

# City marketing communication – challenges and inspirations

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## Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to establish the state of knowledge of city marketing communication and to define challenges arising from the needs of practice and special character of city marketing. These issues are important and relevant especially for the reason that the global competition forces cities to intensify their marketing actions and practice of cities indicates a search for solutions in the management of marketing communication activities. The paper combines theoretical discussion with insights from marketing communication practices of cities. On the basis of the literature studies and overview of examples of selected cities in Europe, the Authors identified the knowledge gaps and the needs to update the marketing theory and develop research on the holistic concept of marketing communication for cities. The study shows the need to seek solutions that would contribute to increase the efficiency of management of city marketing communication on the strategic and tactical level.

**Paper type:** review article

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## Introduction

Operation in the conditions of global competition forces cities to intensify their actions for retaining and attracting residents, tourists, highly qualified human capital, business and investments. Nowadays, marketing communication is an important part of the marketing activity of many cities.

In contemporary academic literature there are many scientific studies on marketing communication addressing the problems of management, coordination and integration. However, they concern mainly single organizations, in which marketing communication systems are intended to be managed and controlled by a “centralized” department. In territorial system boundaries and communication responsibilities of different actors are often blurred. Therefore, the concept of marketing communication might not be addressed only to adapting principles created specifically for firms. Such a challenge requires not only the application of the marketing “analogy” to the communication of a place, but above all a reflection on the nature of governance of such entities and special features of city marketing activity.

The purpose of this paper is to establish the state of knowledge of city marketing communication and to define challenges arising from the real needs of practice and special character of city marketing. These issues are important and relevant especially for the reason that the global competition forces cities to intensify their marketing actions and practice of cities indicates a search for solutions in the management of marketing communication activities.

The paper combines theoretical discussion with insights from marketing communication practices of cities. On the basis of the literature studies, we identified the knowledge gaps on city marketing communication. While many researchers explore myriad aspects of place marketing and place branding, our literature review indicates that they rarely raise problems of coordination and management of city marketing communication. Examples from the practice of selected cities in Europe indicate the search for solutions that would contribute to increase the efficiency of management and coordination of marketing communication on the strategic and tactical level. Therefore, we identified the need to update the marketing theory and develop research on the holistic concept of marketing communication for cities.

### 1. Marketing communication in the context of city marketing approach

Marketing communication (or “promotion” as it was originally known) is used to communicate elements of an organisation’s offering to a target audience. Planned marketing communication incorporates three key elements: tools, media and messages (Fill, 2013). Scientific studies on the problems of marketing communication

ordinary concern commercial organizations. In this section, we present the literature review focused on issues which could be significant from the viewpoint of city marketing communication. Its purpose was to determine the state of knowledge of city marketing communication. The selection of the literature comprised the publications from the past decade (since 2005) and the publications crucial for developing the knowledge of place marketing.<sup>3</sup>

When describing promotional actions taken by cities, authors often use the categories, tools and media applied in commercial marketing. The scientific research in the area of city marketing mostly concerns the following issues: the city marketing concept, the city brand concept, place brand concept, city image, identity and positioning city brand and city brand measurement; success factors of place marketing and city branding, place promotion; strategic aspects related to city marketing and city branding; city brand management (Freire, 2005; Parkerson & Sounders, 2005; Hankinson, 2007; Kavaratzis & Ashworth, 2006; Florek, 2007; Szromnik, 2007; Avraham & Ketter, 2008; Braun, 2008; Gaggiotti, Cheng, & Yunak, 2008; Govers & Go, 2009; Kavaratzis, 2009; Moilanen & Rainisto, 2009; Anholt, 2010a; Dinnie, 2011; Moreira & Silva, 2012; Muñiz Martinez, 2012; Sevin, 2014; Anttiroiko, 2015; Gilboa, Jaffe, Vianelli, Pastore, & Herstein, 2015; Ispas, Boboc, Marica, Năstăsoiu, & Vijoli, 2015; Vanolo, 2015).

