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IS THE COMMUNITY OF ŁÓDŹ INFORMED ABOUT LIVING IN CREATIVE CITY? CITY OF ŁÓDŹ' BRANDING STRATEGY AND ITS PERCEPTION

Introduction

In the recent years, one can observe a growing interest in the creativity and its role in local and regional development. Creative businesses, industries, cities or regions seem to be not only a new trend but simply a fashion among both researchers and policy makers. Since this tendency is correlated with the aspirations to build a knowledge-based economy (on both the European and local levels), this perspective is an attractive approach for local and regional development strategies.

Also a city of Łódź did not resist the desire to base a development on so called creative industries. Thus, in 2011, a strategy of building a brand of creative city was launched. This direction found its followers and opponents both among circles involved in territorial marketing professionally, and citizens. After two years, a time for monitoring the first effects of the strategy has come. This paper is a description of the results of a interview-based research conducted among the dwellers of agglomeration of Łódź, aiming at verification of the recognizability of new city brand and thus – an effectiveness and efficacy of this new direction of promoting the city of Łódź.

1. City branding as a part of marketing strategies of territories

Image of the city is more and more often perceived as one of the biggest assets of territorial units. It can be defined as a sum of opinions, attitudes and im-

pressions of one person or a group of people about a given object, such as enterprise, product, person, or place¹. It can be interpreted as a set of impressions and interpretations, associated spontaneously with a particular social or physical stimulus, which is related to a particular place. Another issue, strongly associated with the image of places, refers to the terms “branding” and “brand”. The latter means a combination of physical product, name, package, advertising, and all procedures concerning distribution and pricing, accompanying them. This combination, distinguishing a particular offer from the other, provides the consumer with outstanding functional and/or symbolic benefits, leading to the creation of a loyal group of customers and enabling to achieve a leading position in the market². Brand should be understood as a name, sign, symbol (or their combination), created in order to differentiate on product from the other, offered by the competitors³. The essence here is to discern product, service, enterprise, organization, person or a place, by triggering positive connotations on their features, as well as benefits and values they bring, that are not provided by other similar objects⁴.

As far as the brand of city or region is concerned, it can be defined as a collection of related visual and verbal elements, identifying a given place and the values and benefits that the recipient perceives as attractive⁵. However, one should underline the difference between commercial branding and branding of places, bearing in mind that cities and regions are more complex and thus different systems than companies. In consequence, in case of place marketing, creating and positioning the brand is a different substance, and should start primarily with decomposition of a complex territorial mega-product (having such elements of the offer as cultural, economic, social, touristic, etc.), into more homogeneous and clearly identifiable elements (sub-products). In other words, there is almost im-

¹ See e.g.: H. Barick, Ph. Kotler: *A Framework for Marketing Image Management*, Winter 1991; Ph. Kotler, D.H. Haider, I. Rein: *Marketing places – Attracting Investment, Industry, and Tourism to Cities, States and Nations*, The Free Press, New York 1993.

² J. Kall: *Silna marka. Istota i kreowanie*. PWE, Warsaw 2001, p. 12.

³ Ph. Kotler, G. Armstrong, J. Saunders, V. Wong: *Principles of Marketing. Second European Edition*. Prentice Hall Europe 1999, p. 571.

⁴ It is emphasized that the first contact with the brand is usually made by its name, which is responsible for the first impression according to the principle: “you never get a second chance to have a first impression” (A. Ries, J. Trout: *Positioning: The Battle for Your Mind*. McGraw-Hill, New York 2001, p. 14).

⁵ A. Koźlak: *Wpływ wizerunku marki regionu na jego konkurencyjność*. In: *Marketing przyszłości, Trendy. Strategie. Instrumenty*. Ed. G. Rosa, A. Smalec, Zeszyty Naukowe Uniwersytetu Szczecińskiego Ekonomiczne Problemy Usług, No. 26, Wydawnictwo Naukowe Uniwersytetu Szczecińskiego, Szczecin 2008, http://www.regioportal.pl/pl29/teksty1509/wplyw_wizerunku_marki_regionu_na_jego_konkurencyjn, (accessed: 16.04.2013).

possible to describe the whole city with one brand. This results in the need to create some kind of simplification of the multitude of messages issued by a given place. What really decides about the success of strategy in this matter, it is a proper choice of these elements (“products”), that have the biggest potential and that decide about the actual *specificity* of territorial unit. In this context, the usage of various marketing techniques should be handled with care, because there is never a “one size fits all” marketing strategy.

