graphic elements, and the use of 'eroded' typefaces, as in *The Park by Bike* (1997) and *Parco del Delta del Po Guide* (1998) (Figure 7, Appendix).

The concept of cultural heritage clearly emerges in the visual choices of the narrative concerning the historic city of Ferrara, which goes back at least to the year 1938, with a publication by ENIT that prominently displays the city of Ferrara on its frontispiece. Inside, the text and images outline the cultural heritage of Ferrara, concluding with a mention of its "surroundings", briefly touching on the landmark near the Po Delta (the Pomposa Abbey and the town of Comacchio), but notably omitting the Lidi of Comacchio, which at the time had not yet become a tourist destination.

Photography. In terms of image, the portrayal of cultural heritage has advanced greatly. Firstly, photography has evolved from black and white to colour, marking a significant shift in presentation style. With the spread of colour, at the end of the 1970s, photography developed technically but also creatively, in particular with regard to architecture. As a consequence,

professional photographers were visibly credited. Apart from photographs, stylised representations of architectural monuments, illustrations and supporting text have also notably changed from traditional hand-drawn methods to modern vector drawing techniques (Figure 2).

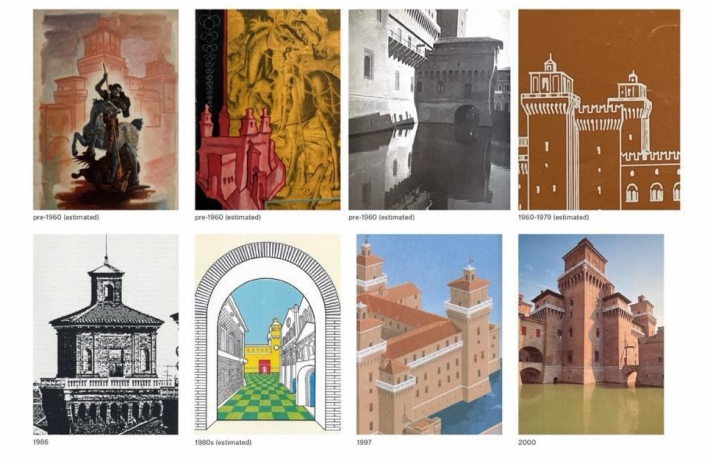


Figure 2: *The Castle of Ferrara in various styles of graphic representation*



Figure 3: *"Ferrara", ENIT, circa 1938. © ENIT – at IAT Archive, Ferrara*

Colour. Analysing the formats found from the 1960s to the 2000s, a pattern in the utilisation of colour as an identifying code also emerges, carrying significant implications and connoting the systems of culture, nature, and entertainment.

As a colour used for graphic elements that complement or serve as background for texts and images, a spectrum of warm tones, particularly variations of red was frequently associated with cultural artefacts of Ferrara, following the tradition. Indeed, there is a shade locally known as *rosso ferrarese*

(Ferrara red), an explicit reference to the red of the bricks ubiquitous in the city, and the only colour of the curtains permitted in the historic centre. We found it repeatedly, from the earliest documents on, in various dark shades of red to brown, in numerous designs specifically reproducing the city's drapery or as the colour marking the culture heritage. This *rosso ferrarese* can be found inside the publications and even more so on the covers (Figures 2 and 3].

Conversely a broad spectrum of blues and greens is used to represent the coastal and delta areas and the natural environment in general. This trend reaches its peak in the corporate identity created for the Emilia-Romagna Po Delta Park (Figure 8, Appendix).

The adoption of a vibrant colour palette becomes emblematic of leisure and recreational activities of the Lidi di Comacchio, where entertainment and relaxation coexist. This preference for vivid and saturated colours is further mirrored in the selection of photographic images for promotional materials. Furthermore, if architecture photography seeks the most appropriate views for a complete shot, the images depicting leisure activities are marked by more conventional stylistic choices, describing carefree fun with clichés as the beach lifestyle.

