

URBAN BRAND IN THE ERA OF MASS COMMUNICATION

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Key words: Urban brand, Media, Marketing

Abstract

The purpose of this article is a scientific reflection on the contemporary transformations in managing an urban brand. It is an original interpretation of challenges faced by municipal authorities and urban planners in managing an urban image. Urban marketing ensures competitive advantage, attracts capital, inhabitants and investments. This article presents analysis of the methods of urban brand managing from the point of view of the requirements of mass communication. It also characterizes the evolution of marketing methods, purposes and effects in planning the directions of spatial development of cities. The contemporary forms of urban marketing have been elaborated. Basic discrepancies between traditional administrative and bureaucratic approach and pro-social orientation have been indicated and special attention was paid to brand's perception from the perspective of an ordinary user of public space. Differences between various marketing strategies have been analysed. In the conclusion it has been stated that the network society has significantly changed the "traditional" approach to urban marketing, in particular to urban brand management in the era of mass communication. It determines the relevance of the deliberations which, in the author's opinion, may show both the inspiring and application values.

Introduction

Urban brand is an ambiguous term, although the opinions questioning the need of urban marketing are rare. In purely general terms one may say that it is a set of measures and tools used to gain development measures for a city. Marketing is related to urban development in a competitive environment where a success of the city is associated with improved living standards of the inhabitants, economic and spatial development. The theory of urban marketing

emphasizes its practical and operational dimension. Kotler¹ points out the following operation sequences: marketing analysis, marketing planning and control of marketing effects.

In marketing an urban form is a clear message whose functions are comparable to a product brand. It combines identification function (allows standing out in comparison to the competition), promotional function (attracts attention of potential clients and encourages to investing), judging function (presents unique values related to tradition and culture).

A strong brand offers competitive advantage, helps in creating positive marketing image, wins clients over, builds loyalty, allows identification and recognition of a city or any of its parts². A brand also reflects the mental picture of a city created by mass media. Thus, depicting the values related to aspirations, life style and culture of the inhabitants³ it also carries symbolic and emotional values.

In practical approach, one may come across such terms as: building an urban brand, managing a brand, marketing message, brand territory. This broad coverage of the definition of an urban brand causes many methodological approaches to urban marketing to emerge.

The author distinguishes between three basic approaches that seriously affect the planning practice and the method of urban brand managing:

- 1) traditional approach, which may be characterized as administrative and bureaucratic orientation,
- 2) social orientation, paying attention to brand's perception from the point of view of local communities,
- 3) media orientation, characteristic for the modern era of mass communication in the network society.

Significant differences are discernible between the respective approaches, which in urban management practice are strongly competitive in specific spatial situations.

Effective brand management relies on recognition and creative use of the advantages of each of the strategies with reference to specific social, economic and cultural conditions of the city. Brand management should not be a set of casual actions but a well thought out strategy assuming that the execution of development targets of a city will be more effective if the brand creating strategy is adjusted to diversified conditions and circumstances. It is particularly important in the era of mass communication which strongly influences political, economic, cultural life and social relations within a city⁴.

Administrative and bureaucratic orientation

In the traditional approach related to urban brand managing, the foreground is created by the following aims:

- attracting the investors (housing, trade and industrial developers),
- increased tax incomes,
- inflow of new capitals,

¹ Kotler, 1994, pp. 8-11.

² Bonenebrg, 2014, pp 72.

³ Kapferer, 1992.

⁴ Lorimer, Scannell, 2002, pp.26-27.

- territorial development of a city,
- promotion of the existing municipal authorities in order to win the nearest election.

In Poland this concept of urban brand building is described in the works of Szromnik⁵, Marak⁶ and Jastrzębska⁷.

The administrative and bureaucratic orientation defines marketing through the activities of urban planners, self-government administration and singled out municipal services and institutions. According to Szromnik, it is a management process aiming at creating the values exchange and an interaction between council entities and their partners⁸.

