

CITY BRANDING WITH STAKEHOLDERS' PARTICIPATION

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Abstract: The article is devoted to city branding. The work presents an outline of the concept and a model of city branding, as well as identifies the brand determinants, relevant for the design and examination of the brand. In the concept and the model presented, the impact of stakeholders on city branding and their role in the image building have been highlighted. The subject of the survey, carried out on a sample of the residents of the city of Rzeszów and the neighboring municipalities, concerned the city's image. Multi-factor analysis was used to analyze the data. The obtained study results allowed for identification of four factors associated with the intangible and the tangible features of the city. The article fills up the gap in the research on the image of Polish cities. It contributes to the understanding of the way, in which city brands are assessed by their stakeholders, and constitutes a guide to the local government practice regarding the orientation of city positioning.

Keywords: city's brand, brand identity, brand image, determinants of city's brand.

1. Introduction

Since the 1990s, place branding has become the subject of interest of local government units (Kavaratzis, 2005). The brand, its identity and image have ceased to be overlooked in the strategic plans of region, municipality and city marketing. This is a result of numerous social, cultural and economic changes that caused, among others, an increase in the polarization of cities and regions, and deepened the differences in access to human resources and investments in individual areas (Szromnik, 2016). As a result, territorial units were forced to compete for the resources needed for development, including attractiveness and retainment of investors, tourists, new residents and a qualified workforce (Pike, 2005; Ashworth, and Kavaratzis, 2009; Moilanen, and Rainisto, 2009).

Interest in the issues associated with brand design, its identity and image has been increasing among the scientific research circles as well (Merrilees et al., 2009; Hankinson, 2005), nevertheless, gaps in the literature on the concept of place branding and image measurement still exist.

The article attempts to fill up the research gap, while presenting the concept of a city's brand and a model for city branding. The purpose of the article is also to identify stakeholder-relevant determinants, used in the assessment of a city's image.

2. City as the subject of branding

The theory of branding (place branding) initially was developed in relation to products, services and organizations. Nevertheless, growing acceptance of the fact that the concept of a brand can be used for places (cities, regions and countries) has been observed, in theory, while in practice, more attempts are made to create brands of specific places (De Chernatony et al., 2011; Anholt, 2010; Govers, and Go, 2009; Kavaratzis, and Ashworth, 2005; Szromnik, 2016). In modern marketing, a product is everything that can be the subject of market exchange, can be acquired or consumed, satisfying someone's desire or need. As such, a product can also be a specific place: city, municipality, region or state (Kotler, and Keller, 2012).

This does not mean that, with regard to a place, the same tools can be used as for goods and services. Some authors emphasize the complexity and convolution of a place as a product and the difficulties associated with place branding (Pike, 2005; Kladou et al., 2017; Kavaratzis, 2005). It has also been underlined, that a place is a complex structure of interrelated tangible and intangible products (services) offered to various users (Szromnik, 2016). Elements of a place as a product include, for example, infrastructure (transportation, housing, business infrastructure), natural, cultural and historical values of the place, services (educational, health, cultural) provided to the public or investors, as well as the residents and entrepreneurs themselves, along with their qualifications, customs and culture (Glińska, 2016).

City branding, therefore, must take into account various components of a city and requires consideration of a wide and diverse group of stakeholders, i.e. the potential and current residents, the enterprises and institutions operating in a given area, investors and tourists (Merrilees et al., 2012; Hankinson, 2005). With regard to larger cities, inclusion of the so-called sub-brands, i.e. organizations conducting their own branding activities, such as large enterprises, institutions, tourist attractions and cyclical cultural or business events, in the city's communication strategy becomes important (Anholt, 2010).

Adaptation of the branding concept to places must also include the political and administrative environment, in which the decisions related to the city's development are made. When creating a place brand, the key role is played by the unit's authorities, which,

in consultation with other entities, set the orientation for the development of the place, as well as coordinate all activities. Due to the principle of office rotation and the subsequent changes in city management, difficulties in maintaining a coherent policy of city branding emerge (Daszkiewicz, 2015). Another problem is that the cities have limited resources available for financing branding activities (Pike, 2005; Hankinson, 2005). Many cities seek support in public-private partnerships, EU structural funds and cohesion policy funds.

