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LOGO AS A TOOL OF EUROPEAN UNION COUNTRIES' DESTINATION BRANDING¹

Abstract

Developing a coherent and comprehensive brand of a country is of vital importance for a destination in the contemporary global world. There seems to be a recognizable gap in the literature regarding the application of visual signs practiced in country branding. The subject of the study: The research identifies the logos of the European Union countries used in place branding. The purpose of the study is the exploration of the logo content from the senders' perspective, i.e., the structures and organizations responsible for the country branding. There are many reasons why logos are used in place branding practice. The authors decided to focus on the logo as a form of controlled and projected message communicated via media and ICT. Cognitive gap: The research conducted so far has focused on the reception of logos by the recipients. The presented research attempts to examine the visual message contained in logos from the senders' perspective. Research methods and data collection techniques: The content analysis method was used to study the visual identity of the countries. The authors collected logos and scrutinised them using Beyrow and Vogt as well as Mollerup's taxonomy. The results of the study illustrate how governmental institutions, which are responsible for

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country branding, portray countries using visual identity on the Internet, social media, and their own media.

Keywords: visual identity, media management, logo, destination brand, European Union, digital communications

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Introduction

Pictures, image, and screen are the concepts characterizing contemporary global culture. A human of the 21st century lives in an environment in which a graphic message, drawing, photo, film, or 3D animation disclosed in the communication processes are significant for both the sender and the recipient. Images² have dominated modern communication and replaced to a large degree traditional verbal communication. An individual creates images in his/her mind, which are the result of a two-way communication process in which he/she is both the recipient and the sender of the message. The visual message has a significant meaning for every person, organization, brand and place (Sturken, Cartwright, 2018). Cities, regions and countries use different tools to communicate with citizens and visitors in a variety of ways, and among others, images are significant bearers of information (Burns et al., 2020). That is why nowadays such questions arise: how is the content of a particular image created? What is the relationship between the image and the object it illustrates? How does the image communicate the values important for its author?

A logo is one of the most popular visual symbols functioning in a public space, that presents and symbolizes a particular organization or territory such as a city, region or a country. It is a graphical sign of promotional and informational significance. In the theory of graphic design, the logo functions are twofold: description of the sender and distinction from the competition (Mollerup, 2013, p. 59). The authors of the abovementioned article decided to examine this popular communication technique, which is simple, but at the same time commonly practiced, also by the European Union countries.

The first goal of the presented research was to collect data to build – as comprehensive as possible – an empirical database of logos used in promotional communication for touristic purposes in the EU countries. The second goal was to add to the theory of place branding, especially destination branding, the basis of empirical research. Relatively rich theoretical literature on marketing, promotion and visual identity of places takes primary advantage of case studies and theoretical models built based on these cases (Hanna, Rowley, 2008; Chan, Marafa, 2013). Before

² The term ‘image’ has many connotations (Bateman, 2014, p. 15) such as graphic, optical, mental, perceptual and verbal. In the presented research, the authors assume that the image has a graphic meaning in nation branding.

the research started, the authors had recognised a few empirical studies that would allow to identify the existing principles and rules of visual communication of place identity (Lee et al., 2012; Zeybek, Gül Unlü, 2016; Newell, Canessa, 2018). Kots et al. (2018, p. 113) suggests that the role of visual elements has not been systematically studied with respect to place branding. Costa (2010, p. 44) states: "Not just photography but images of all kinds conveyed through different media (especially not for profit output such as films, documentaries, news reports, internet sites) dictate – covertly or overtly – the tourist pre- and post-visit experience and help reinforce or detract from the destination image." The third goal of the presented research is practical. Gathering all available logos of the EU countries allows the reader (e.g., designers of the visual identification of a place) to recognize existing signatures and thus, help institutions responsible for place branding to prepare more applicable logos and other visual images. The logo is the most visible and frequent reminder of what the brand stands for (Wheeler, 2009, p. 35). The last operational goal was to verify the functioning of the logo on the official tourism websites and in the researched countries' owned media.

Having in mind these objectives, the authors try to find answers for the following research questions:

(1) What does a logo present the *genius loci* of a country or rather it is a metaphor of the imaginary space?