A strong brand is to contribute to the attractiveness of a city for selected groups of investors. To reach that goal strategies based on analyses, planning and control of promotion programs are created. The purpose of such actions is best defined by Markowski⁹, writing that the economic sense of urban marketing is manifested in strengthening its economic base and increased incomes to the budget. This type of urban brand building is addressed first of all to investors. The hopes of urban planners rest on short-term effects (usually measured with the length of a term of office):

- direct incomes to the city budget from corporate income taxes, real estate taxes and through new work places increasing the proceeds from income taxes from natural persons,
- proceeds from fees and charges: stamp duties, market dues, local charges, administrative charges, operation and parking fees, etc.
- proceeds from commune assets: rental, lease, leasing, interest on financial funds.

This kind of branding is reflected in urban plans, which allot the largest areas to new potential investors (mainly housing developers). Therefore, the actions of self-government units are mainly focused on finding investors, providing them with assistance, legal and financial facilities. A characteristic feature of such actions is their institutional and organizational profile. Those actions are based on the engagement of municipal officers and self-government workers of state budget companies established in order to "build a strong brand of a city". Their actions mainly focus on "clearing the contacts" between municipal authorities and potential investors. Local societies recede into the background of such actions, and their current needs are usually brushed off with assurances that "in the future they are going to be beneficiaries of those efforts of municipal authorities". Marketing promotion also covers a set of tools used by the city to communicate with external and internal environment, transmits information which characterize its economic and social profile, highlights the strengths, successes, aims and planned facilities. These actions are performed by the staff of municipality offices and other subordinate entities.

The most popular marketing promotion measures include: folders, economic directories, investment offers catalogues, advertising publications. These may also include a city logo visible in public spaces, and calendars, pens, note pads, conference briefcases, ID badges. Popular promotion tools include the Internet and WWW sites. In the process of marketing communication, an important role is played by local media, conferences, symposia and press

⁵ Szromnik, 2002, pp. 304-305.

⁶ Marak, 1994, pp. 169-171.

⁷ Jastrzębska, 1999, pp. 14.

⁸ Szromnik, 2002, pp. 42-43.

⁹ Markowski, 2002, pp. 108.

briefings. Moreover, self-governments promote themselves during various fairs and exhibitions, festivities and festivals¹⁰.

This type of marketing activity is aimed at winning external investors over. The issue of urban space refers mainly to the macro scale, whereas the perception of urban space in the micro scale is pushed back in the hierarchy of marketing purposes.

Social orientation, brand perception from the point of view of local communities

The growing number of self-governments starts to understand the significance of the perception of urban space in the micro scale and the influence of such perception on shaping the place's brand. The main role here is played by the usable and compositional quality of public spaces. The point is that such composition attributes which aroused admiration of inhabitants and attracted visitors in the previous centuries should be restored.

It is a new approach to designing urban space, related to the philosophy of not looking "from above", from the perspective of urban planning authorities, but "from the bottom", from the perspective of an ordinary user of public spaces. It is believed that such point of view may be useful in the spatial policy focused on urban brand building. As Neacsu¹¹ emphasizes it, such approach is accepted by the inhabitants.

In modern urban planning, the development of planning procedures based on top-down analyses (functional and technical, social and economic) has outstripped the planning methods where the main emphasis was on compositional quality, visual order and harmony, understood by ordinary inhabitants and passers-by.

This kind of understanding the urban space is significant for building a brand of a place. Even the best advertising and promotion will be ineffective if the space observed with our own eyes is squalid, ugly and dangerous. What we see has an objective aspect influencing our attitude towards the surroundings. Attractive architecture, friendly and safe public space, interesting views, constitutes a marketing communication attracting people to specific places. What people feel, has an objective aspect shaping a brand of the place.

As such, the harmony of urban structure influences social order, and underestimation of the attractiveness of public spaces is one of the reasons for failures in building an urban brand. It seems to correspond well with the contemporary challenges faced by urban planning - subject to standardization and unification and searching for the lost idiosyncratic compositional, ethical and aesthetic values.

This method of building an urban brand is a way of returning to the former, already forgotten views on urban perfection. A good example here are the opinions of Ebenezer Howard who wrote that both the beauty of a city and a beauty of open, non-built-up space complement each other¹². Raymond Unwin and Barry Parker, in their design of a garden city Letchworth of 1904 referred to social theories of Edward Carpenter and William Morris. According to them, the advantages of a city should be related to the everyday life and be available for all inhabitants.

