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BRAND MANAGEMENT OF TERRITORIES: SOCIO-CULTURAL FACTORS OF DESIGNING A CITY BRAND

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Abstract

The article considers the problem of effective brand management of territories, the solution of which largely depends on the successful creation of a territorial brand project. Using urban branding as an example, the author shows that in the modern world, territories are in conditions of total competition for mobile and ever-decreasing resources. In this regard, brand-integrated technologies of project management, which can be applied to the design of an urban brand, are becoming more and more in demand. With the help of a culturological approach and based on an interdisciplinary methodology, social and cultural aspects are identified in the work, which often become the key to the success of a future brand. These aspects determine the perception of the city brand on the part of target audiences, its emotional and cognitive reflection among consumers.

The main thesis of the work is the author's assertion that sociocultural factors not only determine the strategy of designing a city brand, but also often have fundamental significance in improving the efficiency of managing a territorial brand. Therefore, modern brand design technologies include a thorough analysis of the opinions of city residents, the cultural memory of the city, its unique practices by which the city can be "experienced", conceptualized, felt, and also symbolically expressed. In particular, the author draws attention to such phenomena as the values of citizens, the authenticity of the cultural heritage of the city, urban identity, urban imaginaries, and the urban brand is considered as a symbolic capital of the city.

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Keywords: Brand management of territories, city brand, city image, urban brand design, urban identity.



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1. Introduction

The attention of the scientific community to the problems of effective brand management of territories (countries, regions, cities) is increasing every year. This situation is largely due not only to economic development trends and the growing demand for brand-integrated management technologies, but also to modern conditions – informatization, virtualization and globalization of social reality. Moreover, one should agree with the opinion of modern researchers, who believe that the modern period should be called the “competitive age” (Sogomonov, 2010), where, in particular, territories compete with each other for mobile and ever-decreasing resources.

Hence, the number of studies aimed at solving the problems of global competition of territories for tourists, investors, social capital and the search for recipes for the formation of a competitive advantage is growing worldwide. Of particular relevance are those that are concentrated in the analysis of effective mechanisms for branding territories. Branding of the territory, according to Antholt (2003), a worldwide British specialist in this field, contributes to the fact that the perception of the territory can be adjusted in accordance with a certain way. The consequence of this is the fact that branding a territory by strengthening its reputation and image opens up new economic opportunities for territories (Antholt, 2003). In other words, territorial branding is able to change collective ideas about cities and regions, and, accordingly, influence the socio-economic potential of territories: from tourism development to the formation of the investment attractiveness of a place.

2. Problem Statement

Brand management of territories is a whole complex of marketing technologies that allow you to effectively manage the processes of creating, positioning and maintaining the formed image of a place in the eyes of target audiences. Meanwhile, cities are increasingly becoming the objects of brand management technology these days.

Since a huge number of city brands compete with each other for attracting investors, tourists, residents, etc., urban branding is one of the most relevant areas of marketing places and is becoming increasingly important in strategic projects for the economic development of the city. In this regard, it is no coincidence that urban branding is now understood as “a means to achieve a competitive advantage in order to increase domestic investment and tourism”, social development of territories (Kavaratzis, 2004, p.70).

Consequently, the images of cities, in fact, represent a certain product that is delivered to a dynamic and globalizing market with changing trends, values, as well as consumer demands. While the success of the struggle of cities for the resources indicated above largely depends on the literacy of the city brand management, as a result of which a stable and recognizable image can be formed that allows you to identify the city among many such cities and, thereby, increase the level of competitiveness. Those cities that correctly used the brand management resource, as a result, earned trust from a number of social groups and gained recognition in the external environment, that is, they managed to use certain values of the city in the context of economic development.

A certain consequence of this situation was the fact that modern research is increasingly aimed at solving the problem of integrated brand management of the territory. In this case, the dominant trend should be called a research trend on urban brand management issues related to the need for a strategic

vision of this process, as well as the search for effective brand management models. In particular, specialists often suggest using a multi-level conceptual model of strategic brand management of territories, which includes such components as brand assessment, stakeholder engagement, brand infrastructure and identity, brand architecture, brand definition, marketing communications, brand experience (Hanna & Rowley, 2011). It should be noted that the identification of stakeholders directly involved in the brand management process (from power and business elites to public institutions) is an important point in the process of city brand management.

However, the success of an urban brand depends not only on determining a brand management strategy, but also on a qualitative analysis of its perception by a wide variety of target audiences. Therefore, the most important problem in the framework of brand management of territories is a competent and comprehensive study of various aspects of the initial stage of this process - brand design. In other words, one of the most important in this context is the problem of analyzing those factors that initially play a fundamental role in the design process of city brands and, thus, often become the key to the success of a future brand.

