

# Creating Identities and Promoting the Image of the Metropolitan Areas

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## ABSTRACT

Urban marketing is an essential element for the strategies of economic development of cities, in the context of the intensification of competition among urban communities. The creation of identity and the promotion of town image, which are activities of the operative marketing mix, are elements contributing to the creation of a town's brand and this represents one of the grounds for obtaining the success of the development strategy from the marketing perspective. The management of urban marketing can only hope that the actual image will be created according to the desired and conveyed town identity.

The aim of the present work is to evaluate and the present the method employed for the procedures of urban marketing to become efficient instruments of local economic development. The work brings to discussion the success of urban marketing practice which enhances the attractiveness and the value of a town, with a stress on the creation of the identity and the promotion of the image of urban communities. It also presents elements which individualize the application of urban marketing in municipalities on the European territory.

## KEYWORDS

urban marketing, metropolitan area, identity, image, promotion

## JEL Classification

M31, O18

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## 1. Urban marketing – a strategic instrument for town development

Local economic development also involves setting out a long-term marketing strategy directed towards the conservation and the development of natural, economic and anthropic potential of local collectivity. Urban marketing represents the best solution for implementing programs of urban development, because it helps identifying a town's problems and opportunities, sets the objectives and urban strategies, identifies the factors and the institutions involved and conceives the best methods of implementation.

Europe's existing configuration transforms the former competition among nations, with towns as main actors, which became a more unhindered and harsher competition. Towns and states entered a difficult transition process, from a stable industrial economy which dominated world markets, to a rapidly changing, intensively informational economy, under the influence of powerful global competition (Albăstroiu, MaruŃelu, 2007). Local authorities can not constrain the market to respond as they wish, but they must answer in a positive manner to trends and forces governing market evolution. The policies and reactive measures of stopping market forces have had no success, while proactive and interactive reactions gave towns the possibility to co-operate with private companies in various ingenious ways which took the market forces into consideration.

Thus, in the context it operates, urban marketing is characterized by the intensification of the competition among urban communities for attracting human, material and financial capital (in Europe alone there are over 500 regions and over 100 000 de communities competing for the same limited investment and human resources), by the high rate of changes of economic, social, politic environment. For this reason, nowadays, urban marketing must become a prominent characteristic of the strategy for local economic development.

Reinvigoration, as a stage of process of urban changing, requires a process of strategic planning, characterized by the co-operation of all inhabitants, establishments, the use of available resources and their

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hierarchical classification depending on major interests, the immediacy of problems to be solved and the relation of the developed processes. Urban marketing requires the achievement of a public-private partnership to obtain the finality of the strategic process. In such a process, it is almost impossible for the public sector to take on the entire burden of the policy of urban reinvigoration.

Urban marketing is an essential element within the strategies for economic development of towns, contributing to the creation of an overall view of the strategy. This helps towns to achieve more objectives (attracting new national or international companies, the consolidation of the industrial infrastructure, the development of tourism, the diversification and the improvement of transportation and health services) under the circumstances where public expenses must be maintained or lowered and the harsh competition must be dealt with in order to attract new investors.

Urban marketing includes a number of four activities in its nucleus (Kotler, Haider, Rein, 2001): the projection of the proper combination of community characteristics and services; the creation of attractive stimuli for existing and potential buyers and for the use of the offered goods and services; the delivery of products and services to the community in an efficient and accessible way; the promotion of values and images of places so that potential users be fully aware of the distinctive advantages of the respective place.

Urban marketing and the strategies of economic development must focus on creating competitive advantages for a town. These competitive advantages can be achieved by:

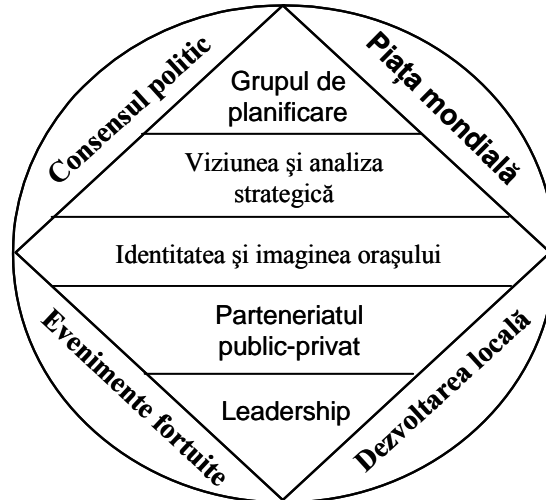
- creating an urban leadership by establishing a consented view on urban economic development;
- ensuring the convergence of urban resources through urban clusters (industrial parks, economic centres);
- creating relations between actors of different levels of public authority and the business environment for the development of new markets and turning to account of the investment opportunities;
- supporting local economic agents and creating a lasting relation between academic, civic environment and economic environment; active involvement of the community in solving public matters.

The definition of the urban marketing concept, as an instrument of economic development for a certain geographical area, necessarily implies the identification of a coherent set of operative instruments. The implementation of the urban marketing strategy is a difficult process, which is achieved through a complex of practical actions, reflecting the municipality's view on the actual modalities of achieving set objectives, concentrated in the notion of marketing mix. In the case of urban marketing, the mix must not be limited to the 4 classic policies. As opposed to the classic model of the 4 Ps (product, price, distribution, and promotion), the urban marketing mix includes 7 Ps (besides those elements mentioned above: human resources, the image of elements of urban environment, the processes involved).

## **2. Town identity and image**

The factors of success of urban marketing explain the reasons why the municipalities succeed in implementing strategies of economic development, using the specific instruments of this specialization of marketing. In the specialized literature, eight factors of success have been identified, guaranteeing the success of specific processes of urban marketing. Figure no. 1 graphically presents the grouping of these factors depending on their role and importance at the level of municipalities using the specific practice of urban marketing.

The elements positioned in the centre of the figure (the planning group, the strategic view and analysis, town identity and image, public – private partnerships, leadership) have the determining role for municipalities, the latter directly influencing the management of the activity of urban marketing. The other elements (the political agreement, world market and local development, fortuitous events) represent the challenges in applying the specific procedures of urban marketing.



**Figure no. 1: Factors of success of urban marketing**  
(Adaptation after: Rainisto, 2003)

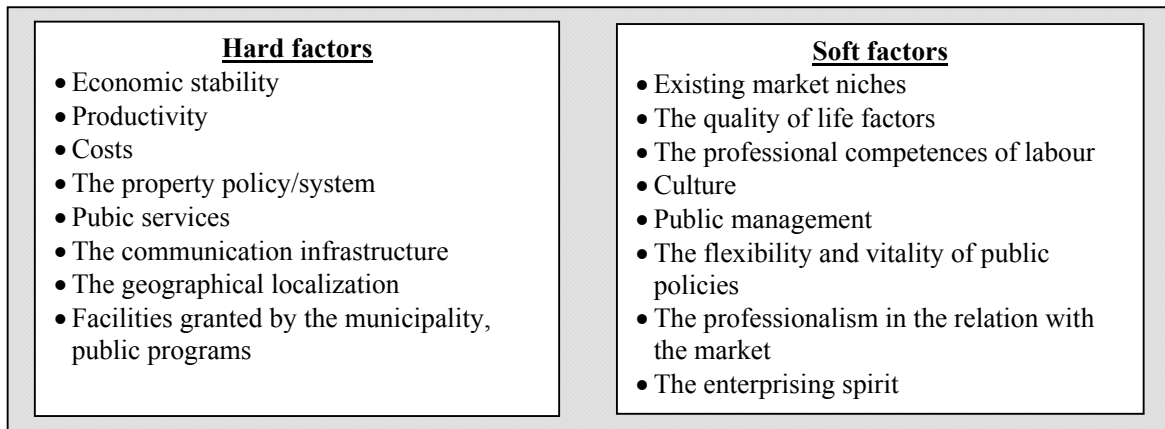
A town's identity and image, identified in the centre of the image, are elements contributing to the creation of a town's brand. It is impossible to create a town image without establishing the contents of urban identity at strategic level. Once the desired identity is clearly established, major elements of the image are formed. The future image of the town will be that established by the planning group, if the urban marketing has an efficient communication system. As far as the metropolitan area, the image is usually built around the central image: the town around which the other localities revolve, its identity being the one which creates the image of the area.