¹⁰ Daszkowska, 1998, pp. 174.

¹¹ Neacsu, 2009, pp. 172-188.

¹² Howard, 1902, pp. 48.

They believed that social order should be supported by visual quality of buildings, and social improvement should be related to "aesthetic control" of construction materials, looks of the buildings and their arrangement¹³. These urban concepts emphasized the role of ordinary inhabitants in the process of planning and designing a city. The visual form of a city was to reflect the function, the spirit and needs of individual inhabitants. Unwin and Parker were convinced that urban planning was a "democratic art" expressed by active participation of the inhabitants in the city planning process. The role of an urban planner is to provide the buildings with physical shapes adjusted to the requirements and aspirations of the inhabitants¹⁴.

This approach to city shaping was supported by the belief that in the planning process the most important role is played by an architect-urban planner. His or her works also include the ability to dialogue with inhabitants, their education "through experiencing the living in a healthy and liberated surroundings" and "understanding the differences between the beautiful and the ugly architecture" and supporting the inhabitants in developing their aesthetic and ethical sensitivity¹⁵.

According to Geddes, maintaining the identity of cities by protecting historic buildings and historic urban assumptions should make the inhabitants proud and satisfied with their culture and history¹⁶. Patrick Geddes (1854-1932) was the first urban planner who drew attention to the social aspect of urban planning. He created the concept of a neighbour unit "house block", he is also ascribed the concept of a region and a conurbation in urban planning. When working at the Edinburgh University and observing the life of the crowded Old Town, he initiated the revitalization of that part of the city by locating attractive, generally available cultural and educational facilities there. In 1919-24 he designed the urban development of Mumbai, and he created the first complete urban plan based on the neighbour unit concept upon request of the mayor of Tel Aviv in the then Palestine, in 1925-31.

In his urban analyses, Camillo Sitte referred to the aesthetic sensitivity of inhabitants. In order to prove that people have a natural talent to urban arrangements, Sitte used to name the examples of good locations of monuments in public spaces. The form of such elements was supposed to emphasize their extraordinary meaning for the entire urban community, and the surrounding public space should be used by all citizens¹⁷. As such, the aesthetic value itself builds a strong urban brand.

Similar approach is to be found in the works of Léon Krier who assigned special role to public spaces and significant urban buildings. He drew attention to the urban context, selection of construction materials, the scale and proportions of urban streets and squares¹⁸.

An urban brand interpreted in that manner emphasizes the meaning of universal cultural, social and artistic values which should join an urban planner and ordinary users of the urban space. It is an attempt to oppose to the contemporary urban planning practice which in the "top-down"

¹³ Unwin, Parker, 1901, pp. 107-108

¹⁴ Day, 1981

¹⁵ Meacham, 1994, pp. 79-84

¹⁶ Home, 1997

¹⁷ Sitte, 1979, pp. 14

¹⁸ Krier, 2001, pp. 12-20

political and economic management of a city resulted in a compositional chaos, wasteful spatial management that deprived many of cities of their former strong brand.

In this concept an urban brand is shaped in the direct bond between a person and the city. Such bond requires that the person has a direct contact with specific spatial forms, thus providing him with specific impressions. Such activity involves positive or negative experiences which combine in the general impression on the attractiveness of the city. Such aiming at activities to establish specific feelings may be called "experiencing" the city. Theodor Lipps says that experience is the basis of cognition, stimulates human psyche¹⁹. Therefore, it is indispensable to place oneself in the situation of an ordinary person, a "man of the street" and look at the surrounding public space, buildings' façades and shop windows with his eyes. According to the above, a space brand is a specific type of synthesis of aesthetic experiences and functional and usable attributes of a specific place that can attract or repel people. Pursuant to that, there can be distinguished a range of brand attributes:

- 1) *spatial attributes*: clarity, compositional diversity, colour, articulation, rhythm, material etc.,
- 2) *psychological attributes*: emotions caused by the urban surroundings - curiosity, fear, admiration, safety etc.,
- 3) *cultural attributes*: remembrance, genius loci, cultural heritage, identity, familiarity, etc.

It is easily discernible that these are quite different criteria than the ones applicable to the administrative and bureaucratic approach. It seems that they are of greater significance for building a strong space brand.