(2) In what way does a logo participate in the country branding?

1. Theoretical background

1.1. Identity, brand identity and visual identity in country branding

Although a logo as a visual symbol has a long history in public spaces, there are still people who confuse identity with visual identification (Balmer et al., 1997). The term 'identity' is variously defined depending on a given scientific discipline and theoretical approach, it is semantically vague and full of contradictions of definitions (Moingeon, Soenen, 2002). It plays a critical role in the contemporary world because it provides meaning, stability, and distinctiveness (Moingeon, Soenen, 2002, p. 1) to the organization. Psychologists, especially social psychologists and sociologists have studied the concept of social identity beginning from the 40s of the 20th century. The subject in recent years has gained impetus in the fields of organizational behaviour (Clark et al., 1994), marketing (Dowling, 2001; Kapferer, 2008), management (Fombrun, van Riel, 2004), public relations (L'Etang, 2010) and human resource management (Gioia et al., 2000).

The identity concept was developed by Henri Tajfel, who discussed the issue of social identity, unambiguously linking the term identity with the position of an individual in a society. According to his theory, the British psychologist understands

an element of the individual's self-image, resulting from his/her knowledge of belonging to a social group (or some groups), including the emotional significance attributed to this membership (Tajfel, 1978). The individual's identity is the awareness of oneself in a particular society; it is the result of a person's life in society (Tajfel, 1978; Tajfel, Turner, 1986; Turner et al., 1987). There is no identity in isolation from the social context. Social identity is basically the sense of unity constructed between individuals (Ashforth, Mael, 1989) and it occurs when an individual is identified with a particular group. Individuals belonging to a group define themselves in relation to this group and distinguish themselves from the others (Tajfel, Turner, 1986).

People build ties with a particular place and "this attachment may serve as an integral component of self-identity" (Storey, 2011, p. 17). People and places are mutually constructed and constituted (Harvey, 2001). Identity of a place has been explored by different disciplines (Convery et al., 2012). It participates in the larger concept of self (Proshansky et al., 1983). Such understanding of identity is a key element in branding (Kapferer, 2008, p. 117), which defines the brand identity as a concept of a brand designed and presented by an organization (Geuens et al., 2009). The identity of each brand is its quintessence and originality. Identity draws upon the brand's roots and heritage – everything that gives it its unique authority and legitimacy within the realm of precise values and benefits (Kapferer, 2008, p. 178). A distinctive brand identity enables consumers to fulfil their self-definition needs for being unique (Tian et al., 2001; Berger, Heath, 2007; Ruvio, 2008).

Although social identity theory was originally developed to explain intergroup relations, it has heavily influenced research on organizational identity in the last 30 years (Ashforth, Mael, 1989; Haslam, 2001; van Dick, 2004). Corporate identity refers to the way that the organization presents itself to its stakeholders and answers the question "Who are you?" (Dowling, 2001). Sense of place (Pretty et al., 2003), place attachments (More, Graete, 1994), place identity (Proshansky et al., 1983; Lalli, 1992; Hawke, 2010), *genius loci* (Norberg-Schultz, 1980) are terms which define characters, 'spirit' and specifics of a place. The discussion over the essence of the place influences also on the debate, how such a feature can be disclosed and how it can be shown in branding strategies of places.

In the branding process, the place identity is translated into many codes of expression including logo, typography and graphics (Olins, 2008; Ashworth, Karvaratzis, 2009, p. 524; Hanna, Rowley, 2011; Dinnie, 2014, pp. 43–44). A graphically excellent logo and subsequent visual system are the corporation's assets. That is why a visual identity as the combination of the logo, visual system (typeface, colors, imaginary) and editorial tone, forms a unique and cohesive message transmitted to the audience. As Wheeler (2018, p. 4) points: "Brand identity is tangible and appeals to the senses. You can see it, touch it, hear it, hold it, watch it move. Brand identity fuels recognition, amplifies differentiation and makes big ideas and meaning accessible".

