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## IMAGES OF POLISH CITIES IN PROMOTIONAL VISUAL AND VERBAL SYMBOLS. WHAT LOGOS AND SLOGANS SAY ABOUT DESIRED IMAGE OF THE POLISH CITIES?

**Abstract**

Advertising is one of the commonly visible elements of the urban landscape (real and virtual). It also does not require proof that advertisements of cities as such are also part of their “cityscape.” Since at least the nineteenth century, cities have advertised themselves as attractive places to live, visit, or do business. Therefore, the following research question can be asked: How do Polish cities present themselves in advertisements one can find in the landscape? The study assumes that each advertisement should clearly identify the sender and indicate its specific characteristics, distinguishing itself from its competitors. Polish cities began to use logos and slogans as a mechanism of description and distinction after 1990, when socioeconomic changes started. There are quite a few studies on this activity, but most of them are single case studies. Therefore, the authors decided to examine a relatively large sample of Polish cities, which allows for statistical analysis. Analysis of the logo and slogan content allows the authors to examine the desired image or the projected identity of Polish cities. The methods were chosen because they admit qualitative and quantitative analysis, especially when there is a sufficiently large sample. Therefore, the survey covered all towns and cities with more than 20,000 inhabitants in Poland. There are 218 such towns in total. The analysis was carried out in the first half of 2021. In conclusion, the authors find that the advertising of Polish cities is embedded in the past, promotes resources (substance), sometimes geographical location, but rarely refers to famous characters and human potential. And such a picture of these cities one may find on outdoor advertisements, which sometimes produce dissonance when accompanying modern buildings or new transport solutions in the city.

**Keywords:**

cityscape, city identity, place branding, logo, slogan



## THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

As an introduction to the presented research, the authors made two assumptions. First, advertisement in public spaces (out-of-home media) is a *sui generis* natural part of the urban landscape in the world (Bernstein, 2005) as well as in Poland (Kubuj, 2006). Second, city (place) branding is a legitimately common practice and a distinct subdiscipline of marketing. In the literature on the subject, it is assumed that the discipline began to separate in the last decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (Campelo, 2017). However, it is difficult to conclude so far that it shows the theoretical maturity (Vuignier, 2017) since the basic terms and concepts are still disputed (Kavaratzis, Ashworth, 2010; Hospers, 2020). This situation results in the proliferation of inconsistent analytical models (Shahahabadi et al., 2019).

Regardless of the reservations formulated above, it can be assumed that place/urban/city branding is related to region/city policies (Campelo, 2017), consisting of (1.) Place making or city building, a process which makes the place specifically advantageous or attractive; (2.) Place or city marketing, an effort to promote the place / city specific advantage and its attractiveness (Helmy, 2008, p. 11).

Helmy's approach separates "place making" from "place marketing," which seems ambiguous. The preliminary authors' study and the research conducted previously allow to make a conclusion that there is an overlap between these two spheres – place making and place marketing (Adamus-Matuszyńska, Dzik, 2019), especially in the public space of cities. On the one hand, monuments, architectural objects, and urban planning are icons of a place and are sometimes marked with city brands. On the other hand, marketing activities take advantage of these objects as elements of the visual identity of cities, which subsequently become crucial elements of their brands' identities. Monuments, architecture, and urban plans are treated as trademarks. The task of place marketing is to create a place that meets the needs of customers, that is, residents and visitors (Kajdanek, 2017, pp. 183). In other words, the elements that "make" a place in marketing and branding activities are perceived as a brand articulation and expose the expressions of the city/place. Brands, including place brands, use extensive design programs, comprising logos and/or coats of arms, marketing names, slogans, colours, photographs, illustrations, mascots, etc., and special guidelines regarding, for example, the shape of websites, designs of promotional publications, or signage of public buildings (Mollerup, 2013, p. 59). Finally, one may notice the following process: a place is created by material objects such as architecture, infrastructure, etc. (place making), which then may become their visual symbols, to then find themselves in the visual identity symbols (logos) practiced in place marketing and place branding, which in turn are presented in public places as various elements of city landscape (e.g. billboards, welcome signs, and other promotional displays).

