

In the early 2000s, Estonia and Latvia adopted nation branding strategies as a means of progressing their transition towards becoming European Union and NATO member states. While both states inherited very similar regional identities centred on a Baltic regional grouping, Estonia and Latvia diverged in their incorporation of this Baltic regional identity into their nation branding strategies, with Latvia foregrounding its Baltic identity while Estonia demonstrated a pivot towards a Nordic identity, while minimising Baltic dimensions. While previous research in this field has predominantly taken a country-by-country approach to nation brand analysis, this paper takes a comparative content analysis methodology in order to identify differences across strategies over time. Through a content analysis of nation branding materials issued by Estonia and Latvia between 2001 and 2020, this paper demonstrates that these countries have adopted strongly differing postures in their nation branding strategies with regards to a Baltic identity. In contrast to other work on this topic, this paper situates the choices made in producing these nation branding strategies in their historical, cultural and economic context in order to draw conclusions as to how a Baltic identity is perceived as being competitive or uncompetitive by those branding Estonia and Latvia. This paper argues that, rather than being singularly reliant on the vision of nation branding professionals, as is often the criticism levelled at the practice of nation branding, the Estonian and Latvian nation branding strategies are constructed through a process of negotiation between governments, citizens, and branding professionals to produce a brand that maximises competitiveness through product differentiation to regional neighbours, creating a state of imperfect competition within the regional marketplace of nations.