The collected materials highlight how the first coordinated approaches and actions were implemented as early as the 1970s on printed media. Although it is not yet possible to speak of a fully integrated visual system, some multi-subject artifacts employ chromatic variations to distinguish communication needs in multiple languages. It is clear that the materials were initially created in Italian, for the Italian tourism market, and then translated for foreign tourism, maintaining the same formats.

For example, the "Ferrara" series of brochures (Figure 4, Appendix), datable to the second half of the 1970s, presents a chromatic variation that alternates green and brick as a background for a series of negative silhouettes of monuments. What identifies the publications in English is solely the addition of the word "ITALIA" on the cover, written in Italian, intended to establish the context for a foreign audience. This visual and textual cue helps immediately establish the geographical and cultural reference, making it easier for non-Italian speakers to recognize and connect with the destination being promoted. In this example, multiple visual languages – descriptive, narrative illustrations, icons and photography all contribute to the construction of the visual language.

The TPM that can be attributed to the 1980s exhibit increased visual coherence, aligning more closely with today's concept of a coordinated

image. Notably, the brochure series "Ferrara Italy" (Figure 5), including "Ferrara Lidi di Comacchio on the road", is recognised by its square symbol, reminiscent of the decorative motifs found on the Palazzo dei Diamanti. This collection introduced an expanded chromatic palette, incorporating yellows, greens, blues, ochres, and reds into its visual lexicon, although a consistent denotative use is not always maintained. Red, for example, is used for both language and theme. In this series of brochures the word "ITALIA" in uppercase, present on all the Italian copies, is translated as "Italy" in lowercase on the covers of the brochures in English.

Multi-subject initiatives with chromatic variations for different languages, such as the foldable posters produced by the Tourist Promotion Agency (APT) of the Province of Ferrara (datable to the 1980s-1990s) (Figure 6, Appendix), indicate an attempt at graphic coordination towards the establishment of a territorial brand. Titles such as "Ferrara and its art centres", "Comacchio and its sea", "The Po Delta and the 'Valli' of Comacchio" and incorporate a colour-coded system on their covers – red for Ferrara, blue for Comacchio, and green for the Po Delta – while maintaining a consistent typographic design across all languages. The titles are kept typographically consistent across all languages, but the original language is Italian. This suggests that the focus was on visual consistency rather than a complete linguistic adaptation for the international audience.

Visuals. The available evidence indicates a gradual and not entirely homogeneous evolution of visual language, rather than the implementation of a coherent, long-term communication strategy. TPM analysed seem to result from autonomous design interventions rather than from a systematic, multi-year planning framework.

A significant aspect to highlight is that all the documents intended for the international audience are not the result of a specific strategy tailored to this target group, rather they appear as adaptations of pre-existing content designed for the Italian tourism market.

This is evident from in the consistent use of standardized formats and narrative structures, which convey a homogeneous representation of culture, nature, entertainment, and relaxation.

In many cases, the English-language materials can be classified as "unforeseen" translations (see Katan and D'Egidio, this issue) of content initially conceived for an Italian-speaking audience. Alternatively, they consist of texts designed from the beginning to be multilingual, incorporating Italian, English and additional languages. Furthermore, it was not uncommon to find flyers and brochures displaying Italian titles on

the cover, accompanied only by a graphic label indicating the multilingual nature of the content – a phenomenon also observed in the Salento corpus (see also Katan and D'Egidio, this issue).



Figure 9: *The logotype "Ferrara" and various lettering styles*

Logotype. The evolution of the "Ferrara" logotype across various communication materials follows a non-linear trajectory, as illustrated in Figure 9. Initially, the logotype featured hand-drawn creative lettering, but over time, it underwent several stylistic shifts, alternating between sans, slab and serif fonts, as well as between uppercase and lowercase forms. It was only in the 1990s, with the rise of coordinated visual identity concepts, that graphic choices began to standardize.

The fonts, the use of colour, and the iconographic elements evolved in response to technological advances, aesthetic trends, and the role of public administrations in investing in professional graphic designers for coordinated branding.