Place branding cannot be limited to the design of a logo and a catchy slogan (Kavaratzis, Hatch, 2013, pp. 74). The complexity of this process is likely the cause of many frameworks (Ashworth, Kavaratzis, 2009). One of them is Anholt's framework called "the city brand hexagon" (Anholt, 2006), which consists of the following components: Presence (how people know the city), Place (the physical aspects of the city), Potential (opportunities the city offers), Pulse (city's lifestyle), People and Prerequisites (the qualities of the city). In this model, the physical aspects of the city, which include not only symbolic buildings, historical remains, or architectural icons, but also outdoor advertisements, are an important element of the branding process. The city space has its aesthetics, functionality and importance for residents and visitors. This space is filled with visual symbols informing about the activities of the city authorities, the city itself and people who live there.

When a city as a research unit is analysed, it should be emphasised that it is a place which needs to be considered as a public or/and social space (Jałowicki, 2010). Public space, that is, the common space of residents and visitors, which is public utility space, is a key determinant of the identity of a given city (Bierwiazzonek, Nawrocki, 2017, p. 59). The identity of a place is not an abstract construct, as it is determined by the social system within which the place is defined. It is a specific process determined by the boundaries of the territory, the symbolic meaning of landscape elements, and components like those that shape a corporate identity (Bierwiazzonek, Nawrocki, 2017, p. 77), such as behaviours, communications and symbols (van Riel, Balmer, 1997). The first two elements, behaviours and communications, are widely covered by various disciplines and require no comment here (Kavaratzis, 2004). However, for the theoretical framework of the considerations presented, the term 'symbol' should be defined. As Lisowska-Magdżarz (2019, p. 139) describes, a symbol is a sign in which the relationship between the signifier and the signified is based on a kind of contract, convention, and shared interpretation. This is important for visual symbols such as logos, logotypes or slogos, as they are to be developed in the process of some kind negotiation between self-government, residents and visitors.

The two processes place making and place promoting (what means: place marketing and/or place branding) are therefore closely related. In Polish law, self-governments are responsible for managing the resources of a local government unit (a place), and so they are accountable for both these processes. Any element of a particular place communicates messages about its image (Kavaratzis, 2004). That is why one may find a research gap that can be specified in the following question: How do cities portray themselves using the tools of place branding in outdoor advertisements, which are the elements of "place making"? The question formulated in this way requires the recipient to be included in this analytical process, because, in parallel, one can ask: what a sender (a local

government unit) wants to expose to recipients (residents, business, visitors) who perceive varieties symbols in the city landscape? Taking into account the Kavaratzis model of city image communication, it should be noticed that, apart from the primary communication (landscape, infrastructure, structure, and behaviour) there is secondary communication which takes place through marketing practices (Kavaratzis, 2004, p. 68). Considering that the urban landscape today also includes various forms of advertising, and these are used by the local government to inform residents and visitors about its activities and intentions, outdoor advertisements are the carriers of city symbols and can be places in the city landscape, becoming, in this way, elements of primary communication. Like this, secondary communication is combined with primary communication and together they communicate the image of the city in its own space.

Deliberating all these theoretical assumptions, the authors propose an analytical model of this issue, going beyond the literature on the subject in the field of place marketing and place branding. The project of the theoretical model is an original proposal combining the Beyrov/Vogt's concept of the three functions of the city (2015), the concept of brand formulated by Giza (2017), the Cronin's concept (2018), which unifies communication into "commercial speech", and the place branding model by Kavaratzis (2004).