Branding the country/nation (these terms are used interchangeably in the literature (Dinnie, 2015) is indebted to tourism marketing. Research in this field began to take a mature form in the 1970s (Pike, 2008). However, at the turn of the 20th and 21st centuries, the two trends occurred simultaneously. First, tourism marketing has adapted the concept of a destination brand (Pike, 2008, p. 179 ff.). Secondly, tourism promotion has been virtualized, the importance of the internet has increased, and at the same time the traditional channels of reaching target groups have decreased (e.g., brochures, catalogs, or TV commercials) (Kruczek, Walas, 2010). Considering the proliferation of websites, it has become essential to clearly identify their operators (e.g., the National Tourist Organizations) and to indicate their 'officiality' (Kruczek, Walas, 2010) and source credibility (Rahman et al., 2021). That is why country branding is a very complex and controversial phenomenon (Dinnie, 2015). It includes multiple dimensions beyond traditional business branding, such as political activities and strong public opinion influence. It is also powerfully influenced by many events, phenomena, or activities of specific people that are difficult to monitor. The time of the pandemic could be the latest example of complexity country branding. Due to the multitude of determinants of the country's brand, theoretical concepts trying to organize the knowledge about this practice are challenged.

1.2. Logo as a visual sign of genius loci

Logo is a particular and distinctive visual symbol that has clear goals: description and distinction (Mollerup, 2013). This picture is organic, because it is created in long processes of knowledge accumulation, collecting experiences, formal education and media impact (Kotsi et al., 2018, p. 113). Another issue, which has a crucial meaning for this symbol, is the process of decision-making itself, as well as its stages (Plassman et al., 2012), as they have the impact on the logo content. Some researchers strongly emphasised the impact of stakeholders on such a picture (Hankinson, 2004).

The links between people (citizens, visitors, tourists) and places (town, region, country) are usually based on a long-term commitment. People are social beings; therefore, they make evaluations and assessments of certain choices they make, with implications on their social belonging. Such process explains why social identity is also built around the logos and brands that people follow (Kapferer, 2008; Sturken, Cartwright, 2018). Consequently, the nation brand is in competition with other countries: it must be perceived as distinctive, reliable and attractive for recipients – tourists, visitors, investors and inhabitants (Kotler et al., 1993; Zenker, 2009; Zenker, Beckmann, 2013). The nation brand is very complex and based on the perceived values, perceived history, perceived competence, and accomplishments that prove it. It covers political, economic, historical, cultural, and environmental

aspects (Fetscherin, 2010, p. 467) which altogether make the place brand (Kapferer, 2008, p. 125).

The authors assume that every country has its own specificity, its own awareness, its essential authenticity, *genius loci*, or a certain 'spirit', 'sense', which determines its attractiveness and substance. The issue of this essence of place is the subject of consideration of urban sociologists, planners and architects. *Genius loci* is a term introduced to the language of sociologists and urban planners to convey a certain character of the place, which consists of the nature transformed by human activities into a cultural landscape determining how things exist and how they are perceived (Norberg-Schulz, 1980; Jałowiecki, 2009). *Genius loci* as well as the term 'identity', is variously defined depending on a given scientific discipline and theoretical approach, it is semantically vague and full of definitional contradictions. The identity of place is *genius loci* whose presence is revealed in architecture, landscape, myths, superstitions, and people themselves. That is why the question arises: is a visual identity, which is a figurative presentation of the uniqueness of a given place, also reflected in its *genius loci*? *Genius loci* is a natural element of a given place, resulting from its history, tradition, location, inhabiting community, and its culture, which is – called by Norberg-Schulz (1980) – the character of the place. The literature on the subject shows that the *genius loci* is relatively durable, due to its rooting in the permanent components of space, such as landscape, climate, architecture, and urban planning. The concept of *genius loci* is matched by the term 'fixed elements' or an anchor in the territorial marketing researches. The literature of place branding presents the shared view that the logo and visual identification system should be based on a whole range of tests and analyses, while the logo itself should be related to what the particular unit is (organization, company, place) and subjected to the branding process. That is why it is assumed that the logo, as a visual picture that is expected to present the essence of the place, should expose the spirit of it, its *genius loci*.

