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The Importance of City Image in Socio-Economic Development

INTRODUCTION

In the times of intensifying competition between cities which concentrates on capturing new investments, attracting tourists, encouraging new residents to settle in their area, upgrading living standards of local communities, the focus is on investigating such factors which could support all the above mentioned processes and finally become reflected in the form of a long-term socio-economic development. The city image seems to meet these expectations and becomes the factor more and more frequently considered by local authorities, entrepreneurs, local community, academic circles in the process of preparing consecutive strategic activities for the benefit of city promotion and development. Previously image creation was most often limited to advertising campaigns while nowadays image construction is based, to a great extent, on an overall series of events activating a wide range of actors who represent the regional scene. The perception of city image through an extensive spectrum of developmental opportunities, possible to accomplish as the result of subsequent and complex activities, is closely related to upgrading the level of knowledge about territorial marketing the image of which represents an important area, but also the involvement mainly on the part of self-governments.

Alternatively, an unfavourable image may become an obstacle in stimulating city dynamic development. A city perceived in a negative way may be associated with poverty, backwardness, underdevelopment, limited investment attractiveness, lack of order, poor management, corruption, insufficient technical and communicative infrastructure, missing distinctiveness, obscure image, or absence of perspectives for the future. The objective of the hereby study is an attempt to emphasize that the image of a city has to be regarded as an important component present in the process of promoting it and enhancing its socio-economic development.

THEORETICAL ASPECTS OF CITY IMAGE

While attempting to define city image one may assume that its should be regarded as the sum of overall subjective images about reality which occur in human minds as the result of its perception, the influence of mass media, as well as informal information passed on by others. In such perspective a city image can be characterized by means of certain attributes focusing on its individual profile lacking in stability or its long-term permanent nature, however, considering its internal complexity, influence on increasing or decreasing city competitiveness, as well as its identification requiring special marketing research. A city image also becomes frequently identified with the subjective image created in human minds, with the peculiar picture of concepts and notions associated with a real life phenomenon, a person, an object, a process or location. An image is regarded as mental reflection of reality in the awareness of its environment, as the set of associations coming into mind about a given object, as an emotional reception of stimuli received from the ambient reality.

These cities which are successful in establishing favourable images in minds of their communities and the name of which evokes positive associations [Cigler, 2008, p. 315], in the broadly understood public opinion, stand much greater chances of attracting valuable partners, investors, residents and entering into harmonious cooperation with them.

When approaching the problem from another perspective an image is defined as the collection of experiences, information, opinions, expectations, ideas, visions, emotions, associations referring to a given product, city, region and deeply rooted in the awareness or sub-consciousness of a significant group of recipients. An image is also referred to as the subjective and emotional attitude, opinion and evaluation referring to the certain area or location. Another definition describes an image as the sum of beliefs, ideas and impressions which people have about a given place [Kotler, Asplund, Rein, Heider, 1999, p. 160].

Among the target group of recipients' [Kolb, 2006, p. 92] activities related to city image creation one may basically distinguish internal and external addressees. The overall group of internal recipients covers key sub-groups of residents, local authorities representatives and entrepreneurs. The external group assigns major importance to tourists, potential residents, highly qualified labour force, international institutions and potential entrepreneurs, both domestic and foreign ones.

The image of a city or region should, without any interference, reach the target group and for this reason the following conditions have to be met:

- it should be communicated in the possibly simplest and most transparent way,
- it should be taken into consideration that image promotion represents just one of many components included in a more extensive socio-economic strategy of development carried out in a city,

- it has to be considered that image creation should be strictly subdued to clearly defined objectives and goals written down in the city development strategy and implemented in the way possible for monitoring,
- promotional activities should be carried out considering competitive territorial units.

