

The strategic importance of consumer insight in defining place brand identity and positioning

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Abstract. Place or destination branding has become a very popular approach to manage and foster development of cities, regions and countries. To make the process more efficient, it is necessary to define the basis of place brands properly. One of the key elements in defining brand identity is consumer insight, which has become more popular recently. The main prerequisites of consumer insight importance are dynamic changes in consumers' needs and behaviors, which determines their decisions. Segmentation process based on demographic data in context of postmodernism is not sufficient any more to differentiate the brand. Looking for competitive advantage, brand managers more often focus on consumer behavior, attitude, values, needs and expectations.

The competitive environment of place management causes that this tendencies also should be taken into consideration in place brand creation. In the paper the author indicates the complexity and multilevel character of defining consumer insight in place brand context. Based on research (IDI and ethnographic research) the paper presents possibilities and limitations of marketing research implementation in the process of defining consumer insight. On Poznań agglomeration case study and research stakeholders insight was formulated. Simultaneously, the author points out strategic meaning of consumer insight in place brand management process.

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THE NATURE AND ELEMENTS OF BRAND IDENTITY AND POSITIONING

In today's economy, conditioned by globalisation processes, dynamic technological development, high level of competitive efforts and a magnitude of choices made by consumers, a company's growth is determined by the image and robustness of its brand (Kunde 2002, p.17). The basic tools employed in creating the desirable brand image include brand identity and brand positioning. These conditions affect brand management processes in product and service markets alike; they can also be transferred onto administra-

tive units. The possibilities of applying the concept of brand management in administrative units have been largely discussed in literature on the subject (e.g. Matson 1994, Olins 2002; Kavaratzis 2004; Anholt 2005) with special emphasis placed on the competitive approach (Kotler & Gertner 2002). The scientific discussion revolves around various groups of stakeholders: investors, tourists, inhabitants, businessmen (Kotler & Haider & Rein 1993). At the same time, a fact is highlighted that place branding is most frequently adapted in a limited context i.e. the promotion context (Papadopoulos & Heslop 2002; Kavaratzis 2004; Parkerson & Saunders 2005; Anholt 2006). The concept's curtailed use may result from lack of materials introducing a holistic, strategic approach to the brand in the place context as well as non-existent materials presenting the application-related opportunities posed by tools and instruments useful in the brand management process that exceed the area of promotion.

As a result of globalization, the world is perceived as a single market where brands compete for the audience's attention. This holds equally true for countries, regions and cities which attempt to stimulate the inhabitants' and companies' involvement, intend to attract tourists, investors or students. For this purpose, they come up with various cultural, sports, business or scientific events in order to build place image and reputation owing to media coverage (Anholt 2009, p. 206). However, it is not possible to purposefully build up a desirable brand image without creating its identity or positioning the brand. This is of special importance to administrative units which may face management discontinuity attributed to the cycles of political elections. A definition of place brand identity and positioning ensures the efforts' cohesion. It is some sort of a guide verifying a location's activity areas and resulting in a cohesive brand image.

In general, positioning can be described as an activity connected with creating a clear and unique image of a brand in the minds of a target audience (Ries & Trout 1981; Woodward 1996; Nilson 1998). Ries & Trout (1981) argue that positioning is "a battle for the consumer's mind". In their opinion, positioning is the way a company wants customers to perceive, think and feel about its brand versus competitive entries. According to such a perspective brand positioning is highly subjective since it refers to the customer's individual perceptions. Davis (2000) perceives the notion of brand positioning in a similar way; in his opinion positioning is the place in consumers' minds that a brand wants to own. It has to be externally driven and relevant, it has to be differentiated from the competition and, most importantly, it has to be valued. Davis takes notice of the strategic significance of brand positioning as the basis for further decisions on brand management. He emphasizes the role of brand positioning for establishing effective communication with customers. The strategic significance of brand positioning has also been presented by Kotler (1994) who places positioning in his STP concept (Segmenting, Targeting, Positioning). Hence, positioning just like segmentation or the choice of the target group becomes the key foundation for defining a strategy for a brand. On the other hand, on top of the strategic significance of positioning for brand management, Kapferer (1992) pinpoints that positioning is a process of emphasizing the brand's distinctive and motivating attributes in the light of competition. Keller (1998) emphasizes that arriving at the proper position requires establishing the correct point of difference (unique to the brand) and point of parity association (connected with the category, not necessarily unique to the brand). For Aaker, who focuses on tactical operations aimed at building strong brands, positioning is the basis for creating and implementing brand building programs. Finally, Temporal (2002) notes that positioning is vital to brand management because it takes the basic tangible aspects of the product and actually builds the intangibles in the form of an image in people's minds. The effect of the positioning process is defining the positioning statement which is a synthetic notion of the basic elements (Tybout & Calkins 2005).