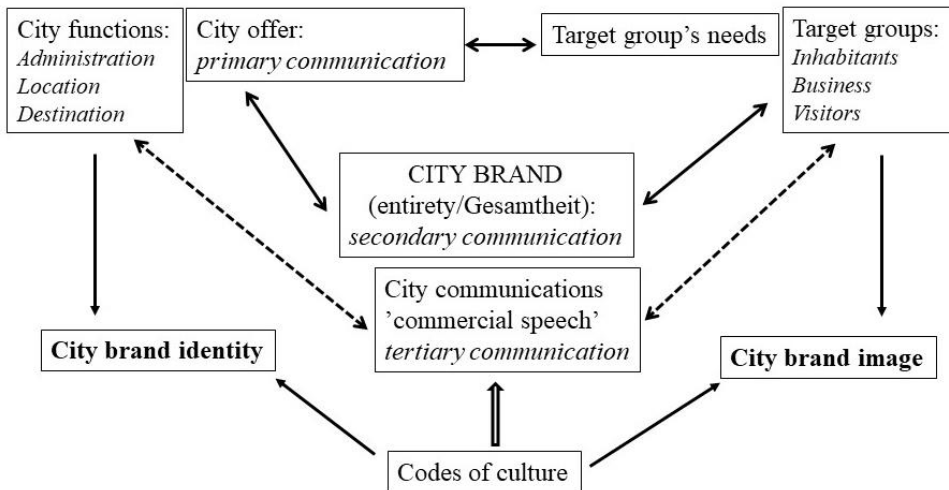


Fig. 1. Analytical model. Source: authors' theoretical model.

The authors in the proposed model clearly separate the brand identity, which is created by the sender, from the brand image, understood as psychological processes taking place in the recipients' brains (Giza, 2017, p. 167). Identity is "translated" into an image through communication processes that have

a relatively uniform form of “commercial speech” (Cronin, 2018). In the process of creating and receiving messages, an important role is played by the codes and conventions of culture common to senders and recipients (Schroeder, 2008). Taking into account the key functions of the city (Beyrow, Vogt, 2015) and the target groups (Hankinson, 2010) as commonly mentioned in the literature on the subject, the authors treat the “city brand” as a whole (Eng. entirety, Ger. Gesamtheit) (Beyrow, Vogt, 2015, p. 11). The city’s brand is a complex business and cultural entity (Cartwright, Sturken, 2018).

“Brand identity” is a multifaceted, multi-element, and not completely coherent concept (Dinnie, 2008, pp. 41–46), however, it seems that there is an agreement that one of its key dimensions are “codes of expression” and it can be treated as visible (tangible) components of brand equity (Jacobsen, 2012). The logo is a visual code of expression, so it is one of the basic codes of brand identity. The theoretical conclusions are based on the distinction made by John A. Bateman, who divides images into five groups, i.e., graphic, optical, perceptual, mental, and verbal (2014, p. 15). In the case of logos’ presentation in public space, the graphic category is examined, including pictures, statues and designs. The authors assume that logo:

- is a graphic sign (Wheeler, 2018),
- allows for socialization around something that people already proud of or engaged with (Govers, 2015, p. 81),
- should describe or at least hint the city identity (Mollerup, 2013).

Logo is a simple sign which is filled with meanings and connotations. It transmits information comprised into visual elements which should make it easier to recognize, remember and distinguish a given place from others. Due to visual rhetoric and the ubiquity of displays logos acquired importance in marketing practices, making visibility more important than the vision itself (Barroso, 2017, p. 59).

In the case of place brands and their outdoor presentations, the authors accept that a specific type of slogan can be analysed additionally. Kochan distinguishes a particular type of verbal/visual symbol and defines it as “slogo” (2005, pp. 84–85), i.e., a signature line/tagline permanently connected to the logo and name of the brand and defined in a standard form in the city’s visual identification system (Wheeler, 2018, p. 54; Healey, 2010). Such “slogos,” as shown by the initial query, are frequently used in the process of identity building of territorial brands in Poland. Its features are as follows:

- Slogo appears next to the logotype and/or graphic sign and is, as a rule, graphically associated with these symbols (Healey, 2010, p. 230).
- It is simple in form.
- It is official inform and tone, playfully and provocative slogans are extremely rare.