It should be noted, that many publications focus on the use of single promotional tools (as city events, city placement, outdoor advertising, city sales promotion, celebrity endorsement etc.), predominantly referring them to promotion of cities as tourist products (Kowalski, 2012; Smalec, 2012; Zawadzki, 2013, dos Santos, Moreno, Rios, Valantine, & Emeljanovas, 2014; Marin-Aguilar & Vila-López, 2014; Zawadzki, 2014; Zmysłony & Szutowski, 2014; Cieślowski & Kantyka, 2015; Wyrwiz, 2015). The researches address many aspects of city communication, but in the reviewed publications, we haven't found the specific and commonly accepted frameworks, that could become paradigms for the marketing communication of cities.

In recent years, scientific research on marketing communication of single organizations very often refer to the issues of management, coordination and integration, and relational aspects of marketing communication (Kliatchko, 2008; Kitchen & Schultz, 2009; Schultz & Patti, 2009; Kitchen, 2010; Porcu, del Barrio-García, & Kitchen, 2012; Vernuccio & Ceccotti, 2015; Kitchen & Burgmann, 2015). While research on city marketing usually do not focus on the holistic vision of marketing communication and problems of communication management.

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<sup>3</sup> Our literature studies were based mainly on sources resulting from exploration in databases EBSCO, ScienceDirect, Emerald and JSTOR. The following keywords were used: city marketing communication, marketing communication for cities, city communication, city marketing, city branding, city promotion, promoting cities, place marketing, place branding, place promotion, urban marketing, urban marketing communication, destination marketing communication, promoting places, marketing places, as well as their combinations.

Managing city marketing communication is not a simple task due to the multi-dimensional nature of city marketing. The relevant issue is that city marketing communication requires a complex approach and thinking in the categories of diverse target groups, which consist of prospective and current consumers of the city offer (residents, tourists, business representatives) and other stakeholders. The expected effect of marketing communication is to make people choose the city as a place appropriate for life, work, investment, tourism and recreation. However, the publications that address problems of city marketing communication relate predominantly to a group of tourists, which usually means narrowing the problems of city marketing communication to promotion of tourist's products. It is also essential that city marketing not only concerns a broad target audience of stakeholders but also actions are taken by a range of entities, and "typically they are all different from each other, due to their objectives, resources and capabilities" (Moilanen & Rainisto, 2009, p. 19).

In the place marketing literature, one can find postulates regarding the need of organisational coordination of a holistic place marketing (e.g. Braun, 2008; Moilanen & Rainisto, 2009). As worded by Moilanen and Rainisto (2009, p. 23): "Cross marketing and cooperation with the various levels of practitioners must be developed to achieve a win-win situation." One of the proposed solutions is designation of organisational units, organisations or teams which would handle city marketing (Moilanen & Rainisto, 2009). A planning group made up of city government officials, citizens and business people could be organised (Kotler, Haider, & Rein, 1993).

It should be noted that the literature often points to the important role of Destination Marketing Organisation (DMO's), the existence of which should enhance destination competitiveness (Pike, 2008; Bornhorst, Ritchie, & Sheehan, 2010). Regardless of whether DMO's hold a so-called holistic perspective regarding the environment, visitors, business and residents (Pike, 2008), they still refer to the travel marketplace and touristic products. According to us, although DMO's play an important role in the development of destinations, professional marketing communication of modern cities cannot be based solely on the unit, which concentrates on tourism products and issues alone.

The complexity of territorial systems raises the need to seek for organizational solutions that will allow coordinating communication activities related to various areas, various products and various stakeholder groups. This is a challenge for managers of cities and researchers.

Many studies regarding city marketing communication tackles problems of branding, image and positioning of cities (Parkerson & Sounders, 2005; Kavaratzis & Ashworth, 2006; Laaksonen, Laaksonen, Borisov, & Halkoaho, 2006; Adamczyk, 2011; Dinnie, 2011; Sevin, 2014; Ispas et al., 2015; Vanolo, 2015). The brand of the city can affect the shape of city marketing communication, that's why a city needs "an integrated framework that will clarify all aspects of developing a city brand and

give guidance for managing it” (Kavaratzis & Ashworth, 2006, p. 191). The challenge for researchers is to identify the role of branding in long-term marketing communication management.