On the other hand, brand identity as defined by the brand owner is a complex message sent out to prospects. Brand identity should define and precisely specify the meaning, intention and vocation of the brand (Kapferer 1992, Keller 1998). This message is by no means limited to the brand's promotion activ-

ity; it is perceived as any efforts related to a brand and initiated by the brand which may be interpreted by broadly defined target groups. In this context, brand identity determines the strategy as well as the selection of marketing tools and means useful in executing this strategy. Brand identity communicated this way results in a subjective brand image (Tybout & Calkins 2005). While brand identity communicates precisely defined information to the audience, this data may be differently perceived by individuals. This stems from the differences in intellectual skills, interests and opinions of the target group. The audience has its own hierarchies of values and preference complying with the norms of the cultural environment in which they live.

Brand identity may be defined with respect to various models employed in practice: Kapferer's Prism of Brand Identity (Kapferer 1992), Brand DNA (Chapman & Tulien 2010), The Brand Code (Gad 2001), Bull's Eye. Irrespective of the adopted model, brand identity is established by means of key elements. These include brand values and brand identity, functional and emotional benefits provided by the brand to its users accompanied by the reason to believe. The basic goal of the brand identity models is developing relationships and bonds with the audience. This approach implies reference to psychological concepts in identifying brand identity when making use of personification methods.

In psychological concepts, human values and personalities are the most durable elements only slightly susceptible to changes in the environment and the situation. Values represent deeply-rooted opinions that certain behaviour is more desirable than other. Values often tend to form a structure referred to as a system of values and determine consumers' beliefs and behaviour (Rokeach 1973). Just like values, personality traits are of significant importance on a general level and are not affected by changes depending on the situation (Kassarjian 1971).

This applies to models of brand identity: brand values and personality should be durable and immutable. In long-terms, this ensures a brand's cohesive growth despite the changeable nature of the marketing environment or the administrative unit's potential. Well defined brand values and personality underlie its flexible growth without the risk of losing brand recognition or credibility in the consumers' minds. Therefore, they lay the brand's foundation when selecting the strategy, the marketing instruments and set directions for growth.

Brand identity and positioning tends to be analysed jointly (Kapferer 1992, Aaker 1996, Keller 1998, Gad 2001, Tybout & Calkins 2005, Chapman & Tulien 2010) because together they establish the frame of a brand's operation in all areas of its activity. Therefore, they are a useful tool for verifying the selection of activities and setting out the brand's growth directions. In this context, brand identity and positioning alike seem to be useful tools in managing an administrative unit which in its specificity touches upon many areas of activity. Diversity and multitude of directions adopted by an administrative unit pose a threat to its image. This is why defining brand identity and brand positioning is of key importance to the management process.

THE PLACE AND IMPORTANCE OF CONSUMER INSIGHT IN DEFINING BRAND IDENTITY AND POSITIONING.

The process of defining the specific elements of brand identity and positioning should always start with reference to the target groups' needs, expectations and values including the competitive aspect and indicating the brand's category (Figure 1).