- It refers to the universe of the messages of the sender, it expresses the general mission, the entirety.

- It is permanent and is assigned to the sender for years.

An information layer (including outdoor advertisements) is an important element of urban space, which is complex and complicated. In cities, especially in their centres, the amount of information is so large that the research highlights semantic and visual chaos (Bierwiazzonek, 2012, p. 207).

To summarize the theoretical part, the authors would like to emphasize that the research presented in the following is about the identity of the city brands, that is, how the identity of the brand is built and how it is translated into expressions (logos and slogans) in public space. In the place branding literature, it is assumed that a territorial brand has two aspects: identity and image (Braun et al., 2018). As Kapferer stresses

Identity is on the sender's side. (...) In terms of brand management, identity precedes image. Before projecting an image to the public, we must know exactly what we want to project. Before it is received, we must know what to send and how to send it. (...) image is a synthesis made by the public of all the various brand messages, eg brand name, visual symbols, products, advertisements, sponsoring, patronage, articles (2008, p. 174).

It should be added that designers consider logo's applications when designing it (Mollerup, 2013a, p. 92). While working on visual identification, such applications are also tested in public space (Wheeler, 2018, pp. 162, 176, 184, 191). Therefore, a research problem of practical importance should be identified, concerning the presentation of the logo in a public space.

## RESEARCH METHODS



The content analysis method was used for the research. It is valuable both in the analysis of verbal and visual messages (Adamus-Matuszyńska, Dzik, 2017, pp. 58–73). In the case of logos and slogans, the research process consists of four stages:

- a) Finding logos and slogans – expressions were found on official webpages, social networks, and other promotional publications. Photographs of the presentations in the public space were taken exclusively by one of the co-authors (Piotr Dzik).
- b) Formulating categories for coding – coding means a set of descriptive labels (or categories) to the logos and slogans.
- c) Coding images – applying distinguished categories to city logos and slogans.
- d) Analysing the results – formulating conclusions and discussion of the questions.

Content analysis is associated with many theoretical and practical complications, especially the methods of sample selection for research. The authors made two decisions in this regard. First, all cities in Poland that are inhabited by more than 20,000 residents were chosen for the examination, which made 218 cases. The objective of such a selection was a possible future comparison with other studies conducted outside of Poland. For example, a similar criterion was adopted in the analysis of German cities by Matthias Beyrow and Constanze Vogt (2015). Secondly, the categories for analysis were adopted from the authors' previous research, also to create the possibility of comparative studies. Logos and slogans were verified in terms of categorization based on their content. In doubtful situations, descriptions and justifications contained in visual identification systems, descriptions on websites, statements of authorities, also obtained from personal contacts, were sources of decisions. The following categories were used in the content examination process:

- a) symbols of the past, such as coat of arms, symbols referring to the coat of arms (it should be noted that in practice of Polish Local Government Units, there is found combination of a coat of arms and a promotional slogan as promotional signature).
- b) natural resources, such as water, forests, animals, etc.,
- c) business capacity, such as symbols of industry, production, etc.,
- d) location as a resource/product
- e) human character (person)
- f) indefinite potential, such as symbols of capacity, development, opportunities, but they are rather abstract ideas than real objects.

Table 1. Visual examples of the categories chosen. The quoted entries in English come from the original documentation (visual identification systems).

City name	Logo/slogan	Explanation, remarks
Prudnik (Opolskie)		The sign has two elements: (1) the graphic, which is the simplified city coat of arms and is limited to the contour, and (2) the logotype is the name of the city. In connection with the use of the coat of arms, this logo was classified as a „symbol of the past.”
Hajnówka (Podlaskie)		The sign consists of three elements: (1) the graphic, which is the simplified oak leaves, (2) the logotype, which is the name of the city, and (3) the slogan which calls “Spiritual vitality.” Due to the oak leaf symbol, the logo has been classified as „natural resources.”