The significance of positive city image results from many crucial functions it performs. An image may be referred to as city profile carrier, as the component influencing investment decisions and choices, as the location for settlement. It constitutes the simplification of reality in the form of mental abbreviation which facilitates the diversification of particular entities and speeds up the process of taking up decisions. Apart from certain measurable advantages it ensures the whole package of added values associated with experiencing the feeling of certain prestige, satisfaction from calling oneself a resident of this particular city, enhances the feeling of being a part of a certain social group. Favourable city image increases local community trust for the authorities in power which manifests itself in consent, to a certain extent, regarding decisions these local authorities make. Besides it strengthens residents' and tourists' attachment to certain city products which co-create its image and reduces negative information appearing in the environment. As the result the conducted promotional activities become more effective which helps the city to become distinguished at the background of competitive units [Wardrop, 2010, p. 149]. Additionally, it supports local authorities in carrying out activities which in some areas may arouse smaller social support and therefore influences the general climate and relations between particular social groups.

THE IMAGE FOR THE BENEFIT OF CITY PROMOTION AND ITS SOCIO-ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

The role of city image becomes more and more frequently noticed in the aspect of upgrading the investment oriented city attractiveness. An image may become the major factor in choosing a given location for potential investments. Future investors, apart from economic factors, also pay attention to city prestige, its position in national and international rankings of business friendly locations, opportunities for spending free time, local authorities involvement in supporting enterprises, creativity [Green, 2010, p. 4] and innovativeness of local community, monuments of culture [*The impact of culture...*, 2009], relics of the past and tourism oriented potential.

The presented dimensions of investment attractiveness (fig. 1) should be referred to as the simplified approach which concentrates mainly on the selected factors responsible for attractiveness and developmental targets of cities and regions. While studying professional literature one may encounter approaches

by far more extensive and covering much broader spectrum of determinants. However, attention should be paid to the fact that the approach presented below functions as a separate category included among the key factors of city investment attractiveness and such image perception becomes more and more common and noticeable in numerous studies. The investment attractiveness itself is determined by positive city image and may finally, after attracting an investor, become translated, among others, into creating new jobs, higher revenues flowing into the city budget, diffusion of innovative solutions, implementation of modern management structures, availability of new products and services.

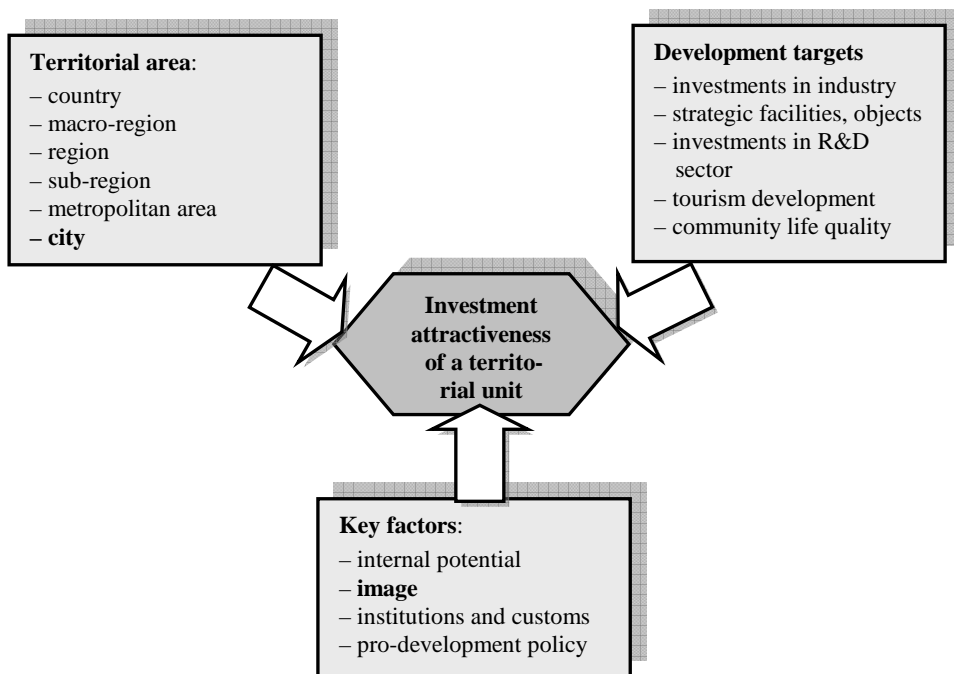


Figure 1. Three dimensions responsible for investment attractiveness of a territorial unit

Source: Author's compilation based on [Ballotta, 2004; Rainisto, 2003; Kotler, Asplund, Rein, Heider, 1999; Martin, 2003].