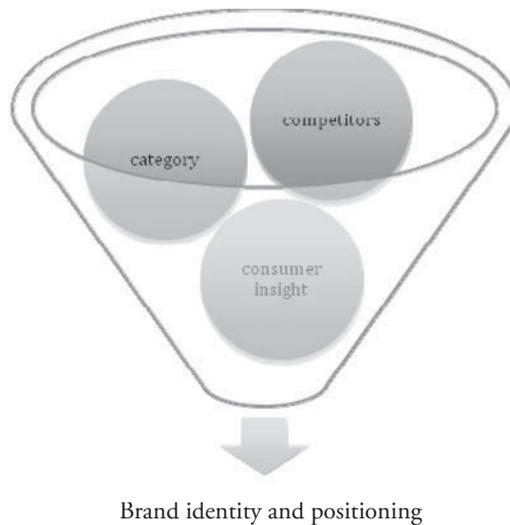


Figure 1. The conditioning of defining brand identity and positioning (author's own source).

Consumer insight is defined as a synthetic description of attitudes, opinions and values preached by a brand's target group. Identifying consumer insight assumes the form of an individual utterance, most frequently in the form of a quotation. Insight can be discovered directly by listening closely to direct opinions of the target group or indirectly, by observing and analysing the group's attitudes and behaviour.

Despite the synthetic nature, consumer insight necessitates a deep relation with representatives of the target group and discovering genuine motifs behind their attitudes and behaviour. These motifs are affected not only by rational premises but quite frequently by emotions (Florin & Callen & Pratzel & Kropp 2007).

It is virtually impossible to define brand values if we fail to find out about values of importance to the audience in the context of the competitors' offers. A brand will only have potential to create its own strength and equity if the values it represents comply with values preached by the target group. Similar dependence determines brand identity which should refer to personality traits prevailing or in demand in the target group. In this context, finding out about your customers is of strategic importance to creating brand identity. This approach is in line with the basic assumptions behind the marketing concept focusing on identifying, defining and satisfying the needs of target groups (Kotler & Armstrong & Saunders & Wong 2002).

In identifying consumer insight, it is important to include the impact of the competitors and the brand's category. This is because target groups operate in a competitive environment which offers a large choice of alternatives. The magnitude of choice results from globalization and the consumers' affluence. Ironically, too broad a choice of brands lowers the satisfaction level and leads to anxiety, concern and uncertainty (Lepper 2000, Schwartz 2004). In this context, an in-depth analysis of the target groups' needs and expectations as well as their concerns may be an important source of inspiration when creating brand identity. These premises also relate to the operations of administrative units where the competitive aspect and the magnitude of choices is very topical.

Simultaneously, the need is indicated to step out of a brand's competitive context related to a direct reference to other, similar offers. Another important factor determining behaviour of target groups is exceeding

the competitive aspect and inclusion of all possible modes of satisfying the target group's needs. Reference is made to the important change of the context in consumer behaviour with a "competitive context" to a "consideration context" (Florin & Callen & Pratzel & Kropp 2007).

An effective reach of the target group and satisfying its individualized needs contributes to building up a relatively stable competitive advantage (Aaker 1996). Therefore, finding out about the needs and motifs of behaviour is of strategic importance in brand management as it allows to design brand identity in line with the stakeholders' expectations. Brand affinity on the level of needs and values adhered to by the consumers is conducive for enhancing the brand's credibility in the audience's minds and builds up trust for the brand.

Contemporary research should focus on identifying the reasons behind stakeholders' behaviour to gain an important source of information useful in establishing brand identity and positioning.

THE OPPORTUNITIES AND LIMITATIONS OF USING MARKET RESEARCH IN IDENTIFYING CONSUMER INSIGHT

Economic researchers and practitioners have no doubt whatsoever that research can be used in the brand management process, especially in defining brand identity and positioning. Where they may differ in opinions is the scope and form of research. The classical approach focuses primarily on finding out about the behaviour of the target groups in the process of selecting a brand. Therefore, brand awareness and recognition are broadly surveyed as is the brand selection process and image. However, it is crucial to ask not only who chooses what but predominantly why the target groups make specific choices.