To present the spirit of a place, graphic designers as well as marketing and branding specialists try to search for codes, which might represent the place (or organization) in a clear, understandable, and easily noticeable way. As Graber argues, writing about audio-visual messages, the analysis of these messages is as important today as verbal messages (2004). The author points out that the coding and decoding of pictures and words is different and requires different competences (Graber, 1996). Similarly, in branding practice, the visual symbols are more associational and connotative than the verbal ones.

The German authors Matthias Beyrow and Constance Vogt refer to the territorial (urban) signs using the term 'Logo alias Stadtzeichen', meaning the city's sign (Beyrow, Vogt, 2015). Per Mollerup (2013), in turn, explains that visual identity is built from the following basic elements, including: a verbal sign of the brand (name mark), i.e., the name of the organization written in a specific way, a symbol or picture mark, selected colours, company typography, and so-called 'fifth element' – an additional decorative element. According to Mollerup (2013), the term trademark

includes the wordmark and the graphic symbol. In the same sense, the word 'logo' is used. As Healey defines: "Symbol plus name remains the most common form of the logo" (Healy, 2010, p. 7). In contrast, the 'wordmark' refers to the verbal brand characters (Adamus-Matuszyńska, Dzik, 2017).

Summing up, a logo identifies the business in a very modest form using well-known symbols, icons, or other marks that both identify and distinguish a particular object (in the case of the presented research – a country as a place). Transforming such a definition into place branding, one should not expect the logo of a country would convert its *genius loci*. It should rather reveal its *genius loci*.

1.3. Digital advertising in country branding

The thesis about the fundamental importance of digital advertising³ in the promotion of destinations, including countries, does not raise a disagreement in the literature (Dexeus, 2019), however, many specific issues related to the management of the territorial brand remain debatable. There is also no reservation that the brand, as it follows from the thesis of Kapferer (2008), has its own brand identity which includes visual elements. The main goal of creating and implementing the visual identity of brands (since the 1960s, these identities take the form of "integrated corporate design systems" [Müller, 2015, p. 13]) is to reduce costs and increase profits through distinction and description (Mollerup, 2013, p. 59). The authors also assume that the concept of destination branding, although relatively new (Pike, 2009), is already accepted in the literature on the subject (Real-Ruiz et al., 2020). However, many detailed issues remain to be resolved, one of which is the relationship between destination branding, media, information management and tourism promotion. As Fernández-Cavia points, an official website⁴ is "a place's showcase to the world" (Fernández-Cavia, 2020, p. 117), and it is very difficult to be recognised in the world of digital media with billions of websites.⁵ Thus, the distinction between official communication and commercial communication becomes a vital issue for destination branding management.

Taking into account the context of the study, the authors decided to check the presentation of the logos on the official tourist websites of the countries, which are members of the European Union. Data are presented in alphabetical order in Table 1.

³ The authors follow the view expressed by Cronin (2018) and McStay (2016, p. 4), that in the digital world the divisions into advertising, marketing, public relations and promotion cease to be of strategic importance and that there is a uniform 'commercial speech' (Cronin 2018, p. 5).

⁴ The division into paid, owned, earned, shared media is commonly accepted in scientific papers as well as in the business guides on digital media, although there are disputes as to their importance and hierarchy (Macnamara et al., 2016; McStay, 2016).

⁵ The www.internetlivestats.com website reports that on November 4th, 2020, at 13.45, there were 1 812 074 971 websites, and their number is growing at a rate of about 1 per second.