These fluctuations in Ferrara's visual identity – encompassing its city, Lidos, and the Po Delta – must also be considered within the broader context of shifting tourism management policies. Frequent regulatory changes transferred responsibilities between various entities, including APTs, Product Unions (business aggregations for tourism development), Municipalities, and Regions.

However, it was between the 1990s and early 2000s that the "grafica di pubblica utilità" (communication design for public use) were widely applied in Italy, leading to the widespread adoption of coordinated institutional imagery in the public administration (Piscitelli, 2019:156). This

shift is particularly evident in the Region of Emilia-Romagna , particularly in Ferrara and other coastal cities.

City branding. In 1998, the Municipality of Ferrara revised its logo, a task executed by the distinguished designer Andrea Rauch, also author of the visual identity manual (Rauch, 1998). This rebranding was enhanced by the adoption of the Optima typeface by Herman Zapf. [Figure 10].

In 2000, the design firm Relè and Dolcini Associati, with Leonardo Sonnoli, undertook a similar project for the Municipality of Rimini, extending beyond the coat of arms to include a comprehensive graphic system with typographic choices and a colour palette. Between 2003 and 2005, Image Studio in Ravenna designed the logo for the Emilia-Romagna Po Delta Park.

As institutional communication systems were established, there was an increasing need for distinctive brands to promote tourism. For instance, between 1995 and 1998, the "Ravenna around. Green, Blue, Gold" brand was created by the Tourism Department of the Province of Ravenna in collaboration with Image and Dolcini Associati (original translation of "Ravenna Intorno. Verde, Azzurro, Oro").

In 1998, Province of Ferrara launched the "Ferrara Terra e Acqua" logo, which became the symbol of the area for the next two decades, and was formalized with an official manual in 2008 by the Province of Ferrara and the Ferrara Chamber of Commerce. This logo, which lacked an English translation of its slogan, was linked to the regional efforts of Emilia-Romagna 's branding, sharing visual elements with the "Emilia-Romagna Land with a Soul" logo (used by APT until 2019, original translation of "Emilia-Romagna Terra con l'Anima"), which colour-coded the region: red for art cities, green for the Apennines, and blue for the Adriatic coast. The reference to red for culture, and green and blue for natural areas, persists.

The branding of "Ferrara Terra e Acqua" also marked a shift in how the area was perceived and presented, for the first time giving equal prominence to both *land* (the land of Ferrara) and *water* (the Po River, its Delta, and the coastal area). This visual emphasis on the connection between land and water underscored the geographical and cultural significance of the area, highlighting not only Ferrara's rich history and cultural heritage but also its proximity to water. It is important to note that this logo, has always appeared solely in Italian, a significant contrast to the English-only branding strategies employed by other coastal destinations such as Rimini and Salento (see Katan and Egidio, this issue).

However, following 2016, tourism responsibilities reverted back to the Regions, and Emilia-Romagna chose to abandon the old branding for a new design featuring 10 silhouettes that symbolise the stones of Via Emilia, transforming the rays into a circular motif. This was accompanied by the development of new brand identities for the destinations. Among these, the standout is "Romagna La terra della dolce vita / Romagna The Italian land of dolce vita / Romagna Italienisches Dolce Vita" (Brand conjugated in Italian, English and German in an official form).