Despite these difficulties, many cities carry out place branding activities, consisting in planned management of the city's brand, increasing the attractiveness of the city's offer and building a positive image of the city among its stakeholders (Daszkiewicz, 2015). The aim of these activities is to create competitive advantage, additional value for the city and its stakeholders, as well as economic, political and cultural development of the city (Kaplan et al., 2010; Ashworth, and Kavaratzis, 2009; Kemp et al., 2012).

3. The concept and model of a city's brand

The concept of a brand has changed over time. According to Merz et al., several approaches to defining a brand can be distinguished: the stage of focus on products (years 1900-1930), the stage of focus on the values (years 1930-1990), the stage of focus on the relations (years 1990- 2000), and the stage of focus on the stakeholders (since 2000) (Merz et al., 2009).

Initially, the identification function of a brand was emphasized, while the brand itself added value to the product. The American Marketing Association has defined a brand as: a distinctive name and/or symbol (logo, trademark, packaging design) or a combination thereof, created to allow recognition of the goods or services provided by a seller or a group of sellers, as well as to distinguish these goods/services from those offered by competitors (Kotler, and Gertner, 2002). In this sense, a city's brand includes only the visual symbols associated with the city, e.g. a logo, the coat of arms, the city flag, characteristic colors, an advertising slogan and street markings. Along with rising competition, it became increasingly important to distinguish a given product from among many similar ones. A brand has already been defined as the sum of the product and the certain added value associated with it (Keller, 2013; Kapferer, 2012; De Chernatony et al., 2011).

According to Kavaratzis and Ashworth, a brand is a product or service distinguished by its position in relation to the competition, which constitutes a unique combination of functional features and symbolic values (Kavaratzis, and Ashworth, 2005). Combination of these elements allows for the distinction of a given seller's offer from competitive ones and provides consumers with distinctive benefits: functional ones (related to the way the brand operates) and symbolic or emotional ones (related to what the brand means for a consumer, in abstract sense) (Kotler, Keller, 2012). These benefits, most often, are associated with a given product,

but some of them can be transferred via the brand name or symbol to other products from other product categories (Urbanek, 2002).

At the end of the 20th century, a brand was increasingly often defined as the subject of consumer relations (Hankinson, 2004). According to Hankinson, with respect to a city, the stakeholders' relations with the brand's infrastructure (city architecture, access to various facilities), basic services (e.g. educational, cultural), media relations (marketing communication) and consumer relations (e.g. with residents and employees of public offices) are of significance (Hankinson, 2004).

In relational terms, a brand is also understood as having a personality (Glińska, 2016), while the concept itself is closer to the concept of a brand image. According to Keller, a brand is something that lies in the minds of consumers and reflects their perception (Keller, 2012). A brand of a place is a network of associations existing in the minds of consumers, based on visual, verbal and behavioral means of expressing the place, which are manifested through objectives, communication, values, general culture of the place and its stakeholders, as well as the visual identification system (Zenker, and Martin, 2011). Zenker and Martin define a brand very similarly to an image, emphasizing the fact that a brand should not be identified with the means of communication or physical attributes of a place, but it is the perception of these means expressed in the minds of a given target group or groups of recipients (Zenker, and Martin, 2011).

Since the beginning of the 21st century, the approach to brands and branding has changed further. The evolutionary nature of a brand (Chernatony, 2010), the role of community in branding (Kapferer, 2012) and the impact of other non-customer groups on the brand's value have been emphasized. According to Muniz and O'Guinn, the community created around a brand is a specialized, non-geographically related community of people, who are focused on the brand and connected by social relations (Muniz, and O'Guinn 2001; Merz et al., 2009). Brand users, but also the non-customers who share brand recognition, experience relationships with other community members (Muniz, and O'Guinn 2001) and share, directly or indirectly, their consumer experiences with all members of that community (Merz et al., 2009).