Researchers and brand managers are also changing their attitudes to the scope of research. On top of the brand selection process, the stage of brand experiencing proves equally important. It determines the stakeholders' future attitudes towards the brand. Brand experience seems of special importance in the context of territorial brands. With relation to place brand, we cannot refer to brand consumption or use; the notion of brand experience is more adequate here. Feelings and the satisfaction level related to contacts with a place brand largely determines the brand's image. Brand experience may refer to the rational and the emotional alike. Especially reaching and discovering the emotional necessitates special research methods and tools.

When looking for consumer insight, it is imperative to apply special research procedures. Triangulation is of special importance here as a method intended to ensure higher research quality by limiting measurement error. In this case, triangulation usually relies on combining quantitative and qualitative methods. In the realm of quantitative research, it is recommended to adopt a nomothetic approach focused on surveying relatively large groups of people. This makes it possible to identify general behaviour and attitude patterns. It is assumed that groups of brand users are a collection of individuals sharing similar characteristics. However, quantitative research should always be complemented with qualitative (idiographic) research focusing on analysing human behaviour in in-depth studies of singular cases (Malim & Birch & Wadeley 1994).

In the context of looking for consumer insight, ethnographic research tends to play a special role. Ethnography is one of observation methods which has lately gained popularity in many research areas (Kelly & Gibbons 2008), also with reference to streamlining brand strategy. The chief method employed in ethnography is participant observation; it may be extended with in-depth interviews (typically IDIs) or an analysis of documents and reports covering bonds and relations with the brand. Ethnography represents a holistic approach and has an inductive nature i.e. general rules and patterns of consumer behaviour can be identified with respect to numerous individual observations. This method allows for an in-depth analysis of buyer behaviour (Babbie 2007) and therefore it may serve as a valuable source of information in looking for consumer insight. The major benefit of ethnographic research lies in that fact that it is conducted in the re-

respondent's natural environment by participating in his or her daily life. The researcher's direct and relatively long contact with the respondent is conducive for discovering spontaneous and frequently deeply buried motifs. Therefore, ethnographic research focuses on reaching the respondents' cognitive as well as affective sphere related to social and cultural mechanisms. Hence the research results tend to be more reliable and take into account buyer behaviour in a specific situation. At the same time, research conducted in the respondent's natural environment calls for the researcher's flexibility and creativity in selecting methods tailored to an individual case. The respective results are less systematized yet provide a picture of detailed conditionings of consumer behaviour (Flick 2010). The goal of ethnographic research is to use the collected information to identify a set of values, beliefs and characteristic attitudes of the target group (Angrosino 2010) and as such they are of special importance to consumer insight. An idiosyncrasy of ethnographic research is drawing conclusions with reference to triangulation, on the basis of numerous sources of information. However, the goal is not to achieve interpretation convergence but to generate diversified perspectives and contexts determining the target groups' behaviour. This way a relatively complete picture of attitudes, values and expectations of the brand emerges accompanied by the product category (Arnould & Wallendorf 1994). Ethnographic research also aims at explaining the way in which behaviours constructs are formed with reference to brand experience. Therefore, they go beyond the very process of brand selection and prove that experiencing a brand is a valuable source of shaping consumer attitudes (Florin & Callen & Pratzel & Kropp 2007).

The major flaw of ethnographic research is the high costs involved resulting from an individual and careful research process focused on a person. This type of research requires special skills from the researcher which is also reflected in the budget. Another threat is the high level of risk that the researcher will identify him or herself with the respondents. Quite frequently, learning about the consumers' needs, attitudes and motifs requires constant and direct contact with the respondents. Hence the researcher's involvement in the research process is very high which may lead to distorting the objective nature of observation, description and final conclusions.

Therefore in defining consumer insight the researcher's knowledge, experience and skills are key. A deep intrusion into the respondents' needs, values and concerns necessitates a creative approach and abstaining from mental clichés and highly structured research formulas. In this context, psychological and sociological knowledge is of importance together with practical use thereof as well as flexibility and empathy in the research process. A researcher should be intuitive, empathic and sensitive in the communication process. These traits combined with his or her knowledge should result in a higher level of ability to ask non-standard, out-of-the-box questions (Karwowski 2004).