Table 1. Presentation of the logos of the EU countries

Country/Region ⁶	Webpage	Country's logo visibility on the website
Austria	austria.info	Tourist logo. Official Tourist Guide can be found in the top left corner of the home page.
Brussels (Belgium)	visit.brussels	Region logo. Confirmation of its officiality requires some effort. Information about the logo status requires viewing the 'About us' section.
Bulgaria	bulgariatravel.org	Tourist logo. The Operator (Ministry of Tourism of the Republic of Bulgaria) can be found in the footer of the page.
Croatia	croatia.hr	Tourist logo. The Operator (Croatian National Tourist Board) can be found in the footer of the page.
Cyprus	visitcyprus.com	Tourist logo. Information who is the operator – The Official Portal of Cyprus Tourism – can be found in the upper left corner of the home page.
Czech Republic	visitczechrepublic.com	Logotype. The Operator (CzechTourism) can be found in the footer of the page. Confirmation of officiality requires some effort. The information about the status requires viewing the section 'About us'.
Denmark	visitdenmark.com	Tourist logo. Information about the officiality of the website appears in the content of the page.
Estonia	visitestonia.com	Logotype. The information who is the operator – Official tourism information website – can be found in the upper left corner of the home page.
Finland	visitfinland.com	Tourist logo. The information who is the operator can be found in 'The Official Travel Guide of Finland' in the website address bar.
Flanders (Belgium)	visitflanders.com	Region logo. Confirmation of its officiality requires some effort and can be found in 'Press' section.
France	ee.france.fr	Tourism logo. The information who is the operator – 'France.fr – the official website of tourism in France' can be found in the website address bar.
Germany	www.germany.travel	Tourist logo. The confirmation of officiality requires effort through the footer of the page and the 'About us' section.
Greece	visitgreece.gr	Tourist logo. The official information 'The Official Website of the Greek Tourism Organization' can be found in the site address bar.

⁶ Belgium does not maintain a national tourism service. The regions (Brussels, Flanders, Wallonia) are responsible for promotion.

Hungary	wowhungary.com	Tourist logo. The confirmation of its officiality requires some effort through the footer of the page and the 'contact' section.
Ireland ⁷	www.ireland.com	Tourist logo. The information that this webpage is the 'Official Holiday Website of Tourism Ireland, can be found in the website address bar.
Italy	italia.it	Tourist logo. The information that it is the 'Italian Tourism Official Website' appears in the address bar.
Latvia	latvia.travel	Country logo in the 'travel' version. The information that it is 'The Official Latvian Tourism Portal' can be found in the website address bar.
Lithuania	lithuania.travel	Tourist logo. The confirmation of officiality requires effort through the footer of the page and the 'About us' section.
Luxemburg	www.visitluxembourg.com	Tourist logo. The information that it is 'The Official Travel Guide of Luxembourg' can be found in the website address bar.
Malta	www.visitmalta.com	Tourist logo. In the header of the home page, the information says that it is the 'Official Destination Partner' can be found.
Poland	www.poland.travel	Tourist logo. The name 'Poland Tourism Organization' appears in the header. There are some websites in languages' versions, e.g., polen.travel, polska.travel, pologne.travel, etc.
Portugal	www.visit.portugal.com	Tourist logo. The confirmation of officiality requires effort through the footer of the page and the 'About us' section.
Romania	romaniatourism.com	Tourist logo. The confirmation of officiality requires some effort through the footer of the page and the section 'Contact us'.
Slovakia	slovakia.travel	Tourist logo. The confirmation of officiality can be found at the footer of the page and the section 'About the portal'.
Slovenia	www.slovenia.info	Tourist logo. The information 'The official travel guide to Slovenia' appears in the address bar.
Spain	spain.info	Tourist logo. The confirmation of officiality requires effort through the footer of the page and the 'About us' section.
Sweden	visitsweden.com	Logotype. In the header of the website, the information 'Sweden's official website for tourism and travel information' can be found.

⁷ Ireland and the Northern Ireland (UK) maintained a joint travel service. With Brexit, its future is unknown today.

The Netherlands	www.holland.com	Country logo. The information that it is the official guide for visiting the Netherlands can be found in the top left corner of the home page.
Wallonia (Belgium)	www.wallonia.be/en/visit	Region logo. The 'visit' service is a part of the region's official website.

Source: authors' research.

The authors made an additional verification, taking advantage of the Google search engine (using the terms 'country name' + 'visit', 'travel', 'tourism', 'tourism website', 'destination website'). The purpose of which was to examine whether the returned search result clearly and without doubt defines the indicated in Table 1 page as 'official'. The following should be explained:

1. Well-defined descriptions as official websites have Austria, Cyprus, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Greece, the Netherlands, Ireland, Luxembourg, Latvia, Malta, Slovenia, Sweden, Italy (15 countries) and Flanders and Wallonia (Belgian regions).
2. Websites of Brussels (region), Bulgaria, Croatia, Czech Republic, Spain, Lithuania, Portugal, Romania, Hungary (8 countries) do not have any information that the website is an official website of the country or region.
3. In the case of Germany, the description is uncertain because the name of the National Tourist Organization appears in the description. The information that such an organization has an official status is not commonly known. In the case of Poland, one may find in the descriptions – depending on the language version – the terms 'national' (PL), 'official' (DE), or general description (GB, FR) appear.