Global competition, social and technological changes, and the related development of the media influence the approach to city marketing communication. The development of the marketing communication forms, media and channels contribute to a considerable expansion of the set of communication tools. In recent years, more and more authors research and describe the use of the modern communication tools (related to the Internet and social media) in city marketing (Köker & Göztaş, 2010; Smalec, 2012; Kamosiński, 2013; Brzeziński & Jasiński, 2014; Smalec, 2014; Stopczyńska, 2014; Sułkowski & Kaczorowska-Spychalska, 2014; Zhou & Wang, 2014; Biełuszko, 2015). However, the dominant approach is to study the use of the city particular media, forms and channels. There is a lack of research and publications that address the problems of their coordinated and strategic use, that puts in the spotlight the achievement of the city vision and long-term goals.

The literature increasingly points to the importance of the participation of citizens in their development territorial units, the researchers also recognize the communicational potential of residents (Daszkiewicz, 2015a), that serves building strong relationships and strengthening the local identity. Maintaining lasting relationships with local stakeholders is beneficial for territorial administration: can contribute to the creation of a strategic competitive advantage over other territorial units, reduces the significance of the impact of other entities outside of the partnership and the cost of marketing (Pukas, 2015). To the best of our knowledge, the academic research regarding cities has not addressed the problem of efficiency of marketing communication activities in building lasting relationships with stakeholders. There are no scientific studies focused on the role of participation in conducting effective city marketing communication.

Summing up the above discussion and literature review, we identified gaps where the knowledge on city marketing communication needs to be reinforced and developed. There is a need to seek opportunities for cooperation between city government and entities operating within the city (van Gelder, 2011), as well as the need to create possibilities of cooperation between various stakeholder groups, building networks and platforms of cooperation (Daszkiewicz, 2015b). An indirect solution is the establishment of a team of experts in order to create recommendations supporting actions of units and organisations dealing with city marketing (Moilanen & Rainisto, 2009) or other options for including stakeholder groups in strategic marketing processes could be sought. It should be said that the role of cooperation between entities in the long-term processes of city marketing communication becomes an interesting research issue, which, to the best of our knowledge, has not been taken up in the scientific research to date.

The identified knowledge gap relates to the organizational network, but also to the issues of joint planning and strategic documentation for marketing communi-

cation activities of cities. While we can find a lot of scientific publications raising an issue of a city brand, the academic studies do not undertake the problem of its role in the management of marketing communication in the long term perspective. Our review also points to the lack of research and publications that address the problems of coordinated and strategic use of modern communicational tools, that puts in the spotlight the achievement of the city vision and long-term goals. A major challenge for researchers is also to broaden the knowledge of the relational aspects of city marketing communication. One of the challenges in this area of research is to determine the role of building lasting relationships in conducting effective marketing communication.

To recapitulate, the literature studies conducted in order to establish the state of knowledge of city marketing communication lead to the conclusion that there is the apparent need to update the marketing theory and develop research on the holistic concept of marketing communication for cities.

## 2. The practice of city marketing communication – needs and inspirations

The development of marketing knowledge has arisen mostly from needs of market practice and decision problems of market entities. For this reason, we have reviewed decision problems in the field of marketing communication and analysed the examples of current practices of selected cities in Europe. For the purposes of this article, the analysis was limited to cities, information about which appeared most frequently in the secondary sources and international reports relating to activities of place marketing (Amsterdam, Copenhagen, Berlin, Edinburgh) and three Polish cities, which marketing activity was most often described in the Polish sources (Wrocław, Szczecin, Poznań).<sup>4</sup>

Taking into consideration the state of knowledge in the field of city marketing communication and knowledge gaps (established in the previous section), we analysed the practice of selected cities in five problem areas of marketing communication:

- The role of city brand and guiding idea.
- The use of marketing communication tools.
- Cooperation between entities/organization.
- Strategic marketing communication planning.
- Participation of citizens and relationships.

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<sup>4</sup> Due to limited length of article in this section we present only part of the collected research material.