A town's identity represents the way it intends to be perceived. It represents a unique set of relations between components (Aaker, Batra, Myers 1992). The town's identity is a sum of its characteristics, which differentiate it from the other towns, being the result of the planned activities of urban marketing programs, and therefore the metropolitan area becomes the sum of images of the localities which form it, the stress being obviously on the greatest, the most important, the reference city.

The factors of attractiveness chosen by the planning group for the creation of the desired image are conveyed to target groups. The hard factors of attractiveness (the infrastructure) can not individually create a unique competitive advantage. A combination of these factors must be used, because it is impossible to use one of them with maximum efficiency. The soft factors of attractiveness (knowledge, the enterprising mind) become more and more important for the creation of the urban product, because they are difficult to imitate by competing towns. Physical elements of a town (town architecture) can not form by themselves the entire message of urban identity, therefore associations with immaterial elements are necessary (Ashworth, Goodall, 1990). Physical elements are not sufficient for the creation of a brand. Focusing on physical elements is easier to achieve, because towns directed their efforts on urban landscape (Gold, Ward, 1994).

These factors of town attractiveness are presented in the figure below:

The image of a place represents a total of beliefs, ideas and impressions that people have about that place. The images are a simplification of a large number of information and mental associations, formed with reference to the respective place. The images differ from stereotypes; the latter are wide spread, much distorted, simplistic images, inducing a favourable or unfavourable attitude towards a town. The image is a single individual's perception, for this reason it differs from one person to another.



**Figure no. 2: The factors of town attractiveness**  
(Adaptation after: Kotler, Asplund, Rein, Haider, 1999)

The creation of a town's brand identity must represent an important preoccupation, to offer it a plus of attractiveness. As a rule, names of the brands are the same as towns' names. The brand reflects the aspirations of the municipality, connecting it to the values attached to the products and services it offers. A town's brand will only be successful if its values are based on the aspirations of its inhabitants. For this, a strict audit of strategic marketing, a determined and continuous improvement of the product and the originality in creating symbols will be necessary.

The brand's identity is an active element in the process of urban marketing; the brand's image is a passive component, without it a town can not decide on the exact form of communicating its identity (Keller, 1998). The management of urban marketing can only hope that the actual image will be created according to the desired and conveyed identity of a town. A town's image is the result of a complex of activities developed on a long term, representing the uniqueness of a town's characteristics. Therefore, the image is not easy to copy, as the other activities of the marketing operative mix.

It is necessary to have a detailed analysis of the town as a brand, for which several stakeholders, including local economic agents and the local community must be taken into consideration. The brand represents one of the grounds for obtaining the success of the development strategy from the marketing perspective. The creation of a great brand requires a well individualized identity of a town, constancy and a clear positioning within the market. The strategic management of the brand supposes the projection and implementation of marketing programs which aim at creating, analyzing the evolution of the brand, controlling its finality. Three essential conditions are necessary for the creation of a successful urban brand: the municipality's representatives must be actively involved in establishing and maintaining the brand; the central values around which the town's brand is created must be set; the communicational effort must be based on the central values of the identity.

The process of creating a town's brand implies taking strategic decisions: choosing the brand's name, which most of the times is the same as the town's name; the positioning of the brand is an essential strategic decision, the town must position its image together with the other towns within the desired segment; the entire activity of urban marketing - objectives, strategies, tactics - derives from positioning the brand on the market.

A town's brand must meet the following criteria (Kotler, Haider, Rein, 2001): be simple; be applicable in various situations; be efficiently used by all stakeholders; be credible; reflect the town's future; inspire pride; be based on the values of the community; be well individualized; be used both nationally and internationally.

The same rules also apply for metropolitan areas. As far as any brand is concerned, it is important to consider the constancy in using the logo, the programs of visual identity aiming at protecting the integrity of the brand and the logo. The town's logo-type (or some of its elements) can not be used by companies, agents, organizations without the authorization of the municipality, deliberately expressed in writing, the respective requests being analyzed and managed by the municipality's departments of public relations.