They build an authentic competitive advantage, at the same time promoting their unique brands originating in the local tradition and identity. Increasing number of self-governments starts to understand the importance of urban space perception in the micro scale from the perspective of an ordinary user of public space. The author represents opinion that standard planning methods at the diagnostic level do not reflect the full picture of the spatial and social reality. The level of a micro-scale, the perspective of perception by ordinary inhabitants is an important tool to support space brand management. The scheme for achieving perception of a brand from the point of view of local communities is based on the following methodological steps:

- diagnosis of the existing condition: what image of the public space is functioning among the inhabitants?
- performance of analyses at the micro scale level in order to identify the places, whose perception is negative,
- suggestion of improvements in the form of alternative correction designs, as the basis for public discussion with the interested users of public spaces.

During creation of a marketing brand, much importance is attached to diversity, uniqueness and individualization of urban interiors. It takes the form of planned strategies which are intended to emphasize the local identity of cities and their respective districts. Urban designs should include the above mentioned spatial, psychological and cultural attributes used to emphasize the differences in social perception of public spaces.

¹⁹ Lipps, 1987, pp. 391-394

Highly valued in urban surroundings perception is the uniqueness and individualization of urban interiors. Those features should be elements of the planned strategy of management of the local brand of respective districts. For this purpose it is necessary to establish local patterns of public spaces furnishing, the looks of shop windows, small architecture and architectural details valid for different parts of the city.

Media communication as an element of urban marketing

Searching for contemporary forms of marketing is more frequently associated with the use of a multimedia communication as a tool supporting the process of spatial planning.

Can mass communication transform the space? How to read the combination of urban planning and media communication? Can media communication be a tool to create new needs? We are still finding new answers to the questions asked by situationists. Guy Debord used to emphasize that a modern city may be called the space of a performance²⁰. Landscape panoramas have become goods sold to the space consumers - tourists admiring the area through the windows of coaches moving from one hotel to another. Such experiences, thanks to the development of the tourist industry, have become the standard method of getting to know new places, admire the landscapes, have contact with architectural monuments.

Don Mitchell draws attention to the tendency of transforming municipal public spaces into "landscape postcards" deprived of permanent inhabitants, solely intended to be admired by tourists²¹. Such "landscape postcards" do not favour the creation of social bonds, do not determine the urban phenomenon - promote visual attractiveness at the expense of vital needs of the inhabitants, prefer nice, pretty view from solving everyday problems of an urban society. Such type of urban policy favours rich investors and does not regard the real standard of life of the majority of the inhabitants. According to Mitchell such approach has also its positive sides: it is pleasant to walk across elegant shopping districts, visit good restaurants, exclusive clubs and galleries, enjoy good entertainment, wide selection of shops, in other words to spend time in attractive and safe surroundings. But usually it is forgotten that such attractions have been created at the cost of squalid residential districts, collapsing public transport, faulty technical infrastructure.

One may consider to what extent such policy is stimulated by media communication - because it is the simplest method to attract tourists and investors to a city promoted as a place of culture and entertainment.

Tourists encouraged by effective marketing most often see the city through the windows of their coach. They do not have a chance to get familiar with the actual urban problems. Their knowledge about a city is limited to a series of "pictures" they consider to be the urban reality.

Tourist agencies sell nicely wrapped reality. The wrap is the "beautiful" view, smartly furnished hotel rooms, "regional" meals served especially for the needs of the visitors. The selection of visited places is closely connected with the media brand of respective locations. A new type of feedback between marketing and urban space may be observed.

²⁰ Debord, 2004, pp. 33-39

²¹ Mitchell, 2003, pp. 9-10

From this point of view, urban planning becomes a form of media culture. Selected public spaces and building façades become scenery for marketing undertakings. Media addressed to mass audience shape the urban planning which, in pursuing a strong brand, needs to adjust to the rules imposed by mass media. Marketing communication created by mass media forms new cognitive conditions which supplant the traditional methods of urban marketing. Mass communication has established new relations between urban planning, media and space²².