However, there still exists a set of rules that should be followed in the process of making and executing branding strategies. First of all, every approach to city branding should be of strategic character. It means that building a brand should refer to only few aims, referring to very concrete city products, addressed to precisely defined target groups. Strategic character means also that branding should be based on consistently implemented, long-term actions, to ensure the repeatability of brand-related communication. Besides, all symbols, words and slogans related to the brand should provide ease of remembering and exert proper associations. Finally, what is really important in case of building brands of territories, it is the ability to capture and reflect the specificity of a given location (for proper positioning), as well as undertaking set of activities aiming at identification of the local community with the brand.

2. Circumstances and the process of formulating brand management strategy of the city of Łódź for the period 2010-2016

Until the adoption of brand management strategy, third largest city in Poland did not have a comprehensive strategy document, structuring its marketing activities. Some of marketing actions was manifested only by including several targets and tasks in other strategic documents developed and implemented in the city (such as the strategy of attracting foreign direct investment). However, the dispersion of objectives concerning marketing activities between the various strategic documents, resulted in inconsistency of the marketing activities of the city of Łódź. Thereat, the end of 2010 resulted in accepting by Łódź City Council a document called “Łódź Brand Management Strategy For The Years 2010-2016”⁶.

⁶ *Łódź Brand Management Strategy for the Years 2010-2016*, http://www.kreatywna.lodz.pl/data/dataPublicator/lodz_strategia_zarzadzania_marka_eng_1.pdf, accessed 16.04.2013.

For this period of time, city decides to lean its strategy of creativity and so called creative industries, and the latter are undoubtedly a leitmotiv of this document⁷.

In details, what the community of Łódź decided to expose as elements responsible for the territorial identity, there were four general sub-products: economy, culture, education and tourism⁸. In a more detailed way, economic offer of the city is mainly represented by trade and services, cultural activities referring to film, fashion, and textile and clothing industry, as well as by infrastructure of international fairs. Cultural sub-product has such specific features as the pre-war tradition of avant-garde in art and modernity, supported by the post-industrial heritage and emergence of design activities. Tourism in Łódź, according to the Authors, should concentrate on city-break type of guests, post-industrial infrastructure and sentiments of pre-war inhabitants and their descendants. Finally, educational sub-product, except universal offer, has its specific value represented by art universities (Łódź Film School, Academy of Fine Arts) and a broad offer of design teaching programs⁹.

Finding a common ground for the above offer, Authors decided on positioning the city as CENTRE OF THE CREATIVE INDUSTRIES claiming that “creative industries based on enterprise and creativity of its residents is what Łódź should be famous for in future”¹⁰.

As a general objective, branding strategy of Łódź foresees its perception as a center of creative industries on national and global scale. Its image should be built on such association with the city as: creative, energetic, open, entrepreneurial, independent and courageous.

In 2013, the city of Łódź is still in the initial phase of implementation of its strategy of brand management. In December 2011, Authors presented a new logo and slogan promoting Łódź to the community¹¹. In 2012, they launched first promotional activities, aimed at familiarizing people with the brand across Poland.

⁷ The idea of creative cities and regions is popularized by economist and urban planners such as Richard Florida and Charles Landry. According to the first of these, in today's post-industrial societies, human creativity is an essential factor in the development of cities, regions and entire nations, and what brings their wealth primarily, it is a predominance of so called creative class in the society (R. Florida: *The Rise of the Creative Class*. Basic Books, New York 2004). Also Charles Landry indicates that human creativity remains on the one hand a key economic resource of modern cities, but on the other hand, human creativity requires a favorable urban environment for its development (Ch. Landry: *The Creative City: A Toolkit for Urban Innovators*. Taylor & Francis 2012).

⁸ *Łódź Brand Management Strategy...*, Op. cit., p. 17.

⁹ *Ibidem*, pp. 17-27.

¹⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 44.

¹¹ Since then, the city is promoted by the slogan *Łódź kreuje* (Łódź creates).