It means that in 10 countries and 1 region, verbal identification indicating the officiality of the website and logo at the same time is not obvious and easily recognizable.

Another factor that makes it difficult to identify the status of websites is their network address structure. As noticeable in Table 1, there is no uniform system in the European Union that would allow the identification of Official Destination Websites (ODW) by the website address. One of the consequences of the lack of such a system is the appearance of commercial websites with addresses similar to the official ones, e.g., visitslovenia.pl belongs to a private travel agency.

The above-mentioned factors indicate that in the owned media management on the internet, a logo is necessary. It has two main functions: it is an evidence of the website officiality as well as it distinguishes such webpages from commercial ones. A particular advantage of the logo is that it can be legally protected, so it cannot be legally imitated.

2. Research methods

A visual content analysis was used to code the data, since the logo is a graphic representation which consists of visual codes having specific meanings. Furthermore, this is a research method allowing to make general statements about the logos' content which tourists, investors, and residents can understand identifying them (Oliveira, Panyik, 2015). Therefore, the authors of this study have examined the pictures (logos) applying the content analysis understood as a research process serving the objective, systematic and quantitative description of the message content (Lisowska-Magdżiarz, 2004, p. 13; Rose, 2001, p. 55). Content analysis of the graphic symbols used in the promotion consists of four stages (Rose, 2001, pp. 56–66):

- (a) finding images – countries' logos were found on official webpages, social media and in other promotional publications,
- (b) devising categories for coding – coding means attaching a set of descriptive labels (or categories) to the images (Rose, 2001, p. 58),
- (c) coding images – applying distinguished categories of countries' logos,
- (d) analysing the results – formulating conclusions and discussion of the questions.

Exploring the literature – both graphic design and place branding – which addresses the logo issue, one may find numerous studies and typologies of visual symbols used in branding. To develop categories for coding, the authors used taxonomies elaborated by the graphic designer – Mollerup, as well as marketing specialists – Beyrow, and Vogt. These two typologies were chosen, because firstly, they represent the two fields having the greatest impact on the content of logos. Secondly, Mollerup elaborated on the taxonomy which is relevant in today's design theory and practice. He also used to be an international expert preparing proposals for national design policies for Estonia (2003), Latvia (2004), and Lithuania (2008). Beyrow and Vogt collected and analysed the logos of the German cities and published the first book ever which gathered all city's logos of one country. They were used in a specially prepared typology that let them disclose the specifics of these visual symbols. All presented city signs (Ger. *Stadtsgnet*) have a main objective to symbolise appropriately the city (Beyrow, Vogt, 2015, p. 34). That is why the relevance of the sign is signalled. Thus, logos in the cited book are called 'city signs' (Ger. *Stadtzeichen*), leading to the question: what constitutes the content of a city logo (Ger. *Gehalt*)? In further analyses, German authors divide the content of a logo into three main categories:

- (a) Substance (Ger. *Substanz*), when a logo exposes what a city administrates and offers to the public (e.g., the logo which shows existing buildings, bridges, monuments, etc.).
- (b) Presence (Ger. *Präsenz*), when a logo presents the fact of the city's existence (by, e.g., logotypes).

- (c) Reference (Ger. *Referenz*), when a logo discloses the value of the symbol (e.g., logos referring to heraldry or cultural heritage of a city).