Opczno  
(Łódzkie)



The logo integrates the graphics and the name (logotype takes the form of a picture). From the information obtained at the Town Hall it was concluded that the logo refers to the most flourishing industry in the city – the ceramics industry. It has been classified as „business capacity.”

Biała  
Podlaska  
(Lubelskie)



The sign has three elements: (1) the graphic presents an open gate which is a reference to the architecture of the city, (2) the logotype is the name of the city, and (3) the slogan calls „Europe’s open gate.” The combination of the graphic and the tagline indicates “location.”

Puławy  
(Lubelskie)



The sign integrates the graphic, the name of the city, and the tagline. The content of the slogan and description contained in the visual identification system explain that the city refers to human potential. It has been classified as „human (person).”

Warszawa  
(the capital)



The sign contains two elements: an image (freely referring to the coat of arms of the city – the legendary figure of the Mermaid) and a “slogo.” The name of the city – Warsaw – is an integral part of the tagline. It has been classified as “Indefinite potential,” due to the connection with the past (tradition) and future opportunities.

Katowice  
(Śląskie)



The sign consists of three elements: (1) the graphics that refers to the industrial heritage and shows various features of Katowice in the form of colourful stripes, (2) the name of the city, and (3) the slogan “for a change.” It has been classified as „Indefinite potential” being an example of the abstract sign which at the same time tries to disclose Katowice potential. This logo is shown in different applications (see Fig. 2–5).





Collection of recyclable materials



City Hall building



Bus Station. Permanent display



City advertisement (sports event)

Fig. 2–5. Examples of the presence of the logo in the public space of the city. An example of Katowice.

## RESEARCH RESULTS

Among 218 cities, 36 (16,5%) do not have either logo or slogan. The content analysis of the logos and slogans of the Polish cities inhabited by more than 20,000 citizens reveals that the dominant symbols used in the promotional signs of these cities are codes related to history and the past. Inhabitants of every third city in Poland (35% of the surveyed sample) recognize that an element known from the past (history) is its distinguishing mark. Often, these are references to coats of arms. The second inspiration for the content of the Polish cities logos is the potential, which, according to the creators of the logo, is a feature of the city (18%). The third category found in promotional signs are symbols related to natural resources. The fourth were signs that focus on the location of a city. Business capacity is a symbol in 18 cases and human – in two of the surveyed cities.

Table 2. Results

Voivodship (region)	Symbol of the past	Natural resources	Business capacity	Location	Human (person)	Indefinite potential	No logo or slogan
Dolny Śląsk	7	2	2	2	0	3	3
Kujawsko-Pomorskie	1	0	1	0	0	2	3
Lubelskie	2	0	1	1	1	2	3
Lubuskie	3	0	0	1	0	0	2
Małopolskie	8	2	0	0	0	1	2
Mazowieckie	9	2	1	2	0	5	6
Opolskie	3	0	1	0	0	2	0
Podkarpackie	2	0	3	0	0	1	4
Podlaskie	1	2	0	1	0	2	2
Pomorskie	7	3	0	1	0	1	3
Śląskie	11	4	2	6	0	10	4
Świętokrzyskie	3	0	0	0	0	1	1
Warmińsko-Mazurskie	5	3	0	2	0	1	0
Wielkopolskie	4	2	3	3	1	6	1
Zachodniopomorskie	5	2	0	1	0	1	2
Total	76	24	18	23	2	39	36

Source: authors' research.