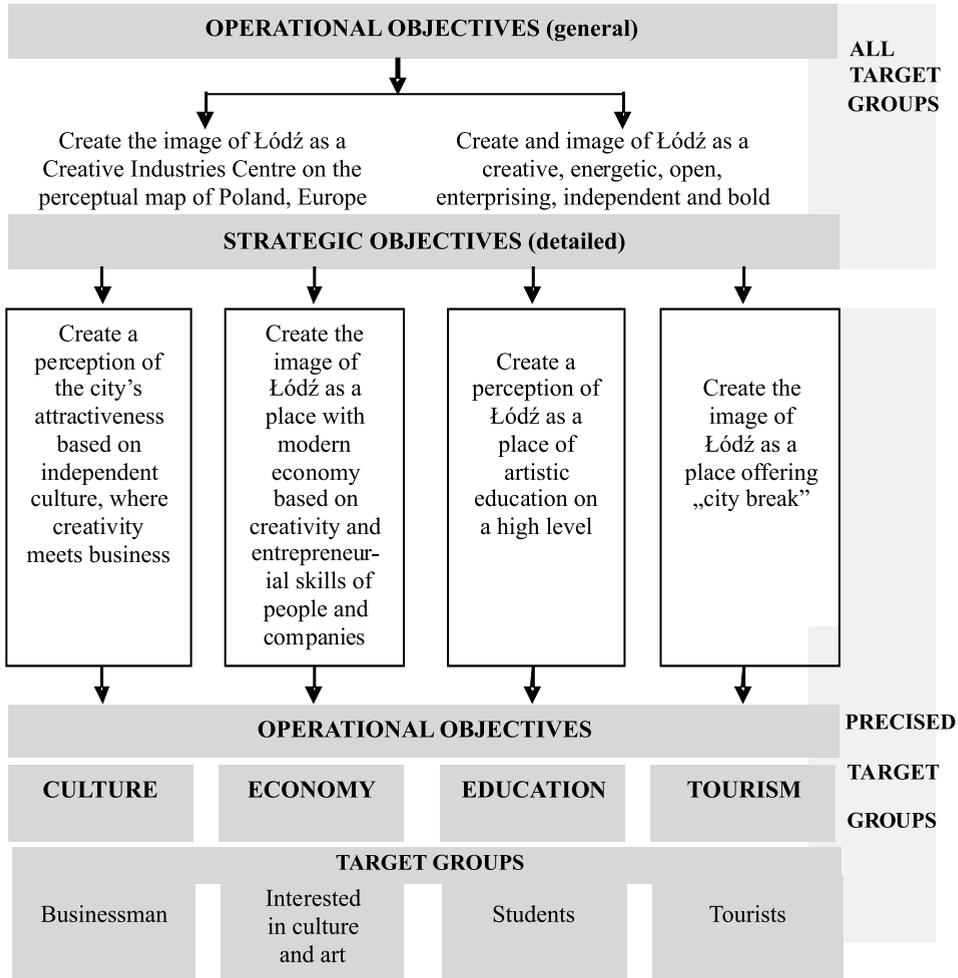


Figure 1. Objective tree of the Łódź Brand Management Strategy For The Years 2010-2016

Source: *Łódź Brand Management Strategy for the Years 2010-2016*, p. 62, http://www.kreatywna.lodz.pl/data/dataPublicator/lodz_strategia_zarzadzania_marka_eng_1.pdf, (accessed: 16.04.2013).

The action included billboards, and advertising campaign in the national WWW portals and social networks. From the perspective of two years of its implementation, it seems to be justified to take the first attempt to measure the effectiveness of brand promotion and its perceptivity.

3. Perception of Łódź from the perspective of two years of new branding strategy

In order to verify the perception of new city brand, a research aiming at identification of it was made¹². Main purpose of the study stood for identification of the level of awareness of Łódź logo and slogan “Łódź kreuje”, launched to the public in December 2011. An additional objective of it was also to identify the key elements of the image of the city, and to create a semantic differential of connotations concerning the city. Research was based on structured face-to-face surveys. However, due to the absence of the sampling framework, selection of the sample remained quota-based (with a trial to ensure the compatibility of structure of the interviewees with the structure of the population of agglomeration of Łódź, taking into account age and sex). Finally, 500 people have been interviewed in the places that guaranteed the desired structure of respondents (two shopping centers, main street, open-air market), in the period between November and December 2012.