We begin with key insights arising from the review of the practices of cities, which indicate an important role of a city brand in marketing communication activities of the selected cities. Amsterdam puts emphasis on a strong reinforcement of the identification of the city, as evidenced by the creation of the brand “I Amsterdam” in 2004. Creativity, innovation and the commercial spirit are Amsterdam’s three core values. Over years Amsterdam has had too many brand “carriers,” e.g. “Amsterdam Has It,” “Small City, Big Business” and “Cool City.” The decision on a long-term approach to the city brand stemmed from the fact that “branding needs continuity, slogans used to communicate key messages need time to be recognized and become effective” (Kavaratzis, 2009, p. 47). Today Amsterdam has a strong brand, which is associated with many good connotations. In its communication activities, the city is portrayed as a dynamic place to live and work, an attractive destination and a test market for innovation. It is evident that the city speaks with one voice (“one image style for Amsterdam of all partners together, one basic story for Amsterdam, one festival and events policy, one policy on new media focusing on visitors, companies and potential inhabitants” [Choosing Amsterdam Brand, concept and organisation of the city marketing, 2003]), which confirms the awareness of the role of city brand for communication activities.

A similar approach can be seen in the communication activities of Copenhagen, with the brand and the key message: “cOPENhagen – Open for you.” The communication messages highlight the unique business climate in Copenhagen that combines technology with human values, the lean culture and a sophisticated lifestyle. The idea of the brand is therefore based on maintaining a balance expressed by slogans such as “productivity redefined” and “you can have both” (Moilanen & Rainisto, 2009). “Copenhagen – the most open capital in the world” – this is the vision behind a common Copenhagen brand which is to contribute to attracting investments, labour and tourism to the city. Copenhagen, as the brand, voices a single, shared vision to promote the city. The “one voice” ties a large number of private companies, municipalities, cultural institutions and NGOs which have joined forces to brand Copenhagen as an open and welcoming city (*Make Copenhagen your personal business. Strategy for attracting and retaining more talented internationals in the Copenhagen Region 2014–2017*, n.d.).

Activities towards building a certain broad idea of the city are also undertaken by the authorities of Berlin. The background and planning of the current “BeBerlin” campaign is a bottom-up attempt to involve Berliners in the marketing of their city, where the core aim is get citizens to see their place as a unified whole, rather than an attempt to communicate with an external audience (Bennison, 2009). In 2013 and 2014, Be Berlin expanded its campaign to include 7 new themes representing the city’s key future fields: smart city, sciences, open-minded city, business, family and career, technology and innovation, electromobility (Be Berlin, n.d.).

Among Polish examples, Wrocław is the city, which activity in the field of marketing communication deserves particular attention. Wrocław was the first city in

Poland to undertake professional and comprehensive action in the field of marketing of the city in the mid-90s. Today, Wrocław is an inspiration for other Polish cities, which is confirmed by numerous rankings and awards. In 1998, a development strategy *Wrocław 2000 Plus* was implemented by the city's authorities. It contained the words "Wrocław – a city of meetings – a city that unites" which name the mission of the city. Around the messages there were built numerous communication activities, creating the slogan "Wrocław – the meeting place." Since then, the city has been methodically building its brand in the country and abroad. Over the years, Wrocław undertook ambitious promotional and communication-related ideas – "Now Wrocław" Euro 2012, European Capital of Culture 2016, World Games 2017 (*The Strategy – Wrocław in the Perspective 2020 plus*, 2006). In the foundations of the next strategy, called "Wrocław in the 2020 plus perspective" there was expressed a conviction that the current idea of the city should remain unchanged, because the need to meet and to unite has a timeless dimension.

One of the most daring concepts of marketing communication was undertaken by the city of Szczecin. The strategy of *Szczecin – Floating Garden 2050* was created in 2008 and it is based on the natural terrain and the location of the city. The *Szczecin Floating Garden 2050* project is a vision of the future of Szczecin, with priorities resulting from this idea. The branding strategy which provides guidance for a long-term communication process of the city as a brand with stakeholders is based on the undisputed potential of Szczecin, i.e. water, green space, openness to ideas, entrepreneurship of the citizens, tolerance, freedom and respect for nature, multiculturalism and the international community, the geopolitical situation – cross border (*Szczecin dla Ciebie. Strategia rozwoju Szczecina 2025*, 2011).