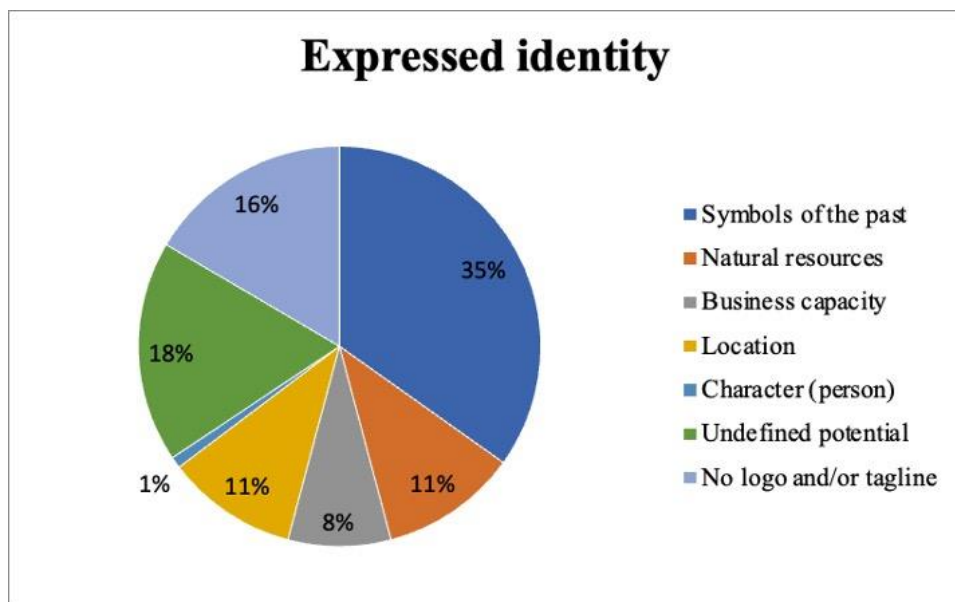


Fig. 6. Graphic presentation of the result. The frequency of occurrence of the categories studied in visual identification systems. Sources: authors' research.

## SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

The analysis of the content of the slogans, logos and slogans of Polish cities with more than 20,000 inhabitants reveals that the past, tradition, history are symbols that are presented in visual identification and at the same time in the public space. In addition, many of them refer to the coat of arms, which shows a strong immersion in noble tradition. 18% of signs communicate the potential of the city, such as possible activities in the city. Relatively few signs consist of business resources (8,2%). Nature in the city logo is less exposed and Poland is presented as “a country without people” due to the lack of characters included in the logos examined.

So, one may ask the following question. What does a visitor see in the city's space from the outdoor city's presentation? He/she sees that Polish cities focus on the value of the past, especially the one that refers to traditional noble values, particularly those related to coats of arms that are sometimes difficult to understand, especially for foreign visitors.

Logos in public spaces can act as both signs and symbols. As Sonja Foss stresses

A symbol is something that stands for or represent something else by virtue of relationship, association, or convention. Symbols are distinguished from signs by the degree of direct connection to the object represented (2018, p. 4).

As a sign understood as a direct indicator, the logo performs at least three functions:

- indicates ownership, it means who owns this (Adams, Morioka, 1994, p. 14),
- facilitates memorization as well as spatial orientation (Mollerup, 2013b, p. 24),
- demonstrates power, as Per Mollerup states (2013b, p. 14) “Signs – as a rule – are signs of authority. Those in power generally commission environmental signs. Rulers and owners use signs to inform and regulate society.”

As a symbol, the logo in the public space imposes the recipients' relationships, associations, or conventions which he/she should understand and accept. Placing the city logo in public space directs toward representations of space (Lefebvre, 1994, p. 33). The research carried out indicates that the city logo as a symbol works as a particular totem in its public domain. From the triad: totemism, fetishism, and idolatry (Mitchell, 2005, pp. 188–196), the concept of the totem best describes the spatial practices of the city logos. Logo as a totem is at the same time: modern because it is practiced in free market economy and ritual because it is used to mark, for example, festivals, it honours ancestors (there is sometimes a reference to the past), it builds a tribal identity through commonly shared symbols, and when a logo is placed in the public space, it takes the role of a public monument. Concluding one may stress that a logo has a very symbolic meaning, it is not only a sign, but also a specificity of the place. Logos as symbols have anthropological meanings, they appear in the space of consumption, and create relationships to individuals such as friendship, companionship, and kinship (Mitchell, 2005, p. 195). Mitchell's concept allows for treating the city's logo as a totem. The totem is both a symbol and a thing. In the case of the city logo, it is presented in the public space and carries specific content. Therefore, the public space with the city logo on display becomes a site of struggle over stories and narratives about that city. Because the one who creates and controls the story is the one who gives life (Bal, 2017, p. 52). In the beginning, there was a word. Today one may conclude that in the beginning there is a picture. So, the city logo is an important action in public space.