Using a single logo for all the municipality's materials, vehicles and establishments contributes to amplifying the acknowledgment of a town's brand. The more often the logo is seen, the better and the faster it will be recognized by citizens (for example, the municipality of Regina city has a program of corporate identity which minutely establishes the form of the logo – colours, dimensions, types of letters, placing the logo in official documents etc).

The policy regarding the image of the elements of urban environment refers to visual (corporate) elements of the town which must reflect the brand/image the respective place intends to convey. This image signifies the synthesis of mental representations of the urban product of cognitive, emotional, social and personal nature.

These elements have an essential role because they provide the conditions for the development of the relation between municipality and the “consumers” of urban products/services. Indeed, the anthropic environment, especially constructions, by its aspect, fulfils the functions of the wrapping in the marketing of goods: of communication, protection, creation of the image. These elements facilitate the flow of activities and persons, by a certain way of disposing and inter-conditioning with the other elements of the urban environment and of the environment which is external to it.

The improvement of the image is not sufficient to ensure the prosperity of a place. Special characteristic elements are needed, to satisfy the inhabitants and attract visitors. Some places have the opportunity to offer a natural element of attraction (Bellogio – Como Lake; Aspen; Honolulu), other places have the advantage of a remarkable patrimony of historic buildings, for example Athens, with its Pantheon, Vicksburg, with its pre-war mansions or Bangkok, with its temples or exotic statues. Other places have built famous edifices, like the Eiffel Tour and the Arch of Triumph in Paris, the Empire State Building in New York, Taj Mahal in India.

The elements of attractiveness, the infrastructure, the architecture must represent the factors creating a positive, attractive image, together with the other factors of development. The image, as a result of the interactions between these elements, eventually represents “the product” the municipality tries to form, promote and “sell”.

It is clear that neither the image, nor the elements of attractiveness can entirely respond to the need of a place for development. The actual pillars refer to the infrastructure. The town-planning experts are interested in the attributes of town planning - the building architecture, open spaces and the level of utilization of the ground, street lines and traffic, the level of cleanliness and quality of the environment – as defining elements for the global urban product. Urban planners start from the hypothesis that people's attitudes and behaviour are highly influenced by the quality of the material environment they live in and that, by changing this environment, there will be an improvement in human attitudes and behaviour. The municipality can wish for more than a simple modernization of the exterior aspect of the place, suggesting a visual theme to control the creation of the urban product: the Swiss mountain town (Vail, Colorado), the cowboy town (Aspen, Colorado), the typical American country town (St. Charles, Illinois).

Visual symbols often have an important role in urban marketing. Many emblematic edifices of towns are permanently engraved in the public's memory: the Eiffel Tour (Paris), the Big Ben (London), the Red Market (Moscow). Judiciously used, these visual symbols appear on official documents, booklets, bill boards etc.

In order to be successful, a visual image must consolidate an image argument. If there is no possibility for the consumer to physically and directly perceive some aspects of the community before starting a relation with the municipality, he will analyze the situation through the already created image, which is often a stereotypy. The image is the result of the interdependence between several controllable and uncontrollable, tangible or intangible factors. The elements contributing to the creation of a town's image are the following:

- Events, festivals – represent the most active and often used elements for the creation of a town's image. These elements contribute to the improvement of the perception of a town's image if, in its turn, it is supported by the distinctive features of urban community (a town's architecture, functional delimitation, figures of the cultural, scientific and sports life, a town's symbols, recreation, amusement activities etc);
- Private companies, public institutions – towns often acquire the desired reputation due to the private sector. The relations between towns and private companies become closer and more efficient: BMW and Munich, Coca-Cola and Atlanta, Cathay Pacific and Hong Kong. In other cases, towns' brands and those of private companies converge towards a common success: DKNY (Donna Karan New York), L'Oreal de Paris, Istanbul Mehmet Cymbals. These companies help a town to attract visitors and foreign investors, ensure the increase of fiscal income, offer opportunities for the development of economic activities;
- The policies of the municipality – the modality of establishing and implementing these policies has a deep impact on the relation municipality-community-external environment. A good relation with the central government, the local community, the mass media, with the other towns is essential for the success of a town's image.
- The investments, living conditions – a clear and rigorous brand strategy will help the municipality attract foreign investments, highly qualified personnel, financing for public projects etc. It is certain that the localization of private companies is determined by a series of factors, among which we mention: the quality of living factors, the image of the local business community, the opportunities for diversification and business development, the education, the condition of urban infrastructure, the quality of the environment.
- The culture, historical vestiges – each town has a history. Some towns have a reach and long history (Jerusalem, Dubrovnik), while others can't take pride in a long tradition (Brazil, Canberra). Urban elements bearing the mark of historical evolution (monuments, public spaces, museums, statuary ensembles) are elements of attractiveness for visitors, investors, institutions, internationally renowned figures etc. This can also have an important influence on the perception of consumers of urban products/services.
- Human resources – the most important "fortune" of a town resides in its inhabitants. It is an imperative requirement that a town's inhabitants be periodically asked with reference to a town's matters, be involved in the development of projects which can affect their living conditions.