Branding is also influenced by other stakeholders who are interested in development of that brand (with reference to a city's brand, they can include e.g. potential or former residents and entrepreneurs, neighboring municipalities, partner cities) (Chernatony, 2010). The process of co-creating a brand value is a continuous, social, dynamic and interactive process, in which all stakeholders are involved (Merz et al., 2009; Muniz, and O'Guinn 2001). The stakeholders and the company can be viewed as resource integrators, who jointly create the brand value through negotiations with stakeholders (Hankinson, 2004; Hatch, and Schultz, 2010).

The concept of a brand, reconciling the positions discussed above, can also be found in the literature on the subject. According to De Chernatony, a brand can be understood threefold: from a perspective of input (the way managers manage specific resources to influence clients), from a result perspective (the way clients interpret brands and use them to better meet their

needs) and from a time perspective (a brand as a dynamic entity, subject to evolution, in order to adapt to the changing environment) (De Chernatony, 2010).

Two concepts, that are necessary for the understanding of the notion of a brand, correspond with this approach: brand identity and brand image. The easiest way to describe the differences between these concepts has been presented by Aaker, according to whom an image is the way in which a brand is perceived by recipients, while identity is the way in which an organization wants a given brand to be perceived (Aaker, 2012). As such, the actions undertaken by city authorities are related to shaping the city's identity and its elements. The image results from these activities. The relationship between brand identity and brand image is presented in Figure 1.

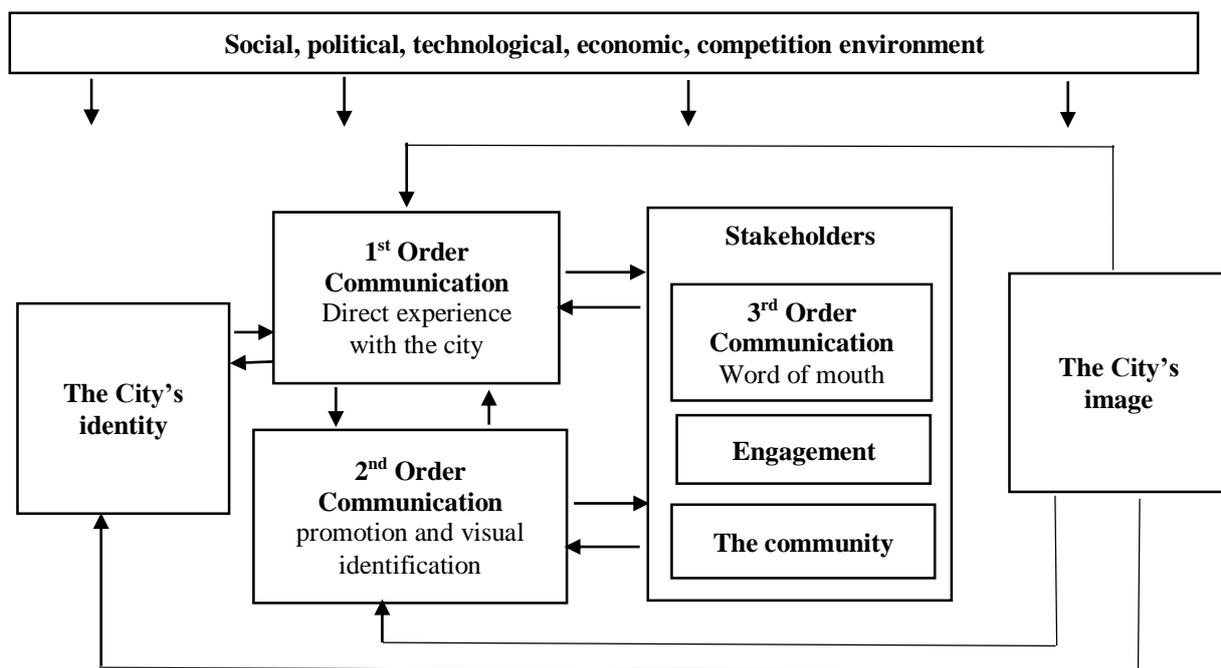


Figure 1. The process of city branding. Source: own elaboration based on Balmer and Gray, 2000; Kapferer, 2012, p. 171.