Since we understand the city brand as a project, project management technologies (city brands) are applicable to it. Hence, important stages in the integrated design of a city brand are the analysis of the current situation and symbolic resources of the city, the development of ideas and conceptualization of brand architecture, and the search for a brand management strategy. In general, in the design of an urban brand, it is important to solve the problem of rethinking the image of the city, both from its residents and potential target audiences, in order to identify the territory and form an attractive image of the city. At the same time, the interdisciplinarity of the urban brand project management problem, requiring the involvement of professionals from various fields of knowledge, from marketing and project management to urban studies and philosophy, should be called a certain difficulty in such studies.

Without claiming to have a comprehensive vision of the stage of managing the city brand design process, in this paper we focus on one of the integrative strategies for implementing this process. As one of the research sections that can be aimed at solving the indicated problem, is the analysis of those social and cultural aspects that often become a decisive factor for effective management of a territorial brand.

3. Research Questions

In designing the city's brand, as the most important part of brand management of territories, the closest attention is often paid to logo design, which entails the use of professional knowledge from certain areas of activity. However, the aesthetics and "presentability" of the visual expression of a city brand does not always become a guarantee of its further capitalization. Visualization of the brand project, in our opinion, is the final stage of managing the city brand design process. The visual and verbal components of the brand are just the tip of the iceberg. The process preceding their creation seems to be more laborious, which requires special attention, because at this moment it is important to determine the deep meanings, ideas, brand concepts that meet the needs of target audiences and are supported by the urban community.

A well-known specialist in the field of brand management of territories Zenker (2011) notes that "modern marketers often ignore the complexity of the brand of a place" and do not take into account its deep conceptualization (p. 40). Therefore, as the scientist notes, researchers of a territorial brand interpret it not so much using economic, geographical, and other "physical" indicators of the territory, but from the

standpoint of the process of perceiving the place and impressions of it from the target audiences (Zenker, 2011, p. 42).

This circumstance is explained by the very nature of the phenomenon of the territorial brand, which, in essence, comes down to the concepts of value, trust, impressions (feelings), that is, to those concepts that directly have a sociocultural character. In particular, the urban brand of the city is characterized by the presence of an emotional and symbolic connection that arises between a person and the city, and this connection projects what we call the image of the city.

In other words, in designing a city brand, the problem of determining the social and cultural “traces” of a future brand is especially important, because society and culture are what the brand holds on to symbolically link the idea and reality of the city. The attention of researchers is increasingly becoming the very “point of interaction - the perception of the city, formed by every person who encounters the city” (Kavaratzis, 2004, p. 63). The meeting of a person with the city and the comprehension of the city often occurs through the idea of the city, concluded in its image. Hence the reputation of the city, impressions of the city and the assessment of the city by various social groups are slipping.

In this regard, the question about the content of those social and cultural aspects that determine the perception of a city’s brand, its emotional and cognitive reflection in the eyes of consumers arises. Such aspects further determine the trajectory and patterns of functioning of the urban image, and therefore are the most important factors in designing a city brand.

4. Purpose of the Study

The main goal of this work is to analyze sociocultural factors as a fundamental basis for designing an urban brand. Thus, the study aims to identify social and cultural practices that can increase the effectiveness of modern technologies of brand management in the territories.

5. Research Methods

Since the research topic has an interdisciplinary context, covering various areas of knowledge (economics, sociology, philosophy, management, etc.), the basis of this work is an interdisciplinary approach aimed at integrating scientific developments from different branches of knowledge. In addition, the research methodology includes a cultural approach that focuses on the social and cultural conditions of the urban brand. Finally, to achieve the goal of the study, an instrumental method is used in the work that allows us to consider the brand as one of the tools for transforming the urban environment and the effective development of the city.

6. Findings

6.1. Urban identity as a sociocultural foundation of a brand project

For designing a city brand, such a crucial factor as urban identity is of particular importance. It is no coincidence that researchers emphasize that urban identity is nothing more than a competitive advantage that should be used in the struggle for resources, as the basis for the brand of the place and for building its reputation (Anholt, 2008). A successful city brand can be considered as a visually and

verbally expressed urban identity. Those associations of the image of the city that hold together the feeling of belonging of the city dweller with the city, as well as attachment to the place become a symbolic commodity, ensuring a positive perception of the city in the eyes of the townspeople. It is the representations of people with their impressions and thoughts that become the link between the distinctiveness (deferens) of the city and the visual, verbal expression of the brand.