The need of applying such in-depth and comprehensive research combining various techniques and methods in defining consumer insight results from the consumers' poor self-awareness. Disclosing hidden motifs behind choices, values and attitudes requires the triangulation method.

In the search for consumer insight perceived as a comprehensive effort aimed at defining a target group's key needs, attitudes and expectations it is emphasized that it is a multi-stage process of discovering rather than creating reality. This process aims at a better and deeper picture of the target group not only in the context of a specific brand but also with respect to the respective product category and to the competition.

In the process of defining brand identity with respect to consumer insight, one should pay attention to the threats related to excessive value attached to the importance of attitudes and needs. Sometimes, looking for consumer insight absorbs more of managers' attention than devising the very brand strategy. Too much importance attached to this concept may also lead to copying clichés in the consumers' minds while defining brand identity is a creative process requiring a creative approach and inclusion of other aspects of the brand environment.

THE RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND FINDINGS

The research and analyses revolve around the Poznań metropolis: one of the biggest urban concentrations in Poland. In recent years in Poland, big cities have created common development policies and plans which concern, among other things, public transport, communal economies, social services and shared promotion. This is also the case of the city of Poznań, which, along with its neighbouring communes, is part of the Poznań Agglomeration. The city of Poznań, the Poznań District, the communes of the Poznań District (17 directly neighbouring communes) decided to establish the Poznań Agglomeration in May 2007. Initially it operated as the Agglomeration Council, a platform of cooperation between the agglomeration communes' authorities. At a subsequent stage, three other communes (not directly attached to Poznań) joined the Council. That year, a formal body (the Poznań Metropolis Association) was established. It is worth indicating that despite work in progress, the law applying to establishment of agglomerations has not been codified. As a result, Polish cities resort to bottom-up initiatives to set up such associations while the notions of agglomeration and metropolitan area are used interchangeably.

The Poznań Agglomeration is one of ten agglomerations set up in Poland since 2005. They are referred to by various names: a partnership agreement, a metropolitan area, an agglomeration, a metropolis and a metropolitan transport association. All these entities comprise of a big city (either a metropolis or sometimes 2 cities as is the case of Polish associations) and the area of their impact. By definition, such areas are highly developed and enjoy high concentration of key metropolitan functions. These areas are factors triggering growth of production, the job market, innovations, technology as well as the social and cultural life.

A new administrative unit needs to be positioned in a context of marketing activity and calls for its identity to be defined. Identification of the target groups' consumer insight serves as a starting point in defining a place's identity. To this end, qualitative research has been conducted in order to define brand values and brand identity. Five major target groups have been identified: residents of the city, residents of the agglomeration's communes, investors, tourists and students. At the same time it has been assumed that at the stage of shaping place brand identity, the priority target groups include residents of the Poznań city and residents of the agglomeration's communes as these groups' identities and involvement create a place's image with reference to the remaining target groups. As part of the priority groups, the 2013 Individual Depth Interview (IDI) was conducted in September (12 interviews in each group) coupled with ethnographic research: the respondents were accompanied in their daily activities while they expressed their attitudes and opinions about daily life in the Poznań metropolis (3 ethnographic surveys in each group).

The interviews and the ethnographic research in the groups of residents of the Poznań city and residents of the agglomeration's communes indicate a relatively strong awareness of the interdependence and benefits resulting from operating as part of a larger entity (an agglomeration). Respondents in both priority groups definitely indicated problems related to the agglomeration's integration as a homogenous entity. These problems pertained primarily to communication and transport. A need was also voiced to enhance access to information about the city's offer and, most importantly, the offer of the agglomeration's communes. Residents of Poznań city are especially expectant of ready-made, comprehensive suburban products created for them.