First of the areas of the study referred to the acquaintance with the new logo of the city¹³. For this purpose, the fragment of logo was presented to the interviewees together with the fragments of emblems of other cities, chosen in such a way that they did not reveal the name of the city (see Figure3).

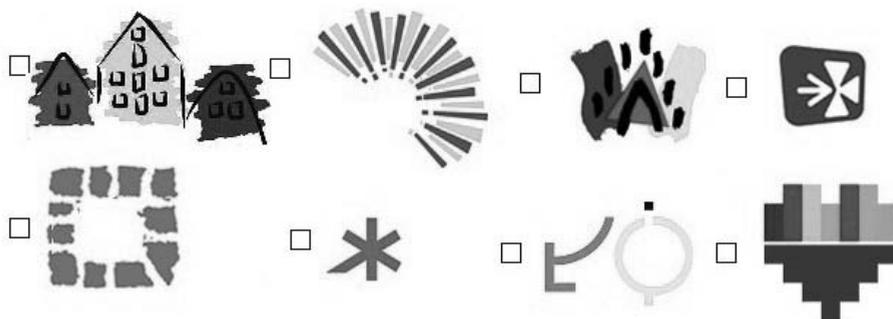


Figure 2. Part of the logo of Łódź among the set of possible answers – recognition test

¹² The study was made by the members of scientific student's association from the University of Łódź SPATIUM, under the supervision of the Author on behalf of the City Council's department responsible for the promotion activities.

¹³ It must be pointed out here, that symbol of a promotional campaign is not simply recognizable, since it does not include transparent typography indicating the name of the town. Although the logo includes its name, it is encoded in the form of so called functional alphabet – a specific typography invented by Władysław Strzemiński, Polish artist creating in Łódź, considered to be a leader of the avant-garde in the interwar period.

Fragment of the logo of the city of Łódź is second from the right in the second row.

Among all the respondents, 82.2% of them aptly indicated the correct answer. This leads to the conclusion about the relatively high visibility of this logo for its positioning in relation to other logos. On the other hand, there is still a large share of the inhabitants of agglomeration of Łódź, who have a problem with a proper identification (17.8%).

Responding more direct question “Do you like the new logo of Łódź”, one could observe even distribution of responses. In other words, logo has almost the same share of advocates and opponents. Besides, what draws attention again, it is the relatively high percentage of people who did not know the new logo.

Probably, one of the main reasons of this situation has its origins in a high level of abstractive character of the logo, to which rather only people from the artistic circles and representatives of the “creative class” can be sensitive. Thus, both the direction of the brand communication and the complexity of the emblem may be considered as a fairly brave move.

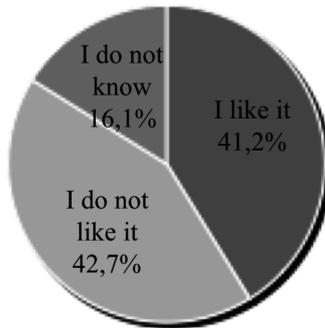


Figure 3. The level of identification of new logo of the city of Łódź by the inhabitants as at December 2012

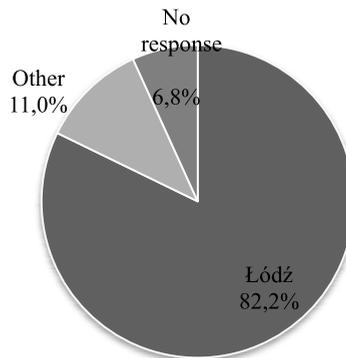


Figure 4. Attitude towards new logo of the city of Łódź by the inhabitants as at December 2012

Widely interconnected with the issue of visibility of the logo is the matter of recognizability of the slogan to promote the city (“Łódź kreuje”). In this context, respondents were asked to articulate the proper sentence spontaneously and without suggestion. What is worth reflection it is the fact that only 37% of respondents answered properly. Furthermore, 5.2% of interviewees gave no indication and a quarter of respondents indicated various different answers, most of them far from the concept of “creative city”.