Taking into account two classifications and the experience in researching the Polish city logos, the authors decided to analyse the EU countries logos considering four different categories. The first class used for content analysis was ‘substance’ in Beyrow and Vogt’s understanding. The EU countries’ logos were investigated whether they contain substances such as culture and nature elements. The second category was taken from the Mollerup’s classification. The term ‘motif’ is defined by Mollerup’s concept (Mollerup, 2013, p. 129) and understood as the illustration of the storyline subject (theme). Mollerup presents many examples of graphic (visual) motifs and then he clarifies them in the proposed taxonomy. One of the presented motifs can be described as ‘human’ (Mollerup, 2013, p. 180), which is understood as a real or fictional person. Additionally, the category of time was considered as one of the values the logos offer. This analysis was made referring to the previous research of the authors on the logos of Polish cities. It turned out that the visual symbols contained in logos very frequently clearly refer to the past, the present, or the future. Finally, the core values expounded and explained in the documents (brand books) were studied to find links between pictures and their clarification prepared by the creators of logos or authors of the idea revealed in the logo content. In some promotional strategies the main values are explained and in such a way the *genius loci* are visually exposed. The brand’s deepest values must be reflected in the external signs of recognition, and these must be apparent at first glance (Kapferer, 2008, p. 173).

3. Research results

As the interpretation of the logos’ content shown in Table 3, it is difficult to find a single symbol or thought common to all logos, which would reveal, on the one hand, belonging to the EU, and, on the other, a unique and shared characteristic for all countries. The variety of signs, colours, fonts, shapes, composition and figures means that, based on the analysis of the content of these logos, it is impossible to build any operational model which could be useful to manage the nation brand communication process. Table 3.1 shows this variety of logos’ content.

Table 2. Tourist logos of the European Union member countries (2020). Alphabetical order⁸

			
<p>Austria</p>	<p>Belgium – Brussels</p>	<p>Belgium – Flanders</p>	<p>Belgium – Wallonie</p>
			
<p>Bulgaria</p>	<p>Croatia</p>	<p>Cyprus</p>	<p>Czech Republic</p>
		<p>visit estonia</p>	<p>FINLAND</p>
<p>Denmark</p>	<p>Espana</p>	<p>Estonia Estonia has no logo. 'visit estonia' is created according to the recommendations on the Brandestonia web page. According to these recommendations, the national AINO font was used.</p>	<p>Finland</p>
			
<p>France</p>	<p>Germany. In print, the logo should be presented together with the logo of the Federal Ministry for Economic Affairs and Energy (BMWi)</p>	<p>Greece</p>	<p>Hungary</p>

⁸ Sources for the presented logos are available in 'works cited'.

			
Netherlands	Ireland. The logo is utilized in tourism promotion of Northern Ireland and Republic of Ireland. Due to Brexit, the future is unclear.	Italy	Latvia
			
Lithuania	Luxembourg, 'visit' version	Malta	Poland The visual identity system of the Polish Tourist Organization includes additional graphic elements.
			
Portugal	Romania A different logo is used on www.romaniatourism.com	Slovakia	Slovenia
			
Sweden The national font SWEDEN SANS is used on www.visitsweden.com			

Source: authors' research.

Regarding *genius loci*, the Spanish logo might be considered as exemplary due to the following features: it was developed by a recognized artist (Miró), it is durable (used since 1984), and as a result it is widely known and associated. This sign considers the three elements of the *genius loci* indicated by Norberg-Schultz, that is: landscape, architecture, and people.

Table 3. Logo content interpretation

Country (nation)/region	Substance		Human	Time (past, present, future, not defined)	Brand values	Additional remarks
	Culture	Nature				
Austria	-	-	A known person (real or legendary) The slogan clearly states that Austria as a country invites people to arrive and revive.	-	Creativity Attentiveness Enjoyment of life Sense of belonging	The Austrian flag is the most important element of the logo, the addressed idea is stressed in the slogan. The values are explained in the document called: "The brand. Holiday in Austria".
Belgium – Brussels	-	A flower – iris which is a symbol of the region	-	-	Diversity Omnipresent Creativity	The values are projected in different colours depending on the specific departments, media, or fields: such as events, culture, business and congresses, art of living, etc.
Belgium – Flanders	Flemish lion that comes from the coat of arms.	-	-	Referred to the past, a coat of arms is a symbol of the past	Imagination	This logo is universal, not only for tourists.