Most frequently, residents of Poznań city indicated the recreational potential of the agglomeration's communes. Another indication pertained to lower accommodation costs which are of key importance to young people. Costs were topped with higher life quality resulting from more exposure to nature and pace of life slower than in the city. Single respondents put forward arguments related to opportunities of business growth accompanied by identification of its limitations within a city.

On the other hand, residents of the agglomeration's communes definitely emphasized the benefits of living in the vicinity of a large city. They appreciate satisfaction with their lives; inhabitants of the agglom-

eration’s communes tend to say that “returning home from the city is like coming to another world”, “a weekend is like a short holiday”. At the same time, they indicate the city’s potential in the realm of education (most respondents drive their children to schools in the city) and the shopping offer (“we always do big shopping in Poznań as the choice is better there”). The respondents also indicated the benefits of access to cultural offers (cinemas, theatres, music halls, concerts). However, this benefit is in the category of potential opportunities only. In-depth questions about the respondents’ actual attendance in cultural activities indicated that they chose to take advantage of them less frequently than twice a year.

With reference to the results of the research, universal consumer insight has been established for each group. Presentation of the insights in the form of quotations allows for a better and more empathic understanding of the target groups’ needs, values and feelings (Table 1).

Table 1

Examples of *stakeholders’ insights* into the Poznań agglomeration based on research findings (IDI and ethnographic research).

Residents of the city	Residents of the agglomeration’s communes
<p>I appreciate living in a big city but I am aware that the quality of my life depends also on the potential and opportunities offered by the surrounding communes: recreation areas, business opportunities, accommodation – the price and quality ratio etc.</p> <p>For me to fully make use of the place’s benefits, I would like to have access to information about the local attractions and modes of spending free time. However, the offer itself is not enough; I would like the idea to be well thought and holistic so that I don’t need to worry about anything.</p> <p>The most important thing is enhancement of traffic conditions to eliminate traffic jams.</p>	<p>I live a quiet life in a small commune but I am aware that the proximity and the potential of a big city improves the quality of my life: the cultural and educational offers, business standards, the shopping offer.</p> <p>Poznań offers more jobs and better wages.</p> <p>I always shop in Poznań. I don’t mean daily shopping but planned shopping: the choice is bigger and the shopping conditions are better.</p> <p>What I dislike most is commuting with traffic jams. This is the worst moment; but when I get home I feel that the entire pressure is gone.</p> <p>A weekend spent at home out of the city is like a short holiday.</p>

CONCLUSIONS: APPLYING THE CONCEPT OF CONSUMER INSIGHT IN THE PLACE BRAND AREA

In order to adapt this concept to place branding, we need to redefine the terms. In the context of administrative units, consumers are replaced with various groups of brand stakeholders. It is therefore justified to replace the notion of “consumer insight” with “stakeholder insight”.

Moreover, by definition administrative units operate simultaneously with numerous target groups in mind. This aspect largely determines the definition of brand identity and positioning in order to reflect various stakeholders’ needs and expectations. The number and complexity of insights depends on identifying target groups relevant to an administrative unit. It is assumed that the more extended the unit, the more groups of stakeholders interested in the unit’s offer. The groups can be arranged in a hierarchy with respect to their importance, highlighting primary groups (of biggest importance) and secondary groups (of secondary importance). This hierarchy may change as the strategic goals change.

In the case of a place brand, opinions of the target groups’ representatives which are at the same time the consumer insight tend to be more extended. This results from the complex nature of the brand perceived and experienced on many levels with various points of reference included. At the same time, roles tend to overlap within the target groups. This means that an inhabitant may be an investor and a businessman at the

same time. His or her attitudes and expectations of the place brand may vary depending on the role he or she performs while the sphere of values remains unchanged.

The multitude and importance of the stakeholders group should be regarded in the process of building up place brand identity and positioning. The process requires extension and inclusion of extra stages of activity. This is another area necessitating changes in implementing the concept of consumer insight. In a simplified model adapted for place brands, 5 major stages of the process are postulated (Figure 2).