It is also worth noting that 32.8% of respondents (almost same as number of answers for “Łódź kreuje”), referred to the slogan “city of 4 cultures”. The latter was popularized at the break of 20th and 21st century in cultural activities of the city, referring to the 19th century tradition of industrial and multicultural city. This observation leads to conclusion that some developed brand already exists and it is based on the multiculturalism of the city. This situation seems to stand for a competitive potential, recognizable at least on regional and national level. In this context, the new direction of brand promotion should not disregard but use this territorial asset.

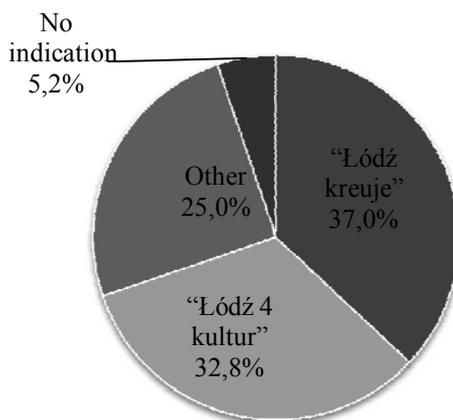


Figure 5. Recognizability of the slogan to promote the city of Łódź by the inhabitants as at December 2012

Another purpose of the conducted study was to capture the specificity of Łódź, in order to compare its perceived image with the current direction of the brand communication. Thus, a semantic differential of the city was constructed, accordingly by asking respondents about the nature of the place itself (Figure 6) and the characteristics of its inhabitants (Figure 7).

According to city and agglomeration dwellers, Łódź is perceived mainly as a historic and multicultural city, being also to some extent: open, developing, with perspectives and development potential, and also friendly and rather busy. On the

other hand, respondents associated it also with the negative aspects, such as: unfortunate management, poverty and pathologies, dirt and gray city landscape. As far as the “creative character” of the city is concerned, 17.2% of interviewees claimed it is “highly creative”, 30.7% classified it as “rather creative” and almost one of third expressed a neutral opinion in this regard.

	+2	+1	neutral	-1	-2	
safe	4.4%	27.7%	28.1%	26.1%	13.6%	unsafe
clean	2.0%	16.6%	17.8%	36.1%	27.5%	cluttered
no pathologies	6.6%	3.0%	21.4%	38.5%	30.5%	with pathologies
busy	20.2%	31.3%	29.1%	13.6%	5.8%	deserted
trustworthy	7.4%	24.6%	43.9%	15.8%	8.4%	untrustworthy
rich	1.4%	10.2%	29.5%	33.5%	25.3%	poor
friendly	12.6%	35.3%	31.3%	14.6%	6.2%	unfriendly
with perspectives	19.0%	32.5%	20.6%	14.4%	13.6%	no perspectives
neat	1.2%	14.6%	28.7%	30.7%	24.8%	neglected
young	7.6%	17.8%	28.3%	23.2%	23.2%	mature
well managed	1.8%	11.6%	28.7%	23.4%	34.5%	poorly managed
with potential	24.6%	33.7%	20.4%	11.4%	10.0%	no potential
has a vision of development	10.0%	25.5%	30.3%	17.4%	16.8%	no vision of development
high quality of life	3.6%	23.6%	35.3%	23.8%	13.8%	poor quality of life
colorful	7.4%	20.2%	23.0%	25.1%	24.4%	dusky
historic	34.9%	34.3%	18.0%	9.8%	3.0%	non historic
creative	17.2%	30.7%	29.1%	15.2%	7.8%	imitative
developing	15.8%	33.1%	25.0%	14.2%	12.0%	stagnant
no complexes	5.8%	10.0%	37.5%	27.7%	19.0%	with complexes
open	19.4%	36.1%	30.5%	8.2%	5.8%	closed
multicultural	40.1%	30.1%	19.4%	6.6%	3.8%	monocultural
attractive	15.0%	32.7%	25.9%	17.2%	9.2%	unattractive

Figure 6. Characteristics of the city of Łódź in the eyes of the respondents as at December 2012 – semantic differential

In other words, perceivability of the creative character of the city is observable, but with comparison with its multiculturalism, it is still not dominating. In this context, once again, one should repeat the argument of significant value of the latter feature.