Due to the need for the city communication with different customer groups and stakeholders, there is an increased number of entities involved in cooperation and communication. This may impede cooperation, but cities are trying to solve this problem by creating an organisation with a central character. In Amsterdam, there was created the so-called Amsterdam Marketing – the city not-for-profit marketing organisation of the Amsterdam Metropolitan Area, active in the fields of promotion, information, research and services. Amsterdam Marketing's goal is to execute the city marketing as an integrated activity, focusing on national and international residents, businesses, visitors and influential figures. To achieve this, the public and private organisations, cultural institutions and universities work together (*I amsterdam. Amsterdam Marketing*, n.d.). In 2007 in Berlin, the city's government commissioned Berlin Partner GmbH with developing and implementing a strategy for an image campaign. Berlin Partner as a public-private partnership, collaborates with the Berlin State Senate and over 200 companies dedicated to promoting their city, is also responsible for marketing the German capital to the world, for example with the successful "be Berlin" campaign (Berlin Partner for Business and Technology, n.d.). Similar central organisations were also established in other cities in Europe. An interesting example is the Edinburgh – there were sever-

al institutions of the central character (Destination Edinburgh Marketing Alliance DEMA, Edinburgh Convention Bureau, Marketing Edinburgh, Edinburgh Tourism Action Group [ETAG]) (Heeley, 2011; Invest Edinburgh, n.d.) as well as Copenhagen (Wonderful Copenhagen and Copenhagen Capacity).

A slightly different situation takes place in Wrocław. Formally, there does not exist one central organisation coordinating marketing activities including communication. Here the communication activities of the city are undertaken by special departments in the municipal office (Department of the President of Wrocław, the City Promotion Office, Department of Social Communication), as well as organisations and municipal multi-partner companies that become not only consultative and advisory organisations, but also decision-making ones (e.g. Wrocław Agglomeration Development Agency). Each unit takes action within its competences and responsibilities, and larger projects are co-ordinated at weekly meetings by an informal team – The City Promotion Management.

The cities seem to understand today's challenges of marketing communication, as well as the necessity to build long-term relationships with consumers. Nowadays, the development of information technology presents the cities with new opportunities for communication activities. It changes the structure of the employed media and the communication itself alters its direction from in-outside to outside-in. The internet and social networks allow the cities to obtain opinions from the citizens.

Amsterdam utilises the potential of consumers, who are not only the recipients of its offers, but who can also participate in the city's development. They are involved in solving problems, in the process of generating ideas and creating new solutions through: a crowdsourcing platform (AmsterdamOpent.nl), a platform for cooperation (The Client Relations cluster of Amsterdam Marketing), competitions (Smart Schools Contest), workshops (NxtCity Amsterdam), participation in numerous programs (e.g. Smart Citizen Kit), expressing their views in research studies (Amsterdam City, n.d.).

In Edinburgh, direct relationships also apply to investors. One of the communication tools used in marketing communication is the Invest Edinburgh blog, which concerns city development, business and economic issues across Edinburgh.

Wrocław intensively communicates with citizens through portals and social media. Taking into account the relational optics, in 2011 the city launched a call centre – a pioneering initiative in the country – a project called “One Number.” It is a single place where citizens could get answers to all their questions, and also report problems. Today it operates as a contact centre with numerous forms of contact – email, chat, application form on the website. Similar initiatives were also undertaken by other cities in Poland. It should be added that the authorities of Wrocław took into account the need for social participation which works as the outside-in type of communication, and in 2015 they adopted an innovative initiative to create a bottom-up strategy for the city by its citizens. The co-organisers of the fully open and transparent process of creating the new Strategy 2030 are going to be activists and social

movements centred around the Society for the Beautification of Wrocław (*Wrocław 2030*, n.d.). The citizens will be able to present their views and submit their ideas for the development of Wrocław during thematic seminars and via an online platform. After the analysis and a verification process, the ideas will be included in the new strategy called Wrocław 2030.