In this regard, the design of long-term urban brands cannot do without analysis and consideration of the various elements of urban identity, providing the brand with individuality. There are many examples in the world when, with the help of a stable and positive urban identity, a brand symbolically has a connection between a city and a person, thanks to which we can easily identify a city and form a certain attitude towards it. If we turn to the experience of Russian cities, then the urban identity in the brand can be expressed through significant historical events (the 1000th anniversary of Yaroslavl), natural objects (polar night in Murmansk), fairy-tale characters, some of which are officially fixed in the “Fairy-Tale Map of Russia”, etc.

6.2. Values of citizens as an asset of the urban brand

As mentioned above, the brand is largely a projection of the perception of the city by people who have certain views, values, mentality and, accordingly, adhere to specific norms of behavior. In analyzing the design situation when developing a draft city brand, it is important to consider not only the external target audiences that the brand should be aimed at (tourists, investors, potential residents, etc.), but also such a factor as the inner culture of the townspeople, which is the foundation of urban identity.

The importance of the values of city residents in the design of an urban brand is increasingly noted in modern research. So, the goal of one of them was to study the various roles that residents play in the formation and distribution of territorial brands, as well as an analysis of these consequences for managing brands of territories (Braun, Kavaratzis, & Zenker, 2013). Moreover, according to researchers in the field of territorial branding, the process of creating a brand is “a process of identifying resources that are the most valuable asset for the territory: these are the people who live there” (Govers & Go, 2009, p. 109).

Indeed, in brand design, sometimes values that determine people's attitudes to the world play a crucial role. If we consider the brand of the city as a global text, then not only marketing technologies, but also ordinary people take part in the creation and dissemination of it - in social networks, at conferences, during travels, on the pages of magazines and so on. Therefore, it is necessary to identify and take into account the values of citizens who live, work, study and constantly share their impressions with those who are in contact with the city. For example, in Copenhagen, designing a city brand took place precisely from this position, since the developers identified one of the promising environmental values of citizens - the desire to maintain the cleanliness and environmental orientation of the city. As one of the central ideas of the brand, it was connected with the fact that cycling improves the quality of life at the local level, while a green wave at traffic lights was introduced in the space of the urban environment. As a result, the city brand of Copenhagen only correctly expressed the values that are held by the townspeople, and thereby allowed to concentrate the efforts of the city in this direction. It is important to note that in this case, the values of citizens can be attractive to representatives of the external environment (for example, for tourists or for potential residents who want to live in an environmentally friendly city). Therefore, it is

people with their values that can be the ideological basis of the brand project and in the future one of the factors of sociocultural support for the brand idea.

6.3. Authentic cultural heritage as the project basis of the city brand

The urban identity mentioned above is a definite difference that produces a competitive advantage for the city. It is important to understand that urban identity does not arise on its own, it is formed on the unique characteristics of the city, which are created by cultural content (Govers & Go, 2009). Indeed, culture, as experts note, is crucial for individual economic behavior and economic development at the macro level (Borisova & Kul'kova, 2016). Moreover, it is culture, as research shows, that is the basis for developing a successful territorial brand, as it expresses the identity of the place and provides differences between communities and places in a globalized world (Alexa, 2012).

Modern scholars point out that “one of the most important assets that cities possess is their local character and identity” (Kavaratzis, 2004, p. 70). Therefore, one of the key sociocultural factors that can increase the efficiency of the urban brand design process is a unique cultural heritage. In this case, the urban brand symbolically marks the authentic cultural practices of the city. As a result, the city brand acquires the individuality that lies in the most diverse elements of authentic urban culture: from public holidays to the traditional gastronomy of the city. An analysis of Russian city brands showed that many of them use elements of cultural heritage in the form of architecture (the color of the Kremlin in the logo of the Nizhny Novgorod brand), art crafts (Vologda lace as a brand), and musical classics (Klin brand, based on P. I. Tchaikovsky) and many other elements of authentic culture.

Therefore, the authenticity of the cultural heritage is an inexhaustible source of generating the identity of the city in the representations of various communities, and also represents the basis of the “genius loci”. Against the background of typical housing buildings, retail chains and cinema centers, historical objects, cultural traditions, memorial sites, authentic names, etc., participating in the formation of the city’s personality are especially unique. From here, “genius loci” studies often focus on studies of the authentic characteristics of a place. As a “genius loci”, a well-known person often acts, somehow connected with the territory, which, due to its significance and the presence of authentic objects that convey the spirit of genius, attracts people. The meaning of the name in this case is transferred to the value of the place, and the symbolic connection of a famous person with the territory causes a change in the status of a number of cities around the world (for example, Veliky Ustyug - the birthplace of Grand Father Frost).