	+2	+1	neutral	-1	-2	
rich	1.4%	13.8%	29.1%	34.5%	21.2%	poor
working	4.6%	26.7%	23.4%	31.5%	13.8%	unemployed
happy	9.4%	29.1%	27.9%	13.2%	20.4%	sad
open	14.8%	33.9%	29.3%	14.0%	8.0%	closed
entrepreneurial	9.4%	35.1%	36.5%	13.4%	5.6%	shiftless
nice	14.6%	39.9%	30.3%	10.2%	5.0%	unpleasant
talented	29.1%	35.9%	29.1%	3.8%	2.0%	untalented
friendly	18.4%	38.9%	29.7%	10.0%	3.0%	unfriendly
entertainment oriented	20.6%	18.8%	53.3%	4.8%	2.6%	not eager to play
diverse	31.5%	30.9%	27.1%	7.2%	3.2%	monotonous
ambitious	20.0%	37.5%	32.3%	6.6%	3.6%	unambitious
creative	20.8%	36.9%	29.3%	9.4%	3.6%	imitative
motivated	13.8%	26.3%	35.1%	17.6%	7.2%	non motivated
trustworthy	7.4%	24.0%	51.7%	11.4%	5.6%	untrustworthy
no complexes	6.4%	13.6%	32.9%	29.5%	17.6%	with complexes
colourful	11.8%	27.9%	31.7%	15.4%	13.2%	grey

Figure 7. Characteristics of the inhabitants of the city of Łódź in the eyes of the respondents as at December 2012 – semantic differential

As far as the characteristic of the city inhabitants is concerned, respondents were more moderate in their assessments, and more often tended to give neutral or temperate answers. However, the fact that 31.5% of interviewees indicated diversity of inhabitants as high, and 30.9% of them indicated as moderate, reiterates the appeal to tradition of multiculturalism of Łódź again. Among the most negative connotations concerning the city dwellers, indications related primarily to the low level of wealth and unemployment. The structure of answers of the creativity of inhabitants, resembled the structure of answers in the semantic differential of the city of Łódź.

Conclusion

Contemporary widespread belief in the role of innovation, cultural industries and creativity broadly defined in the economy, leads more and more cities and regions to base their development and marketing strategies on these issues. Also the city of Łódź as one of the largest Polish cities decided to promote its brand as a city of creative industries. For this purpose, in December 2011 a new logo of the city and new promotional slogan were launched.

From the almost two-years-perspective, it seemed a reasonable to realize the first study of a new brand awareness. Research conducted at the end of 2012 revealed that new logo of the city of Łódź is rather difficult to read and accept, but more and more people recognize it. In other words, the “identity” reflected in logo, as well as the level of identification of the residents with it, still requires further development. As far as the new branding slogan is concerned (“Łódź kreuje” / “Łódź creates”), it remains in the shadow of already developed brand of “Łódź of four culture”. Thus, without questioning the merits of promoting the city of Łódź as a center of creative industries, the proposal of combining it with the promotion of its multiculturalism, seems to be a rational recommendation.

The study also revealed that many of the elements of the image of the city of Łódź is still inconsistent with the new brand of the city. This requires strengthening not only promotional activities, but also (or even primarily), the other sub-products of the city, particularly in the areas of:

- strengthening economic potential of the dwellers,
- quality of life,
- quality of municipal management,
- visual attractiveness,
- so called social regeneration, consisting of the fight against poverty, unemployment, and striving for social inclusion, but primarily of strengthening the local identity, which is still poor among city dwellers.

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Summary

In the recent years, one can observe a growing interest in the creativity and its role in local and regional development. Creative businesses, industries, cities or regions seem to be not only a new trend but simply a fashion among both researchers and policy makers.

Also the city of Łódź did not resist the desire to base a development on creative industries. Thus, in 2011, a strategy of building a brand of creative city was launched. After two years, a time for monitoring the first effects of the strategy has come. This paper is a description of the results of a interview-based research conducted among the dwellers of agglomeration of Łódź, aiming at verification of the reconcilability of new city brand and thus – an effectiveness and efficacy of this new direction of promoting the city of Łódź.

Keywords: brand management strategies, brand image, brand perception, Łódź