Logos of Polish cities placed in public space are totems, and as such they try to impose, first of all, a historical narrative on recipients. The representation of the past so strongly present in the logos and slogans of Polish cities is probably not surprising. Considering that heritage is exploited for multiple purposes (Ashworth, 2015. p. 16) and that objects, events, places, activities, and characters derived from the past are transformed into here and now experiences (Ashworth, 2015. p. 22), selecting particular elements from the past and exposing them in the city logo not only makes the city more easily recognizable, but also serves to remind about this important heritage and to keep it preserved in the minds of the visitors and residents.

## DISCUSSION AND FUTURE RESEARCH

The study is exploratory, but with a large sample and considering the previous research of the authors, several questions can be formulated that can contribute to future research.

First, the research concerns senders what self-government means in the case of the Polish cities. Considering the literature on the subject (Hereźniak et al., 2018; Lucarelli, Berg, 2011), the reception of such signs and their presence in public space seem to be an interesting research direction. It can be hypothesized that in marketing communication the reception will not fully correspond to the vision of the senders (Schmitt, Simonson, 1999), that the “expressed identity” will be different from the “perceived image.” This thesis, in relation to communication, was stated by Umberto Eco (Ollivier, 2010, pp. 118–120).

Second, another question arises for further research. All relevant sources confirm that place marketing (branding) is strongly related in terms of time, as well as concept and practice of local governments, to neoliberal ideology. David Harvey writes:

In recent years, in particular, there seems to be a consensus emerging throughout the advanced capitalist world that positive benefits are to be had by cities taking an entrepreneurial stance toward economic development. What is remarkable is that this consensus seems to hold across national boundaries and even across political parties and ideologies (2001, p. 347).

Thus, how is the neoliberal *Zeitgeist* and the practiced concept of New Public Management and Good Governance (Addink, 2018) connected with the tendency to the tradition, the past, and the use of traditional cultural resources, which is strongly visible in our research? What could be called the Polish *genius loci*? And is this tension local (Polish) or more universal? If one accepts the previously formulated thesis that logos in public space operate like totems, their content and form can be used to analyze ideology. This possibility exists because, as Mitchell (2005, p. 196) argues, they are synecdoches of social totalities.

Third, the presented research has shown that a logo and slogan in public spaces exist in three forms:

1. permanent in urban space (e.g., permanent signage on buildings in “cityscape”)
2. ephemeral in guidebooks, leaflets, gadgets, and advertising campaigns, etc.
3. virtual, e.g., own media, social media, webpages, etc.

At this point, the question arises whether a virtual space can be treated as a “public space?” For example, Vikas Mehta stated that: [...] “*public space* will refer to the access and use of the space rather than its ownership” (2014, p. 54). It can be argued that publicly available official websites can be considered as public space, while various types of fan pages on social media are not.

Fourth, slogans trying to combine tradition and modernity have been referred to in the literature as “semantic nadir” (Medway, Warnaby, 2017, p. 153). It seems that this term can be extended to cover the entirety of visual-verbal identifications, in line with the thesis of the cited authors that place branding should be multisensory. However, the hypothesis that the signatures linking tradition and modernity in visual and verbal messages are trivial and banal requires further research.

Concluding, all mentioned forms of public spaces should be examined together due to the concept of entirety/*Gesamtheit*.

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