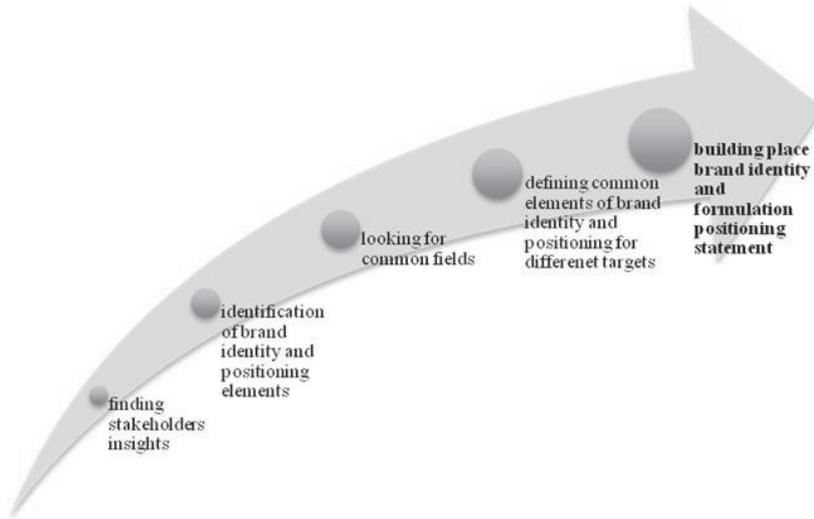


Figure 2. Stages of defining brand identity and brand positioning with reference to consumer insight.

Stage 1 consists in looking for individual stakeholders insights for specific, pre-determined target groups. This stage is the most time-consuming and labour-intensive one as it requires lots of experience and skills to select the collected and analysed materials. The more target groups the more complicated and complex the process of looking for stakeholders insights.

Subsequently, elements of identity and positioning are defined with respect to every utterance presenting the audience's values, attitudes and opinions. Specific elements of identity and positioning are analysed in order to find similar areas that would lay the foundation for identity. This analysis should result in defining elements of brand identity and positioning shared by all target groups. Achieving coherence at this stage determines transparency and legibility of brand identity and makes it possible for an administrative unit to pursue a uniform positioning strategy. The uniform approach has its big advantage in one clear integral picture with the highest level of place brand synergy resulting in its high level of influence (Florek & Janiszewska 2011). One should ensure, however, that the common elements are of significance to the target group and differentiate against the competitors. Failure to identify common elements may be a premise for pursuing the strategy of exclusive or interrelated positioning. The process is complete when brand identity is defined with respect to the available methods and the positioning thesis put forward.

To sum up, in order to establish brand identity and positioning it is necessary to correctly define the values, attitudes and needs of the target groups included into the stakeholder insight. A comprehensive use of the available research methods (quantitative and qualitative alike) is a prerequisite for correct identification of consumer insight. In the process of defining brand identity, research based on ethnographic methods

prove especially useful. The same principle applies to in-depth qualitative studies exploring the target groups' lifestyles and referring to the brand experience. Ethnographic methods applied in anthropology seem to be a particularly valuable source of information for administrative units. Research into brand identity and positioning based on the results of surveys conducted on the target groups makes the concept of place brand more credible and therefore has a bigger potential in creating brand equity. At the same time, researchers indicate the limitations accompanying this concept stemming from the large number and diversity of place brand's target groups. The research methods presented in this article can be used; however, full-scale application thereof with reference to a wide spectrum of target groups necessitates considerable financial investment. Moreover, while designing research and analysing its results involves experience and competence, administrative units have not developed yet the right skills in implementing the place brand concept which is not applied on a large scale. These limitations can be overcome by resorting to a hierarchy of target groups. Undoubtedly, the concept of stakeholder insight deserves attention in the context of a global, competitive and changeable environment as the basis for establishing place brand identity and positioning. Profound knowledge of the target groups results in a better understanding of them and more complete satisfaction of their needs resulting from deeply-rooted motivation which in turn enhances the competitive position.

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