Among the sets of communication tools, by means of which a city may strengthen its image among potential investors and in this way stimulate its socio-economic development and also improve its competitive advantage, the following may be listed:

- preparation and proper distribution of guidelines for investors, economic catalogues where crucial role is played by the complexity of presented documents and their adequate focus manifesting itself in the form of emphasizing crucial components from investors' point of view,

- appointing a special unit for serving investors. One institution should be established constituting e.g. a part of local administration structure which should be responsible for providing the interested parties in all indispensable information referring to running a business in a city. The condition for such unit successful functioning is met in the form of its competent and adequately trained staff. The first contact personnel is extremely important in the context of city image since it is during the first meeting that clients jump into conclusions regarding the opinion about a particular institution or city providing effective and friendly customer service, or just the opposite,
- participation in fairs and exhibitions,
- organization of press conferences,
- complex cooperation with representatives of institutions connected with business environment,
- entering into agreements with twin cities and opening representative offices in regions the main task of which is to conduct promotional activities, coordinate projects under implementation, or exchange experiences with other units performing similar activities,
- preparation and consistent application of an advertising slogan suggesting measurable benefits resulting from undertaking business activity or settling in a particular city.

Positive experiences of investors, who have been functioning in the city so far, are of great significance in stimulating business activities and upgrading investment attractiveness of a city in the context of its image. Potential entrepreneurs interested in bringing their business to the city take into consideration all information obtained from entities which have already been functioning in the local environment. If the due experiences are positive and references are favourable the decision about the choice of investment location becomes much more realistic. City authorities do confirm that there occurs strong relationship between attracting new investments based on the already functioning ones.

Table 1. Potential influence of an image on selected spheres of city functioning

Spheres of city functioning	Favourable influence of positive image
<i>1</i>	<i>2</i>
Economy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • higher city investment attractiveness, • better climate for investments, • increased city recognition, • more intense tourist traffic, • possibility of minimizing the effects of uneven demand for tourism services, • increase of loyalty among tourists, • positive experiences and opinions of previous investors, • improved city perception at national and international arena,

1	2
Economy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • higher attractiveness of city products and services, • increased interest of developers in the city, • possibility of shopping centres faster development, • higher interest in the city on the part of sponsors, • events organized gain higher interest and participation of residents or visitors, • enhancing purchase decisions of potential clients regarding city products and services, • opportunity for becoming distinguished at the background of other cities, • higher chance for important national and international institutions establishing their seats in the city.
Society	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • prestige related to work and life in a city of a recognized image, • strengthened feeling of loyalty towards the city, • local identity strengthening, • higher creativity of local community, • enhancing the awareness of cultural identity, • decreased inclination towards local community migration, • better relations between particular social groups in the city, • greater social participation in solving social problems, • attracting creative personalities and famous individuals to the city, • residing in a city as the manifestation of social status.
Promotion and management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • higher efficiency of the conducted promotional activities, • possibility of promotional materials reaching a larger group of recipients interested in city offer, • opportunity for focusing promotional activities in the specifically defined areas, • mental city allocation in a group of locations attractive for both potential residents and business, • facilitated cooperation with other cities at both national and international level, • extending the scope of international exchange of territorial self-government employees and members of local community, • greater interest in the city on the part of media, • including image creation into the scope of broader socio-economic strategy development, • reduction of negative information occurring in the environment, • local authorities position strengthening, • recognition earned from other territorial units owing to the status obtained, • easier implementation of tasks arousing smaller social acceptance.

Source: Author's compilation based on [Kotler, Hamlin, Rein, Haider, 2002; Kotler, Haider, Rein, 1993; Anholt, 2007; Gelder, 2005; Gelder, 2011; Powell, 2002; Middleton, 2010; Metaxas, 2002; Baker, 2007; Florida, 2005; Todaro, Smith, 2009; Govers, Go, 2009].

The image does have complex influence on particular spheres of a contemporary city functioning. The presented summary of information (tab. 1) is limited to economy, society, promotion and city management.