Brand identity is a combination of an organization's (or city's) personality, expressed through the behavior of the organization and its members, its communication with the environment and the relationships created with the stakeholders (Kapferer, 2012; Balmer, 2008). Brand personality encompasses a set of cultures existing within an organization (or a city), which is reflected in symbolism, communicated to the environment, and influences the behavior of the organization and its members (Dąbrowski, 2010). A city's identity is shaped through planned, long-term activity, consisting in the persuasion of the environment about and dissemination of its characteristic features, properties and functions in the environment. This intentionally compiled collection of information about a place is sent to all groups of internal and external stakeholders, in order to build a positive and competitive image of the place (Szromnik, 2016).

Construction or modification of brand identity should be preceded by a diagnosis of the brand's current situation. The city's image, its surroundings (the social, political, technological, economic and competitive environment), and the main stakeholders of the brand are examined. Stakeholder surveys provide knowledge about how a given city is perceived by various stakeholders and what their needs are. This enables identification of the gaps between the existing image of the city and the desired one, as well as provides guidance for changes in the stakeholder communication and for any other changes that are necessary for the brand itself. The research also provides information on the selection of the brand's main philosophy and its distinguishing characteristics.

Brand characteristics are features that play an important role in the creation, in a given group of stakeholders, of a coherent set of ideas that are important to them, which they pay attention to, which constitute the criteria used to assess a given category of a company, a product, a brand, and which allow comparison with rival offers.

According to Echtner and Ritchie, the distinguishing characteristics (attributes) of a place can be presented in three dimensions – three axes, which classify the brand's attributes as holistic or based on attributes (1st dimension), as functional (in terms of the material properties of a place) or emotional (associated with the desired feelings and emotions) (2nd dimension), and as unique (specific to a given city) or common (occurring in other cities as well) (3rd dimension) (Echtner, and Ritchie, 1991).

Brand distinguishing characteristics should be formulated based on the city's real features and on the competitive cities' offer. Currently, many cities offer similar products and services and the only way to survive on a competitive market is to build a unique brand identity, based, in particular, on its non-functional elements (Kaplan et al., 2010), e.g. on the city's atmosphere, its history, culture (Glińska, 2016).

The brand philosophy and the selected distinguishing features constitute the basis for the planning of further activities – changing the system of city identification, development of stakeholder communication strategies and planning other necessary activities (e.g. regarding the technical infrastructure, the city aesthetics or the quality of the services provided by the city). These activities are defined in the literature on the subject as first- and second-order communication. The purpose of communication activities is to inform the right recipients about the city's distinguishing characteristics and to position the brand, which allows the city's strategy and activities to be tailored to selected groups of stakeholders. The city's internal stakeholders should participate in the branding process. They can express their opinions during public consultations on the planned changes, become involved in project works and participate in the decision making regarding new investments (e.g. as part of participatory budgets). The decisions made may also pertain to the broadly understood communication (first- or second-order communication).

The first-order communication (Primary Communication), presented in Figure 1, encompasses all activities which “inform” the stakeholders about the city and its activities, e.g. the city's infrastructure, its organizational and administrative structure, the services provided by the city, as well as the cultural, sporting and recreational events organized in the city (Kavaratzis, 2005). As part of the first-order communication, attempts can be made to shape the city's identity through, among others, construction of new public utility facilities, changes in the transportation infrastructure, activities increasing the effectiveness of city management, e.g. through development of community networks and greater participation of citizens in the decision making (Ashworth, and Kavaratzis, 2009). In contrast, the second-order communication entails formal communication (promotion), which includes advertising, public relations, sales promotion and personal promotion activities. Means of the second-order communication also include visual identification, such as: city symbols, flags, emblems, colors, the attire of city hall employees, external and internal decor of buildings, street markings.