In conclusion, the elements of urban environment must successfully relate to create a visual image to consolidate an image argument. If the visual element does not harmonize with the slogan, the themes or the positioning, it will undermine the credibility of the place.

### **3. Promoting the metropolitan areas. Successful European practices**

Over the last decades, it has been ascertained that towns become more and more "disconnected" from regional or national economy, becoming an element of the global system. At this level, especially in the mass media, a town is represented by its economic-cultural image. This image is considered an artefact, its strong points and cultural weaknesses reflect on the community's economic possibilities.

Thus we can define the strategic management of the image as the continuous process of researching a town's image among its public, of segmenting and directing its specific image and its demographic audiences, of positioning the advantages of the place so that they support the existing image or create a new one, and of conveying these advantages to the targeted audiences.

Unfortunately, a town's image is less based on the marketers' communications as opposed to the traditional image of brands, because a lot of sources and actors contribute to the creation of an image and they are often difficult to co-ordinate. Prejudices play an important role; some towns have a positive image due to the natural environment, to the cultural inheritance, to tourist attractions. These help them create a clear identity, which helps them differentiate from other competitors. Towns must make constant efforts to maintain or improve their image, in the context where disturbing elements affect them more often.

The creation of an effective image is a part of the entire marketing process. For this, a rigorous audit of strategic marketing, a precise improvement of the product and originality in creating symbols are necessary. Once these measures are taken, a town's next task is to spread its new image among its target public.

The promotion is the last stage of the strategic plan of urban marketing. The planning of promotional strategies includes several tactical alternatives for each strategic objective. The main objectives of promotional strategies are to increase the competitiveness of a town, to attract new investments and to increase the quality of life for the existing inhabitants. The promoting programs aim at improving the perception of the target groups on the town/area, increasing their confidence, creating a positive attitude towards the future perspectives of their town (Inn, 2004).

The promotional activity in the case of urban marketing is characterized by a great variety with reference to contents, role, and form of achievement. In order to create a unitary promotional policy, the promoters of the place can generally use several generic influencing instruments to promote their town on target markets, namely: publicity, sales promotion, public relations; brand utilization; promotional manifestations; the municipality's human resources.

The same is applicable for metropolitan areas, and in order to exemplify the way the unique image of an urban community is created and promoted, we will consider two such areas in Europe:

a) The Helsinki region – is one of the most developed regions in Europe, being estimated to have 1.5 million inhabitants and 800 000 work places by 2025. At present, 24 localities form the Helsinki Region (Greater Helsinki), yet the greatest cities, namely: Helsinki, Finland's capital (186 km<sup>2</sup>, 568 531 inhabitants), the town Espoo (312 km<sup>2</sup>, 238 047 inhabitants), the town Vantaa (241 km<sup>2</sup>, 192 522 inhabitants) and the town Kauniainen (6 km<sup>2</sup>, 8 511 inhabitants) actually form the Metropolitan Area of Helsinki (YTV Area – from the Finnish name of the Council of the Metropolitan Area of Helsinki).