Table 1 *Managerial solutions in the field of marketing communication developed and implemented in selected European cities*

City	City brand and guiding idea	Marketing communication tools	Cooperation between entities, organizations/centralisation	Strategic marketing communication planning	Participation of citizens and relationships
Amsterdam	I Amsterdam	✓	Amsterdam Marketing	✓	✓
Copenhagen	cOPENhagen – Open for you	✓	Wonderful Copenhagen and Copenhagen Capacity	✓	✓
Berlin	be Berlin	✓	Berlin Partners GmbH	✓	✓
Edinburgh	Edinburgh Inspiring Capital  Edinburgh Your Council Your Capital	✓	Destination Edinburgh Marketing Alliance  Edinburgh Tourism Action Group (ETAG)	✗	✓
Wrocław	Wrocław – the meeting place	✓	Department of the President of Wrocław, the City Promotion Office, Department of Social Communication	✗	✓
Szczecin	Szczecin – Floating Garden 2050	✓	Municipal Office	✓	✗
Poznań	Poznan, a city of Know How	✓	Municipal Office	✓	✓

✓ – exist, ✗ – not exist

To summarise very briefly, the abovementioned discussion the analysis of practical examples of the European cities (Table 1), we can conclude that contemporary cities intensify marketing activities and their authorities search for and implement managerial solutions, which can help to increase the effectiveness of city marketing communication on the strategic and tactical level. The problems of coordination and management of city marketing communication are rarely addressed in the academic studies, which means that they become challenges for the future research.

### 3. The challenges for city marketing communication

The analysis of practices of selected cities indicates that municipalities recognize the importance of the brand of the city, but we noted differences in the ways of its use in city marketing communication. Among them there are cities that recognize the fundamental role of the brand and use the guiding idea for building long-term communication activities. However, we have identified cities treating a city brand only as the element of identification. In our view, such an approach does not contribute to increase the efficiency of management of city marketing communication. There are also examples of cities in which the limitation of brand's role stems from the terms of office of the city authorities. This raises further problems associated with the use of forms and communication channels. In conclusion we can say that the role of brand in city marketing communication is dependent on a number of factors, which identification is important for development of new model solutions.

Our analysis also pointed out that the variety of communication tools used by cities is similar to corporations. Cities use not only traditional but also modern (ICT-based) forms and channels of marketing communication. The development of information technology creates new opportunities for communication activities of cities. It changes the structure of the employed media and the communication itself alters its direction from in-outside to outside-in. The internet and social networks allow the cities to obtain opinions from the citizens. It seems that cities, where exists the cooperation of entities and municipal units performing tasks within the marketing communication of the city, achieve the best communication effects.

Due to the need for the city communication with different customer groups and stakeholders, there is an increased number of entities involved in cooperation and communication. This may impede cooperation, but cities are trying to solve this problem by creating an organisation with a central character. However, this requires actions that are not only tactical, but above all strategic. This means the next challenge – that the marketing communication activities should be included in the strategic documents of cities. However, as shown by the examples, not all cities carry out communication activities in the strategic perspective.

Our review indicates the existence of cities that seem to understand today's challenges of marketing communication, as well as the necessity to build long-term relationships with consumers. We therefore agree with the statement of Kavartzis and Ashworth (2008, p. 162) that "the needs and wishes of local communities should be integrated in the goals set and they should be participants in all stages of formulating, designing and implementing a marketing strategy."

## Conclusions

The literature review conducted in order to establish the state of knowledge of city marketing communication leads to the conclusion that there is the apparent need to update the marketing theory and develop research on the holistic concept of marketing communication for cities. There are many challenges associated with the coordination and management of city marketing communication, but these issues are rarely raised in academic research.

There are many scientific studies on marketing communication addressing the problems of management, coordination and integration. However, model solutions for integrated marketing communication (IMC) apply mainly to single organizations. There is no model solutions, which concern integrated communication of cities.

The practical examples of cities show, that their authorities search for and implement managerial solutions, which would contribute to increase the efficiency of management and coordination of marketing communication on the strategic and tactical level. However, their actions in this regard are intuitive. Therefore, we recognize the need for academic research which could underpin the establishment of guidelines in the field of long-term planning of communication activities of cities, both in terms of creative strategy (brand, guiding idea) and organizational solutions. They could give the basis for development of new model solutions for city marketing communication.

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