Unlike the first- and second-order communication, the third-order communication is not controlled by the city authorities and their promotion department. The third-order “word of mouth” communication mainly takes place between the potential and the current users of a given brand and other interested participants, including the current and the potential residents, entrepreneurs, tourists. City authorities, despite the lack of control over this type of communication, can, however, undertake a number of actions to stimulate and maintain the communication between stakeholders.

Primary activities involve monitoring the ongoing communication between stakeholders and responding to their inquiries, proposals, complaints, as well as communication of high-quality information directly to recipients and opinion leaders, i.e. information that recipients can share and change. Financial or material support for the stakeholders is also important. It may consist of sponsoring the existing bloggers, forums, web portals about the city and other topics that are relevant to the residents. Other activities include the creation of a space for conversation and meetings of residents and local entrepreneurs.

These activities, complemented with the impact of the first- and second-order communication, allow for the creation and strengthening of the relationships among the participants, can contribute to the creation of a community around the brand and promote creation of a positive brand image (Muniz and O'Guinn, 2001; Schau, 2009).

The brand image, therefore, is shaped on the basis of the information reaching the recipient (the first- and third-order communication) or on the basis of direct experience with a given brand (place), its infrastructure, services, institutions and residents (the second-order communication) (Kavaratzis, and Ashworth, 2005). Image development is also influenced by the market conditions (Melewar, and Jenkins, 2002), in particular, by rival (similar) facilities, rival cities or larger territorial units, e.g. the region or the country, which constitute a reference point when creating the image of a specific place (Budzyński, 2018).

The image is created as a result of the impact of various information and numerous entities, but also in consequence of the characteristics of the people, to whom the activities are addressed. The addressees of these activities can distort the messages reaching them, by preferring messages that are compatible with their needs, attitudes and values. As a result, the intended city image, created by the authorities of a given area, differs from the city image existing in various groups of stakeholders. It is, therefore, possible to talk of a dominant image of a given place, because an image, in fact, has many variations and interpretations (Govers, and Go, 2009). What is more, the images created about a place are not detailed pictures of reality, but consist of many random and partial images, ordered within the memory, from comprehensive to detailed assessments of that place. These images do not have to be true (Dąbrowski, 2010). That is why it is so important to monitor the city image emerging among various groups of stakeholders and attempt its unification. Based on these images, further attempts can be made to reduce the gap between the brand's identity and its image.

4. Research methodology

The image of the city's brand and its distinguishing features were part of a study conducted in Rzeszów, in 2019, on a sample of 123 people. The study was exploratory in nature and was part of a larger research project. The structure of the examined sample is presented in Table 1.

In the sample under examination, residents of Rzeszów constituted the majority of the sample, residents of neighboring municipalities – almost 9% of the sample, residents of other towns in the Subcarpathian Voivodeship – 10% of the sample, and residents from outside the Subcarpathian Voivodeship – 6.5% of the sample. During the survey, the respondents were present in Rzeszów, so they had the knowledge necessary to assess the city's individual characteristics. Most of the respondents had completed higher education. The structure of the sample differs from the structure of the inhabitants of Rzeszów and the surrounding area. The survey method consisted in an online survey, which increased the participation of younger respondents in the survey.

The respondents assessed various dimensions of the city's image using a seven-point Likert scale. Formulation of the measurement scale was preceded by studies conducted in 2013-2018, involving the inhabitants of Rzeszów and the surrounding area (Hajduk, 2017; Michalcewicz et al., 2018), as well as by literature analysis of the studies carried out by other authors on the image of cities (Merrilees et al., 2009, 2012; Anholt, 2006; Glińska, 2016; Zenker et al., 2013). Based on these studies and analyses, a set of 26 questions was prepared (Table 2). The measurement results were subjected to factor analysis, using the IBM SPSS v.25 statistical package.

