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## City Image and its Role in Attracting Tourists and Investors Effectively

### ABSTRACT

The key issue in newcomers' decisions - both tourists and investors is the place's image. The image of the city is formed from the interaction between projected messages (i.e. image campaigns) and the consumers own needs, motivations, prior knowledge, experience and preferences.

More and more cities in Western Europe (not yet in Poland) are implementing *Strategic Image Management* - the ongoing process of managing the city image.

The English examples of the post-industrial cities prove that attracting visitors through effective city image campaigns result in substantial benefits to local economies. In these cases tourism is also treated as an effective tool for attracting inward investments.

### 1. Introduction

Post-industrial cities, when their industries collapsed, are not in a very favourable situation as the three main target audiences of their marketing activities (residents, investors, visitors) are dissatisfied. The monocultural structure of the local economy and its crisis cause dissatisfaction of the citizens because the standard of living is often low and many of them suffer from unemployment. Investors will rarely choose post-industrial areas for their projects as they prefer greenfield investments and are not willing to bear higher costs and invest in a badly perceived area because the negative image of the place may turn against their plants and products. And lastly, tourists are not willing to visit a badly perceived city, preferring other destinations which provide them with both emotional and physical advantages-benefits.

So a place can come into big trouble because of its monocultural industry and its collapse. The issue of how to overcome the difficulties and whether they can be overcome depends totally on the quality of the regeneration policy of its local authorities and its effective

implementation. The creation of a favourable image plays a crucial role in these activities, as images are even more important than tangible resources.

The image of a place plays a crucial role in a newcomer's decisions. It works not only at the level of the country, although especially now it is a vital thing in Eastern and Central Europe, but also at the level of the cities. This article will concentrate on post-industrial cities which have already chosen or are still looking for a new successful way of expansion.

Glasgow in Scotland is an example of the image change phenomenon. The city whose character in the 1960's and 1970's could be expressed in 3 words: dirty, dangerous, drunken, has changed not only its image, but the people there have changed themselves. The survey undertaken in South - East Britain at the time showed that majority of the respondents perceived the city as a place with much unemployment, with slums and depressed people. The survey showed that only 2% of the respondents viewed Glasgow as a healthy, prosperous, rapidly expanding city and there was nobody who saw it as a safe, secure place (Pacione, 1982).

It is unbelievable that now in the 90's Glasgow is known as a lively and dynamic city, an important cultural, commercial and also tourist centre, a city with the fastest growth rate of foreign visitors in Great Britain, a city with widely known theatres, museums, galleries and entertainment. A crucial role in that transformation was played by "*Glasgow's Miles Betters*" campaign (1983-90) promoting the city within the United Kingdom and outside. That example is the proof that even the worst perceived industrial cities can totally change their image and expand into modern and newcomer-friendly metropolises. However, it must be stressed that results of even the best quality activities do not appear in the short run. A longer period of about 10-15 years must pass in order to have visible effects. In the case of Glasgow, success was not a matter of just a few years. This proves that only a stable marketing and promotion policy towards targeted audiences can result in prosperity of the local economy as well as in satisfaction of the inhabitants.

## 2. City image and strategic image management

The question is what is the city image indeed. Whether it is what we have in mind when we think of a particular city. Whether it is only one impression of a place or a sum of impressions. Whether it is stable or whether it changes quite frequently. Kotler, Haidler and Rein (1993) defines the place's image as a sum of beliefs, ideas and impressions that people have of a place (city). Images represent a simplification of a large number of associations and pieces of information connected with the place. They are a product of the mind trying to process huge amounts of data about the place. Other authors even more strongly emphasise a large number of different influences on the final subjective image of a city (Ashworth and Voogd 1990). They claim that the received place images are formed from the interaction between projected messages (image promotion campaigns designed by the city) and the consumer's own needs, motivations, prior knowledge, experience, preferences and other personal characteristics. In this way the consumers construct their own unique representations or mental constructs, resulting in their own personal images of a place (city).

An image is a whole set of beliefs about a place. It means that Glasgow can be known for world-wide events (European City of Culture 1990, City of Architecture and Design 1999), but also for its theatres and museums or its industrial past and prospects for its future development. All these functions and elements create the city image. People's images of a city do

not necessarily show their attitudes toward it. The city of Łódź in Poland, generally perceived as a textile industrial city, suffering from huge unemployment and poor living standards can be for those who were born there their childhood hometown, where they come back, meet their family and have memories of their childhood or growing up. That also means that different people can hold quite different images of the same place. Almost nobody knows that Łódź is the second biggest city in Poland or that it is located in the very centre of the country and at the cross-roads of the future European highways.