Figure no. 3: The logos for: A) the Metropolitan Area of Helsinki, B) the Helsinki Region



Figure no. 4: The logos for the cities A) Helsinki, B) Vantaa, C) Espoo, D) Kauniainen

The Metropolitan Area of Helsinki, as well as the entire Region, has formed its image starting from the premise that Europe acknowledges Finland as one of the most developed countries with reference to education, research and technology (for this reason YTV is also presented as: „Helsinki – European super region”, in order to point out that the great rates in the country’s development in terms of economy of information and knowledge are mainly due to this area, where 70% of the foreign companies are concentrated). The marketing programs of this area have been structured taking this idea into consideration and thus, Helsinki Region Marketing Ltd., the company which is held by the municipality of Helsinki on a proportion of 54%, resorted to marketing instruments such as the Ideopolis Magazine publication, the Helsinki Region Business Guide, and slogans through which it responds to potential investors, like: “Need more space? In Helsinki Region there’s always room to think” or “Looking for inspiration? Hire a Finn. Researches say they’re truly creative”. The external image of the region is that of a continuously expanding economical centre, greatly involved in the industry of high technology and in telecommunications, for this reason, the theme of publications and of materials published by the respective company and by the municipalities is “Helsinki – the most creative region in Europe”, the region having occupied the first place in the European Competitiveness Index in 2004 and 2006.

Also, the internal YTV projects refer to sustainable development by preventing and reducing losses, especially for saving natural resources (the “JESSE 2010” project with the slogan „It’s smart with less waste”) and by preventing climatic changes („Climate strategy for Helsinki Metropolitan Area”), Helsinki making efforts to raise the population’s awareness on the seriousness of the situation, under the circumstances where gas emissions in the area represent 10% of the total emissions at country level.

b) The Metropolitan Area of Porto – the second metropolitan area in Portugal, after Lisbon, is one of the most important European tourist attractions. The region is situated in the northern part of the country and includes, after the administrative reorganization in September 2008, 15 localities (Arouca, Espinho, Gondomar, Maia, Matosinhos, Oliveira de Azeméis, Póvoa de Varzim, Santa Maria da Feira, Santo Tirso, São João da Madeira, Trofa, Vale de Cambra, Valongo, Vila do Conde, Vila Nova de Gaia) and, obviously Porto city. This region, with a surface of 1 573 km<sup>2</sup> and 1 581 694 inhabitants (excluding Oliveira de Azeméis and Vale de Cambra, which recently became parts of the area), has never appeared to be put into shade by Lisbon, but it created a unique, animated, bright and coloured image, just like its logo.



Figure no.5: The logo of the Metropolitan Area of Porto



Figure no. 6: The logos of the localities in the Metropolitan Area of Porto



In the logo of the area, each colour represents a town (for example, the first scarlet circle in figure no. 5 represents Porto city), but each town has, in its turn, an emblem or a logo (presented in figure no. 6). The logo of Porto, situated north of the river Douro, close to the coast of the Atlantic Ocean, presents a monastery, the choice of the symbol being justified by the fact that the historical centre of the town is part of the UNESCO world cultural patrimony of 1996, with 95 protected objectives. Nevertheless, Porto is not all about monuments, churches and museums, but it is associated with wine (“Vinho do Porto” is a well-known origin brand) and with bridges (“Porto – City of Bridges”).

In the case of all localities in the region, the symbols and colours are used to identify the area in a special manner, stressing the fact that the ocean, the wine and the history are found in a region where the tourist can discover the new and the old in the same place. Also, in all the materials published by AMP (Área Metropolitana do Porto) towns are represented by the colour in the logo of the area (for example, there is a detailed calendar of monthly events in the region and each event is noted using the colours of the town where it is being held). The initiatives and the internal AMP projects refer especially to sustainable development, to the protection of the environment and to ecological education, like “Futuro Sustentável – Plano Estratégico de Ambiente do Grande Porto”, a project awarded in 2005 by ICLE (International Council for Local Environmental Activities).

Thus, as opposed to Helsinki, where the promoted image was focused on research, innovation and technology, Porto imposed itself by bringing important tourist attractions forefront, so Helsinki seems to be the ideal region to learn and invent the future, while Porto is the place especially created for relaxation and discovering the past. However something connects them: water (the Baltic Sea, respectively the Atlantic Ocean), therefore the blue colour and symbols like the boat and the waves are present in the logos and the promotional materials of these two areas.

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