Table 1.
Structure of the research sample

Gender	Number	Response percentage
Female	67	54.5%
Male	56	45.5%
Age		
less than 25 y/o	32	26.0%
25-35 y/o	42	34.1%
36-50 y/o	43	35.0%
over 50 y/o	6	4.9%
Education		
Secondary education	18	14.6%
Higher/university education	105	85.4%
Children		
Yes	55	44.7%
No	68	55.3%
Place of residence		
Rzeszów	92	74.8%
neighboring towns	11	8.9%
other towns/cities/villages within the Subcarpathian Voivodeship	12	9.8%
outside the Subcarpathian Voivodeship	8	6.5%
Total	123	100%

Source: own elaboration.

Table 2.
The city characteristics measured

No.	City characteristics measured (1-13)	No.	City characteristics measured (14-26)
1	The condition of transportation infrastructure (well-maintained roads, lack of arduous road works, quality of public transportation)	14	The residents' openness and tolerance
2	Location of the city on commute routes (airport, motorways, railways)	15	Investment conditions in the city
3	Development of tourist facilities (hotel and gastronomic offer, tourist routes, tourist attractions)	16	Innovation in the local economy
4	Cleanliness and aesthetics in the city, spatial order	17	The level of the city's economic development
5	The level of healthcare and availability of healthcare facilities	18	Self-employment possibilities
6	The level of the educational offer	19	The condition of the natural environment (air, rivers and water reservoirs)
7	The level of security in the city	20	Access to recreational areas (parks, greenery, open spaces, nature assets)
8	The level of administrative services and city management	21	Relatively low cost of living in the city
9	Sporting events offer and access to sports facilities	22	Housing conditions and rental costs
10	Cultural events offer	23	The ease of finding a job or getting a promotion
11	The city's historical heritage (known people, past events)	24	Living conditions for families
12	Access to commercial, service and catering facilities	25	Cultural diversity
13	Unique atmosphere in the city	26	The ease of meeting new people

Source: own elaboration.

Table 3.
The city characteristics measured

Kaiser-Mayer-Olkin test and Bartlett Test		
The KMO measure of the adequacy of sample selection		.929
The Bartlett's sphericity test	Approximate chi-square	2188.688
	Degrees of freedom	325
	Significance	.000

Source: own elaboration.

The first stage of the analysis consisted in the determination of the number of factors to be distinguished. Principal component analysis was used for this purpose. Before factor analysis, results of the Bartlett sphericity test were checked (Table 3). In both cases, normal results were obtained. Based on the Kaiser criterion (eigenvalues > 1.00) and the scree plot, four factors were adopted for further analysis. Factor loadings were determined using maximum likelihood estimation, with Promax oblique rotation. Six variables with factor loadings lower than 0.35, as well as the items loading more than one factor (variables numbered 5, 6, 13, 15, 16, 23 from Table 2), were excluded from the analysis. The final solution and the calculated Cronbach's alpha coefficients – reliability of individual scales – are presented in Table 4. All factors were greater than 0.80, only the ratio for the second factor was $0.781 > 0.7$. Such value is widely accepted in social sciences.

5. Results and discussion

The study was exploratory in nature. Its purpose was to examine the existing hidden dimensions of city image assessment and to develop a measuring scale for further research. The data presented in Table 4 show that the first factor – “urban lifestyle” – explains as much as 46.732% of the variance, the second factor – “cost effectiveness” – only 6.196%, while the third and the fourth factors explain less than 5% of the variance.

The first factor consists of seven variables, pertaining to: the city's cultural diversity, residents' openness and tolerance, the ease of meeting new people, cultural and sporting events offer, historical heritage and development tourist facilities (hotel and gastronomy offer, tourist routes and attractions).

The second factor – “cost effectiveness” – includes three variables: the general price level in the city, costs associated with housing and self-employment possibilities.

The third factor is related to the basic living conditions in the city and concerns: the state of transportation infrastructure, the level of administrative services and city management, cleanliness and the city's aesthetics, access to green areas, the state of the city's natural environment, and the conditions for family life.

The last factor consists of the variables that are significant for the city in terms of its economic and tourist development. These variables include economic and tourist-related categories: location of the city on commute routes, the level of the city's economic development, the level of security, as well as access to commercial, service and catering facilities.