Today the city marketers must consider the image as a major factor influencing a buyer's choice. If the investor wanting to establish a new factory in a Polish city had two prime locations of similar parameters in two different cities, he would choose the one that is known as a safer city. And safety of the city is not a factor particularly connected with the efficiency of the plant.

The ongoing process of managing the image was named Strategic Image Management. The process consists of a number of activities connected with the image policy. A fundamental element in the process is researching a city's image among its audiences, segmenting and targeting its specific image and its demographic audiences. Another important element of the process is the right positioning the place's benefits to support the existing image or create a new image, and communicating those benefits to the target audiences. The SIAM seems to be widely used among cities in developed countries, but it is not yet common in Poland.

### 3. Post industrial cities and their future

Numerous of the former industrial cities all over the world are actually suffering from the collapse of the industries which used to be the driving forces of their local economies. We can list such industries as: coal, steel, textile and many others which built a number of cities in different countries (especially in the 19th century) and now have to be changed to avoid bankruptcy. The question is what to do with thousands of unemployed, depressed people who not only lost hope for their future, but are also suffering from poverty. What to do with the society which is continuously ageing as the young are moving to more prosperous cities.

Theoretically there are a few directions of change of industrial cities (Gold, Ward, 1994). Maintaining a relatively high share of a traditional industrial function exists rather in theory than in reality, as most of the affected cities are implementing some changes. A more common practice is to replace the traditional industry with a different one, e.g. steel manufacturing with the food processing industry.

A more and more popular direction of change among the post industrial cities consists in attracting a high-tech industry into their territories that would replace the older industry. Such creation of the so called "silicone valley" can be a very interesting solution. Some cities do not want to develop any industry any more and they market the former industrial structure of their area in heritage terms as part of their tourist promotion strategy. A perfect example is Bradford, a big textile and engineering centre in the UK till the 1970's, now a market leader in short stays and weekend breaks, which attracts some 6 million domestic and overseas visitors annually (Barke, Harrop 1994).

The last direction of change for the post-industrial city is to replace the traditional function with service sector activities based on offices and retailing. Contrary to industry, services record an ever-increasing share of in the creation of GDP.

The presented directions of change can be mixed. That means that a city can try to replace the older industry with high-tech manufacturing and at the same time attract the service sector to the city. However, one of the listed directions should be dominant.

The chosen direction of future development affects the target audience. The city marketer should answer the question who is the city's most desired target audience, whom he can influence through the image. There are two commonly targeted audience groups - investors and visitors. Of course, a more specific classification can be used (i.e. long stay tourists, short breaks, weekend breaks, etc.).

In Poland, post-industrial cities try to attract especially investors - not so much tourists, as they perceive tourism as a fluent and risky business and are oriented at quick results of their promotion activities (a city council term lasts 4 years). The third reason why attracting tourists by industrial cities in Poland is not so popular is that Polish tourists actually prefer other destinations (warm southern resorts) and it will take time before the needs for this kind of leisure activities are satisfied. To change this situation it is necessary not only to change the industrial city image into a more favourable one but also to create the tourism facilities (hotels, motels, museums, other attractions, guided tours, good transport infrastructure, etc.). When the city targets at tourists, a tourist development concept is needed. Actually the foreign tourism sector in Poland is not so strong especially in industrial heritage, but in Western countries, this kind of tourism is becoming very popular. Tourism expansion is among the development goals of some Polish cities (not industrial), but the most common main objective in the development strategies adopted by most of the Polish cities is to attract inward investments which may improve their local economies in a relatively short time.

#### 4. Designing the city image

How to design a city image? What features should it have to be strong and favourable? First of all, the place's image should be valid, i.e. it should not be too far from reality. At the beginning of the market economy in Poland, when Lech Wałęsa was President there was an idea to create the image of Poland as the *"second Japan"*. Unfortunately, it did not work out as Polish society is dynamic and hardworking but not as much as the Japanese. People should be ready to believe the image (it must be believable). It is widely said that a good image is a simple image. The most desired situation is when the image is simple and there are not many images of the same place (city). Many images have an appeal. It is mainly visible in the city's slogans which must suggest why people would want to live and invest there and visit it. A widely known slogan *"I love NY"* suggests that there is something in New York to love. City marketers designing the city image must pay particular attention to the fifth important feature of the image which is distinctiveness. Cities should avoid commonly used slogans *"Invest in ..."*, *"Discover ..."*, *"Best for ..."* and should look for something original and in the same way design the image creation campaign. Having in mind the fact that the city slogan plays an important role in designing an appropriate image for the city, it is strange that examples of any slogans being used are hard to find at the Polish market.