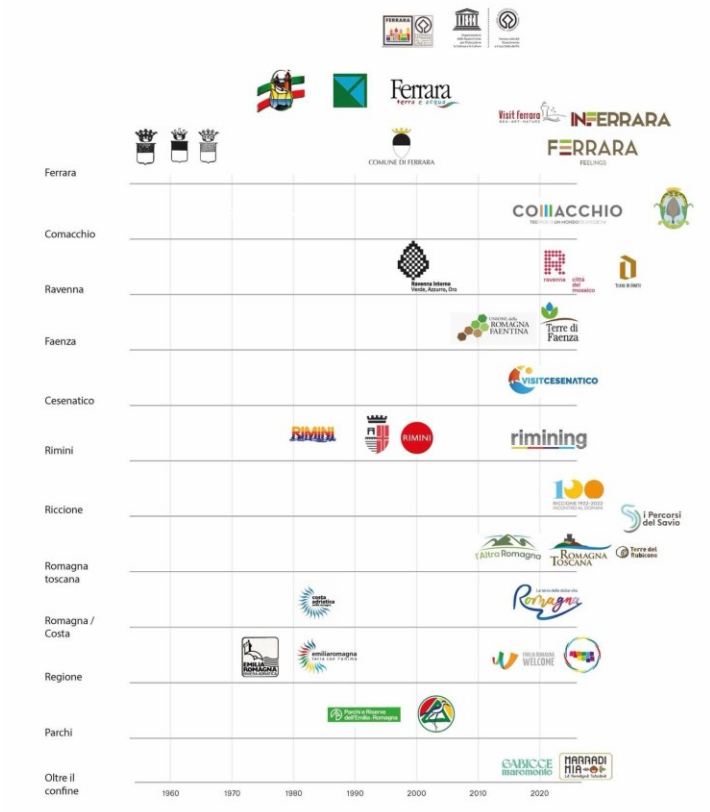


Figure 10: *Branding of the Emilia-Romagna coast. Elaboration by the authors*

This shift in governance caused a period of uncertainty in many areas, including Ferrara, regarding the formation and administration of tourism identities. This period saw various efforts to establish a new tourism identity that could either inherit or reimagine the narrative of "Ferrara Terra e Acqua". Initially, there was "FERRARA Feelings", which ran concurrently

with a coordinated tourism logo for Comacchio. This then evolved into "INFERRARA", the present brand and marketing strategy for the city's tourism services, which is less focused on creating an image that connects the city to its surrounding lands and the Po Delta. It is noted that, due to this last shift of competencies, Ferrara, its Province and the seven Lidi di Comacchio, though geographically and culturally considered part of the Emilia area, even by their own inhabitants, ultimately became part of the "VisitRomagna " promotional brand.

The case of Rimini, as the quintessential seaside resort city for tourism, is worth attention. As early as 1981, Rimini adopted a distinctive tourist logo, designed by Gambarini e Muti studio, with rounded lettering in coloured stripes that mirrors itself in the water – an iconic design so enduring that it was repurposed in 2023 as one of the emblems of the Summerpride (event held during the summer, celebrating diversity, inclusivity, and equality). In 2016, the city introduced a unifying brand called "Rimining", a clever play on words that incorporates the city's name and ends with the "-ing" suffix, symbolising the ceaseless flurry of activities and the ongoing evolution of Rimini's tourism offerings. The visual identity for this brand was masterfully conceived by Leonardo Sonnoli, whose graphic design work offers an interpretation of the brand's essence [Figure 10]. If Rimini can be called the "heart", the fulcrum of the Romagna, the definition of "joyful" can be read in the branding strategy adopted over time and in the ability of this latest project, "Rimining", to connect with international tourism.

5. Conclusions

The analysis of tourism promotional materials for the Emilia-Romagna Adriatic coast, from 1960 to the advent of the web, has shown how the construction of a destination's tourism identity is a dynamic and complex process, influenced by the continuous interaction between text, image, and branding strategies. Although there is no direct evidence of the effects of these design transformations on the success of promotional campaigns, the evolution of strategies suggests a shift from a more spontaneous and fragmented approach, typical of the 1960s and 1970s, to a more structured and strategic model, characterized by cohesive visual identities and the creation of distinct territorial brands, responding to cultural trends and changes in marketing practices.

Representations of culture, nature, recreation, and relaxation – topics well aligned with the actual tourism offerings of the Emilia-Romagna coast – have been distinguished by colour. Ferrara has built its image around art and history (shades of red), while the Po Delta and Lidi di Comacchio have focused on environmental appeal and family tourism, using (blue, green).

Although the visual components and images were largely retained in the English versions, this decision ensured that the visual identity of the destination remained consistent and easily recognisable, both nationally and internationally. Over the years, the administrations that commissioned the tourism materials seem to have preserved the authenticity of the destination in this way, maintaining a consistent image across different languages and cultures and focusing on a visual representation that embodies its essence.