Organised in the form of independent elements joined by links, it refers to selected places in the urban structure. Such links are meant to draw attention, stimulate emotions, excite interest. The purpose of this strategy is to attract clients, make the largest attractions available to the greatest number of users. The system is constructed in such manner that the method of use of one fragment of the space does not collide with the functionality of other fragments. A representative example here are the interiors of huge shopping centres, linked with Internet information on new products, special offers and attractions.

This new method of using the space creates the new rules of urban marketing. A city may be "shared" from any place via the WWW network in the form of *Google street view* and other sites of hypertext providing adequately profiled information on city attractions, its history, society and economy.

One should also draw attention to the open character of the WWW. Any attempt of imposing specific opinions and assessments by the elites is met with active response of the members of the network society whose expectations are most frequently quite the opposite to the preferences of the elites. Such phenomena create a specific climate of a sharp exchange between the mass culture and the elite culture. In this cycle an urban brand is shaped by:

- promotion coded in the form of a media communication (visual and text),
- marketing communication read by the members of Internet society who attach specific meaning to that communication.

The interpretation of a communication depends on the cultural and social context. Media communication may be decoded by recipients within the current set of references. For example numerous blogs, "likes" and comments on Internet forums, which shape the opinions of the recipients of marketing communications. Opinions formed in mass media are often contradictory, still remaining in positive or negative relation with the social and spatial structure of the city.

From this point of view, urban marketing is functioning in two value systems: economic and cultural. The sender of a communication (municipality) limits its interest to the economic value, whereas the recipient is functioning within the area of cultural or sub-cultural values. Negative attitude of the recipients of a communication threatens with media depreciation of an urban space and in the consequence attacks the urban brand. Such situations mount challenges to spatial planners and municipal authorities who have to react on case to case basis to the changing opinions generated in the network society.

One may observe clear transfer of the main focus of urban marketing to social and cultural context dynamically shaped by mass media.

²² Fukuyama, 2000, pp. 24-35

From this point of view, media authorities deform urban space according to their own, changing priorities, among which the strategies of consumer policy come to the fore. They have dominated the social, cultural, economic and political life. They realize their goals by shaping the method of thinking, life style, fashion and introducing new trends. In this reality all is changeable and dynamic and requires the urban marketing to react quickly to the changing methods of spatial behaviours. Urban space whose promotion cannot catch up with the changes loses the strong brand and becomes less popular.

From this point of view a city may be treated as a media communication carrier which is characterised with two significant features. First, in media reception, a city is a reflection of mass culture and social experiences. Second, a city is characterised not only by economic, social and cultural advantages, but it also allows people to confront their immediate needs with the communication created by mass media. Such confrontation is the source of specific spatial and economic decisions. It may also replace selected needs with the promise of satisfying those needs. From this point of view, an urban brand in the era of mass communication, creates reality according to our ideas and at the same time it is a kind of promise of the dreams and desires concerning living in a city come true. Therefore, urban marketing as a means of social communication enriches both the space and the inhabitants.

Summary

The diagnosis of contemporary spatial phenomena in architecture and urban planning taking under consideration changes in cultural, social and economic impact caused by the development of the information society should form the basis for creating new strategies in urban branding. De-industrialization of cities in developed countries, significant mobility of workers, development of information and communication technologies and creative industries cause changes in settlement preferences. New, image of urban areas created by an appropriate urban branding can attract additional population, when places compete for inhabitants and businesses. In order to do that effectively, it is necessary to understand the potentials of place to be presented to the target groups. Experience shows that not only the positive visual and spatial features attract people, but also hard to define "atmosphere", mood, city narrative, related to activities, events and history. The choice of a place/neighbourhood to live in, is often based on emotions and impressions. The perception of an urban space is a broad-spectrum experience. It can be lived through learning the city's history, myths, legends, social relations in relation to urban space. Furthermore, the approach takes under consideration the view of specific groups of inhabitants.

Contemporary media events, are composed of a sequence of images, which remain the most effective medium of mass communication. Referring directly to the emotions, subconscious reactions, they have an extremely fast impact and are memorable. Spatial context, including architecture, is usually an element of media image: it can play the background role, it can also be a carefully designed event scenery. In the first case, it shows the spatial context of events, in the second case - it shows the unreal world, but reinforcing the message of the transmitted context.

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