## 5. Creating the positive industrial city image for tourists

Tourism undoubtedly has a favourable influence on a place. It is claimed that it is an important catalyst to help to regenerate the city. Tourism, if well managed can improve the city image substantially. Tourism may produce more positive views of the city among outsiders. It can be done by getting outsiders to visit and see the city for themselves, by influencing others to accept the positive images contained in the tourism promotions or to perceive the city as sufficiently attractive and interesting for it to be a tourist destination. A Chief Executive of a tourist bureau in one of the post industrial cities in the UK has explained its influence: *"it suits the economic and social needs of the city, that is it is labour intensive and brings in money from outside. It is also being used to regenerate the fabric of the city. It has brought enormous developments in the amenities, attractions and services for the community, so their quality of life has improved"*.

This expression will definitely encourage many other cities to look for success in the tourism industry, as it can make the city a better place to live, visit, work and invest in and so the standard of living goes up, the quality of life improves and the profile of the city is raised.

Nevertheless, as it has been already mentioned, post industrial cities in Poland tend to attract inward investors rather than tourists and the latter are only of supplementary importance. For that reason they usually implement a standardised image-improvement strategy which imposes creating an image of the "city reborn" with a glamorous as well as prosperous and cosy lifestyle.

It is common especially among the cities in Poland but also to some extent among these in the UK that they create very similar new images of a high quality place to visit, to reside in and to invest in. And in most of the cases, the last objective is the stimulus to conduct any city promotion activities. This "promotion orientation", not yet marketing, or strategy orientation of the city development planning on a short time basis (a 4-year term of the city council) leads Polish cities to seek for quick success with visible effects (Szromnik, 1997). And the simplest way to achieve it is to attract foreign investments - well built factories, well visible hotels, office buildings, etc.

The tourism industry is undoubtedly a more risky business and does not generate substantial effects in the short run. Nevertheless a number of English post-industrial cities connected their future with the tourism industry and after consistent campaigns they succeeded. An interesting research project was conducted by Bramwell and Randing (1996) on five English post industrial cities (Birmingham, Bradford, Manchester, Sheffield, Stoke-on-Trent) which created their new images as the tourism destinations. In all these cases, the traditional manufacturing industry experienced a severe decline. We can see some standardisation in the design of their images towards tourists, but there were also some significant differences. The analysis was conducted from the perspective of three disciplines: geographical studies (influences of the city size, landscape and history, mix of economic activities, regional and national importance, local power relations within the community, local marketing organisations and its objectives); marketing science (conducting market research, segmenting the targeting markets and gaining the position of a "status area"); and social science perspectives (the city image in relation to the major structural changes occurring in contemporary capitalist societies connected with globalisation, de-industrialisation and consumption).

Looking from the perspective of the problems experienced by Polish cities with starting consistently conducted re-imaging activities I will point out a few aspects of the above mentioned

analysis. The former industrial cities which plan to enter the tourism sector, usually with no previous experience face a real challenge. The question is to what extent the tourism policy in the city should be planned, co-ordinated, implemented and monitored solely by the public bodies and what should be the participation of private entities in these activities. The first step to create a favourable city image is to set up an organisation to take care of the whole process. In the UK, the first organisation with the task to improve the existing companies and attract new businesses through improving the city image was the Economic Development Unit, established in Bradford within the city council (1981). However, such activities were conducted in many British cities by public - private partnerships. Birmingham, now a widely recognised conference and convention centre, began in 1982 when the Birmingham Convention and Visitor Bureau was set up. It was a partnership between Birmingham City Council and the private sector tourism business and organisations in the area, with its role being the marketing of Birmingham for tourism, mainly in the form of business tourism. Birmingham has also a council department, the Directorate of Public Affairs, whose responsibilities include co-ordinating the tourism marketing activities of local authority facilities and attractions in the city. The key issue is the right division of competencies between different bodies and good co-operation among them. Based on British experience we can also draw a conclusion that tourism marketing activities are run more efficiently by public-private partnerships in comparison with those conducted only by private or only by public bodies.

The other important issue connected with the initial stage of the city tourist promotion is market research. In Birmingham, the image creation work was led without the assistance of any market research. A similar situation was in Sheffield, but later on this town did market research on attitudes to the city as a short break destination, and also among visitors on tours of factories in the city.