We should also point out the limitations to this research. First, it has relied on archived promotional materials, which has not preserved all the examples of institutional tourism promotion in the area. Also, the study has primarily examined the perspective of public institutions, and not those of other actors, such as tourists, or private stakeholders. Finally, the research focused on printed promotional formats and did not include any digital formats.

Future studies could expand the scope to include online platforms, to better understand how digital communication influences Ferrara's tourism identity and how travellers contribute to this process through shared narratives and experiences. Furthermore, future research could assess the effectiveness of different branding strategies by evaluating their impact on tourist perception and engagement. New studies could also explore the role of sustainable and responsible tourism in destination branding and promotion.

In conclusion, the research highlights the evolution and development of tourism promotion strategies, emphasizing the growing synergy between various communication channels, including language, graphic design, and marketing. While the effectiveness of these strategies remains a subject for future research, the study underscores the importance of strategic planning and the collaboration of experts from different fields in crafting cohesive messages. Furthermore, it calls for continued dialogue between academia and key stakeholders in the tourism sector to inform policy and investment decisions. The insights gained from past promotional practices offer valuable perspectives for ongoing discussions about improving sustainability and enhancing the appeal of tourist destinations in the future.

Appendix



Figure 4: *"Ferrara", Provincial bodies to Tourist Promotion Agencies, 1960-1979 (circa)*

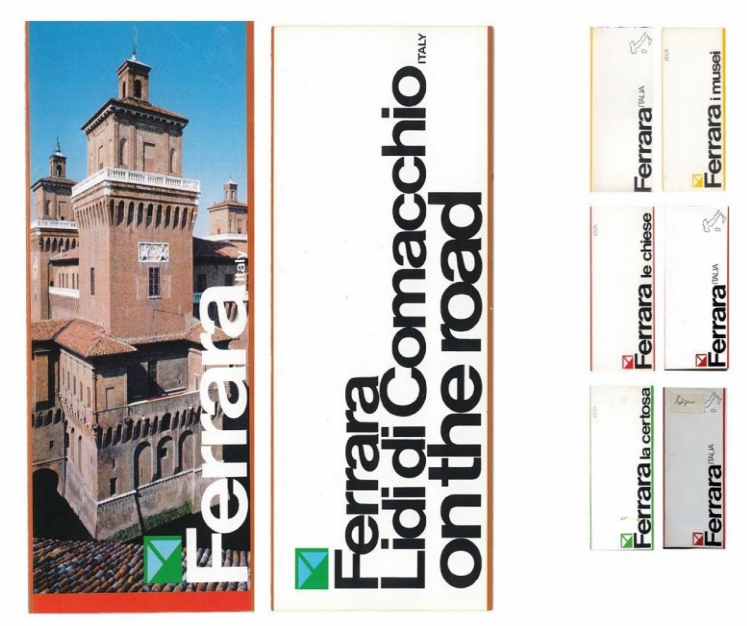


Figure 5: *"Ferrara Italy", Ferrara Lidi di Comacchio on the road, 1980s (circa)*



Figure 6: *Multi-subject promotional series, Ferrara APT, 1980-1990 (estimated)*



Figure 7: *1990s graphic style: Parco del Delta del Po Guide, 1998; The Park by Bike, 1997*



Figure 8: *Coordinated system for the Po Delta Park highlighting the use of green and blue, 2010*

Title
Subtitle
Format
Years
Year of print
Year of reprint
Destination
Topics
Edition
Producer organization
Patronages, partnerships
Sponsors, fundings, programs
Publisher
ISBN
place of publication
Curator
Editorial staff
Copywriting
Translations
Editing
Languages
Part of a series / collection
Editorial staff
Graphic design
Photographer
Map designer
Illustrator
Printer
Photolitograhy service
Paper
Size
Size (spread)
Binding
Number of pages
Flaps
Folding
Printing technique
Colours
Tags
Archive
Box / Collocation
Type of acquisition
File name
Notes
Related website

Table 3: The implemented project's analysis card. Elaboration by the authors

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