6.4. City brand project as urban imaginary

As the well-known researcher in the field of sociology of the city Zukin (2001) emphasizes, the so-called “urban imaginary” plays a special role in building the image of the city. It makes the place more meaningful, and also able to attract people and thereby improve the urban environment through ownership of the territory, which is supported by the presence of original objects and the social practices of their cultivation (Zukin, 2001). Indeed, scientists have already established that the city lives, first of all, in our imagination, since we are directly confronted only with fragments of the city. The city “exists only in our heads or in the thoughts of those who work in the field of various types of art and the media:

television, the press, theater, radio, cinema, novels, DVDs” (Çınar & Bender, 2007, p. 2). The power of imagination is also noted by specialists in the field of territorial branding. In essence, the brand management of an urban brand comes down to managing impressions of the image of the city, and the imagination becomes a key factor in the success of a brand project. According to Dinnie (2004), branding of a territory is a process that contributes to the creation of a “super-realistic, most competitive and strategic vision for a city, region, country” (p. 106).

In other words, an urban brand can be understood as a well-constructed myth that operates on the basis of urban imaginary. But for the brand project to be successful and the myth to be supported, the collective imagination needs a constant reminder of the essence, history, and uniqueness of the brand idea, i.e. a constant stream of communicative processes connecting myth and reality (from unique events - festivals, discoveries, etc., to the creation of literary texts). Consequently, the successful “imaginability” of the city largely depends on the presence of unique fragments of the cultural memory of the city, and on their reproduction in the urban environment. Moreover, urban imaginary can be considered as a projection of sensory-emotional experience and practices, traces of collective memory that form the imagination of the city, its difference from other cities (Bloomfield, 2006, p. 46). And of particular importance in the design of the city’s brand is the interpretation of the urban past, which actualizes through collective imagination certain layers of the city cultural memory that convey the uniqueness of the city image.

We also note that, according to the famous economist Jensen (2002), we really live in an era of imagination, because “for most of the planet, the orientation toward acquiring more and more material wealth ends ... instead, there is a growing interest in the emotional side of life” (p. 12). Today, tourists and potential residents are attracted by what can give an impression. Hence, the importance of imagination, mythology, impressions and symbolic meanings in the global market of products increases, and those of them that tell a story, including the story told in the city’s brand, are in special demand.

6.5. A city brand as a symbolic capital of a place

The brand of the city, as mentioned above, is the functioning of the symbolic connection between the city and society. The strength of such a symbolic connection is provided by various factors, among which the meanings of the city in which the symbolic function is enclosed are of particular value (natural symbols of the city - rivers, mountains, climate; architectural symbols of the city - temples, buildings; symbols of traditional production; gastronomic symbols; symbols in the form of historical monuments or famous personalities, etc.). In the context of this issue, it should be noted that if these meanings of the city have acquired the most important social and cultural characteristic - meaning (value), then they become a unique symbolic marker of the city, accumulating elements of urban identity, which can bring a special kind of profit. Earlier, we showed that “the totality of significant elements (meanings) of the territorial environment that provide the local place with recognition, fame, prestige, and credibility from various social groups” represents the symbolic capital of the place (Fedotova, 2018, p. 144). Moreover, the value of symbolic capital is measured by the effect (symbolic profit) that it brings to its owner, while being converted into economic benefits” (Eldieva, Fedotova, & Zhukov, 2019, p. 682).

The role of the brand here is not only to identify the city, but primarily to become part of the symbolic capital of the city. In this case, the city's brand through the sociocultural factors, namely, due to the "exploitation" of the values and valuable assets of the territory, can bring economic profit. The symbolic capital of the city brand has a clear effect: it generates emotions and imagination, make us appreciate certain practices and images of the city, create certain impressions of certain people, places, events of the city. In this regard, designing a city brand is an objectification of the social and cultural values of the city, aimed at increasing their significance and further capitalization.

On the other hand, an essential characteristic of the symbolic capital of a city brand is such a social asset as community trust in the city. It is worth adding that trust in the city (as a result of brand promises) is one of the powerful sociocultural determinants that can determine a positive attitude to the city and cause loyalty not only to the target audience of the external environment, but also young and talented citizens who can stay on this territory. This is the inner sociocultural potential of the urban brand.

7. Conclusion

In conclusion, we note that competent brand design based on sociocultural factors can become the key to effective brand management in the global market of territorial brands. Whereas the process of designing an urban brand itself can be considered as a process of symbolic representation of urban culture and providing conditions for the social cultivation of the image of the city. That is why, in order to create a successful urban brand project, it is important to carefully study the opinion of the city residents, the cultural memory of the city, its authentic practices with which the city can be imagined, "experienced", conceptualized, and also symbolically expressed. As a result, the chances of capitalizing the image of the city increase, and the city itself will become more attractive for life, work or travel.

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