On the other hand, the Greater Manchester proved its professional approach, when its Visitor and Convention Bureau not only conducted an extensive market survey on attitudes to the city, but also was advised by two advertising agencies and worked effectively on the issue among its own staff. *"The Life and Soul of Britain"* slogan was one of the fruits of these endeavours. It is essential to conduct an appropriate market research before starting the image-creation activities, as it both minimises the risk of defeat and increases the publicity of success.

Despite the fact that all the researched cities (five) showed some standardisation in the image creation process (an exciting city, lively, cosmopolitan, with lots to see and do, dynamic, cultural, enlivened) there were also some differences which definitely influenced their successes positively. If all the cities created their images in the same way they would be uninteresting and even boring for the tourists who seek out differences when they travel, directing their attention to the features of culture, heritage and landscape which separate them from their own everyday experience.

Simplifying the promotion activities we can assume that Manchester promoted itself as an international city, Birmingham as an international convention city, Sheffield as a city of sports, leisure and tourism, Stoke-on-Trent as a museum of ceramics and Bradford as a short stay leisure destination. These differences are very needed, they constitute the strength of the image and influence greatly these cities' successes.

## 6. Creating a favourable city image for investors

A good perception of the city in the eyes of tourists has its influence onto the perception of outside enterprises, also on these which are planning their expansion and select possible places for new plants and offices. An interesting statement was made by Bradford's Economic Development Co-ordinator, who said: *"We see tourism as a tool for (attracting) inward investments. We believe that if you can ... promote a fairly positive image of the Bradford district, you might eventually get through a subliminal message to inward investors that Bradford is not that bad a place"* (Bramwell, Randing, 1996).

Foreign investors are the most desired audience group especially in Eastern and Central Europe, both at the national and city level. Their investments in most cases influence the local economy positively, minimise unemployment, provide advanced technology, modern work organisation schemes and provide good salaries, which leads to the upgrading of the living standard of the local community.

Investors' decisions are influenced, apart from the general (tourist) image of the city, also by the local authority's attitude towards foreign investors and their endeavours in that field. To be efficient, these activities have to be done professionally (Burgess, 1981). City marketers should understand that the image reflects not only the character of the place itself, but also the nature of the local authority. The secret is to influence the investors effectively by speaking their language. That is why understanding their needs and decision-making processes is a crucial thing for city marketers seeking success.

Another piece of advice concerns written promotion materials targeted at potential investors which should be more directly addressed to the reader. These written promotion materials (i.e. brochures) should not be too general, but in order to be effective they should concern concrete branches, markets and speak their language. Apart from professional activities of local authorities or organisations in charge, it is also worth stressing the importance of public relations activities in influencing inward investors decisions. The surveys on this issue (Burgess, 1981) assume that companies recommendations are the most important. The idea has come from TV ads of consumer packaged goods, which often use the so-called testimonial evidence to increase sales. Influenced local authorities can do a lot by exploiting personal contacts. The results of the survey conducted among financial investors in the city of Łódź prove that "personal contacts" are the third important feature which influenced their decisions to locate their factories there (Rudolf, 1997). Places both in Western and Central Europe spend too much time for publications and these spendings should be allocated more carefully.

Lastly, it has to be said that the city image towards foreign investors is created also by basic services towards them. Following up postal and telephone enquires can be an important factor in creating a favourable image of the city for outside enterprises. Only an integrated policy of creating a favourable city climate for foreign investors which is implemented in the long run may result in new investments supporting the local economy and effecting the level of living of the local people.

## 7. Summary

To sum up the considerations on city image creation efforts aimed at two most common target groups (tourists and investors) one can say that even with the most sophisticated promotion, old images die hard. Nevertheless as it was proved in the text even the worst crisis in the city can be reversed and a regeneration program with accurate promotion activities can lead to world-wide success.

The author is taking the risk to conclude that the post industrial cities in Poland have to make more efforts to change the negative image than these in Western Europe. The reason for this is the lack of previous experience both in this sort of problems and in general city marketing activities. The industrial cities in Poland are more directed at quick success, so they target especially at foreign investors and the tourism sector plays only a supplementary role.

It is necessary to underline that this short-run orientation is a great mistake, as it does not lead the city into prosperity and harmonious development in the long run. Also an integrated strategic approach in the city renewal policy is indispensable with the strategic image management, as the element of the crucial importance.

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