In the social sphere of city functioning an image plays the role of a peculiar, local identity binding factor. Residents do appreciate the prestige and are proud of living and working in a certain city, which has a measurable effect on improving their life quality understood as the combination of the possessed material goods, wealth and the feeling of life satisfaction [Yuan, Yuen, Low 1999, pp. 3–4; Clark, Huxley, Mountford 2010, p. 22]. To some extent it results from the mutual relation consisting in shaping the city by its inhabitants and the city itself influencing their personality. There occur opinions that living in a city of established positive image translates into the category of human happiness. Satisfied inhabitants are characterized by higher creativity [Hennessey, Amabile 1988, p. 13], curiosity towards the surrounding world, inclination towards upgrading their skills, gaining new knowledge and openness to changes. Individuals who feel happy about their place of residence and perceive it as the right place of their settlement less often decide to leave it for another location. In view of the observed demographic processes and the migration wave, which took place in recent years, this phenomenon is of great significance in the context of city socio-economic development.

With reference to an economic sphere, apart from the discussed city investment attractiveness, attention should be paid to the influence of an image on the development of tourism, higher attractiveness of products and services offered by a city, making purchasing decisions easier, as well as an increased loyalty of the city space users. In the context of city promotion and management the key role of an image seems to manifest itself in enhancing promotional activities, their focus on selected areas, in strengthened the position of local authorities and acceptance for their activities [Insch, 2011, p. 12], as well as more intensive interest on the part of the media.

FINAL REMARKS

City image may exert positive influence on the local community standard of living and therefore may result in increased satisfaction from residing in a particular location and from the general wellbeing occurring there. In the competitive city environment it is one of the key elements in the context of diversifying its offer at the background of other units. The image supports attracting new residents, tourists, potential employees, increases the interest on the part of the media, establishes loyalty [Kotler, Keller, Brady, Goodman, Hansen, 2009, p. 426] and the feeling of local identity. Complex influence of an image on particular

spheres of city functioning also has to be emphasized since it determines faster pace of processes responsible for socio-economic development.

Local authorities play an important role [Ward, 1998, p. 202] in the context of image creation and socio-economic potential strengthening. Successful implementation of short and long-term strategic developmental objectives depends on proper management and diagnosis of the given unit strong and weak sides, on consistent realization and monitoring of activities constituting components of city development, as well as the correct direction of promotional campaigns. City development, based on its image, is not reserved exclusively by the richest metropolies, since each and every territorial unit may create its image based on its own advantages, human resources potential, unique products, services, favourable investment atmosphere and openness towards innovation.

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Summary

The article discusses selected problems referring to the role of image in the context of city social and economic development. Its initial part presents theoretical aspects of city image placing particular emphasis on its definition, listing the addressees of activities related to city image creation and characterizing the important functions played by the city image. Next, the role of image in socio-economic city development is discussed from the perspective of strengthening its investment attractiveness, as well as the dimensions of investment advantages, including the key role of image, are presented. Positive impact of image, on the selected spheres of city functioning, is also discussed and supplemented by broader characteristics of its influence on the social sphere.

Znaczenie wizerunku w rozwoju społeczno-ekonomicznym miasta

Streszczenie

W artykule poruszone zostały wybrane problemy nawiązujące do roli wizerunku w kontekście rozwoju społecznego i ekonomicznego miasta. Na wstępie zaprezentowano teoretyczne aspekty wizerunku miasta, ze szczególnym uwzględnieniem jego definiowania, wyszczególnienia odbiorców działań związanych z kreowaniem wizerunku miasta oraz scharakteryzowaniem istotnych funkcji, jakie wizerunek pełni. Następnie omówiono rolę wizerunku w rozwoju społeczno-ekonomicznym miasta z perspektywy wzmacniania jego atrakcyjności inwestycyjnej, przedstawiono również wymiary atrakcyjności inwestycyjnej uwzględniające kluczową rolę wizerunku. Zaprezentowano również pozytywny wpływ wizerunku na wyselekcjonowane sfery funkcjonowania miasta z poszerzoną charakterystyką oddziaływania na społeczną sferę.