Table 4.
Elements of the city image (results of factor analysis)

Factor	Individual elements	Factor loading	Cronbach's alpha	Percent of the variation explained
1. "Urban lifestyle"	1. Cultural diversity	.747	0.913	46.732
	2. The ease of meeting new people	.720		
	3. The residents' openness and tolerance	.706		
	4. Development of tourist facilities (hotel and catering offer, tourist routes and attractions)	.581		
	5. Cultural events offer	.545		
	6. Sporting events offer and access to sports facilities	.498		
	7. The city's historical heritage (known people, past events)	.495		
2. "Cost effectiveness"	8. Relatively low cost of living in the city	-.906	0.781	6.196
	9. Housing conditions and rental costs	-.532		
	10. Self-employment possibilities	-.429		
3. "Everyday life" (basic living conditions)	11. Access to recreational areas (parks, greenery, open spaces, nature assets)	.879	0.867	4.236
	12. Cleanliness and aesthetics in the city, spatial order	.696		
	13. The condition of the natural environment (air, rivers and water reservoirs)	.668		
	14. The level of administrative services and city management	.560		
	15. The condition of transportation infrastructure (well-maintained roads, lack of arduous road works, quality of public transportation)	.552		
	16. Living conditions for families	.430		
4. "The city's potential" (economic and tourist-related)	17. Location of the city on commute routes (airport, motorways, railways)	.701	0.818	3.858
	18. Access to commercial, service and catering facilities	.578		
	19. The level of security in the city	.478		
	20. The level of the city's economic development	.462		

Source: own elaboration.

The obtained factors partially overlap with the Anholt Brands Index (2006), used for large city ranking (Anholt City Brands Index) and in the studies conducted by Zenker (2013). The results of the survey carried out in Rzeszów may mean that, for the respondents, the features related to a specific urban lifestyle are of great importance. Anholt defines this dimension as "the city's pulse", while Zenker refers to it as "the city's urbanity and diversity". This factor pertains to people's perceptions of how exciting a given city is, and whether a resident/tourist

can easily find interesting ways to spend time. The “urban lifestyle” factor is associated with cultural activity, local communities’ openness and tolerance and cultural diversity, that is, with the intangible features of a city. These characteristics are also important for the creation of local communities and the communities surrounding the city’s brand.

However, different results emerged from a study on Polish cities, carried out by E. Glińska. In this study, the city’s technical infrastructure (roads, water supply networks, internet access, city transport accessibility) and public services (educational, administrative, as well as city’s sport, recreation and cultural offer) were the key factors (Glińska, 2016). These characteristics are related to the material aspects of the city’s offer and to the city’s basic services.

The differences in these studies may be related to research limitations (with regard to the sample size and structure, as well as the data collection methods). They may also result from different research approaches. In the study carried out by Glińska, the sample was made up of the city hall officials dealing with, among others, promotion of the city’s brand, while in Rzeszów, the brand’s stakeholders were examined, mainly residents of the city and the neighboring municipalities. A question can also be asked whether the differing results derive from the city managers’ and the city stakeholders’ different perceptions of the distinguishing characteristics of the city’s brand, which could lead to a gap between the projected city identity and image.

Answers to this questions may be provided by further research on the city’s brand, including both the managers and the recipients of the city’s brand.

Conclusion

The above-presented concepts of the city’s brand involve various entities that are responsible the branding. Branding decisions are made by the city managers and the city promotion departments with a narrow understanding of the brand. Along with the development of the concept of a brand, importance of individual entities and groups of entities, which make decisions regarding the place and influence the managers’ decisions, has been increasing. As a result of numerous changes in the social, competitive, economic and technological environment, the stakeholder’ expectations regarding the place and its offer have been increasing as well. The increase in expectations indicates that the material features of a city, such as transportation infrastructure, access to basic public services or clean environment, cease to be the distinguishing factors for large cities. They are treated as characteristics that are necessary, but also obvious for the recipients. In contrast to that, intangible features, related to the city’s character and urban lifestyle, are beginning to play a decisive role in city positioning.

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