Belgium – Wallonia	-	-	-	-	-	Identifies the destination and Belgium as a country.	The logo communicates through colours: culture, nature and locality. The country is identified by red colour. In promotional materials, human beings must be presented to show the people as the core value in Wallonia.
Bulgaria	-	-	-	-	-	A rose which is a traditional symbol of Bulgaria	Traditional Damask rose oil is a symbol of Bulgaria and well known to the Europeans. These roses are available only in Bulgaria.
Croatia	Sailboat	Sea, sun palm fronds	-	-	-	Meaning of the past referring to the Croatia's heraldic symbolism	The multitude of languages used in the name of Croatia has an important meaning to avoid political difficulties. The content of the logo is very rich. It takes advantage of different languages.

Cyprus	-	Sea, heart, sun	Legendary figure- Aphrodite	-	Mythological past	Heritage Tradition	Referring to Aphrodite because Cyprus is perceived as the birthplace of Aphrodite.
Czech Republic	-	-	-	-	History Stories	Values are included in the slogan which is an integral element of the country's logo.	Czech national colours which are connected with the idea of Panslavonic identity. Logo unified destination brand-name.
Denmark	-	The heart is a symbol of Danish way of life.	-	-	-	Diversity Eye-to-eye (direct contact) Creativity Danish hospitality	The colours of the Danish flag. The primary colours are strong, eye-catching and symbolise strength, dynamism and "Danishness".

Estonia	Digital society as a contemporary symbol of Estonia	-	Society	Future	Independent minds Clean environment Digital society 3 crucial values: Nordic, surprising, smart.	Instead of having a particular logo, Estonia uses specially prepared fonts called "aino".
Finland	-	-	-	Not defined	Unconventional Fresh Individual Alternative	
France	-	Woman as a symbol of France	-	Timeless	Liberty Authenticity Sensuality	The design is a fluid feminine figure that is modern, sensual, timeless and forward-looking.
Germany	-	Logo shows emotions and radiates friendliness	-	Not defined	Diversity Vibrancy Friendliness Perfection and – not least – unity and uniformity.	Colours referred to the German flag. The picture is eye-catching. There are three different slogans which are the permanent part of the logo. This is a signature.

Greece	-	-	-	The past which is fashionable all time.	Democracy Philosophy Music Theatre Architecture Olympism	The logo symbolises: national colours, both ancient and different cultures, tradition, ways of life, sunny beaches, mountains and wilderness, together with islands. Logo objective is to build the brand name.
Hungary	-	-	-	Present and future	Modernity Friendliness Activity	Informal element of logo - delight. Logo promotes the brand name. There is a different logo addressed to the Hungarian tourist market.
Ireland	-	-	-	Not defined	-	According to the meaning of shamrock, it brings luck. Nothing is explained. This is just a corporate sign to identify the country.

Italy	-	-	-	-	Not defined	Sustainability, digital innovation, quality accommodation / services and adaptation to the new trends of demand.	Logo objective is to build a brand name because in the logo there is only name of the country. Reviving Italy – the goal of tourism strategy.
Latvia	-	-	-	-	Future	Core values: Versatility Modern Innovative Forward-thinking	The slogan expresses values: "Best enjoyed slowly"
Lithuania	-	-	-	-	Present	Realness	The slogan ("Real is beautiful") is an integral part of the logo.
Luxembourg	-	-	-	-	Present	Openness, dynamic, reliable, development	National colours, the logotype is made up of lettering Luxembourg and the symbol X, which replaces the letter X.

Malta	Maltese Cross inside 4 arrows.	-	-	Logo refers to the past (Maltese Cross)	-	Very new logo published in February 2018. No explanation what the logo means. Colours used in the logo may mean: Gold – a sun Green – nature Blue – a symbol of sky Red is connected with Maltese cross and national colours of Malta.
Netherlands	-	Logotype	Rembrandt who inspired the sketch lettering.	Open minded people.	Not defined	The colour – orange – links the logo to the country's royal heritage.
Poland	-	Mountains, water, trees	-	-	Past	The symbol is very generic. The logo is expected to accompany the collage of national icons.
Portugal	Haven	-	A mythical figure. A warrior – a Portuguese hero	People who are explorers, sea-farers – warm people	Past	A symbol that represents Portugal as an Atlantic country. Colours come from the Portuguese flag.

Romania	Folklore Rural life	-	-	-	Past	Nature Authenticity Tradition Unique culture	Gold – the Sun Green – nature Blue – a symbol of the sky
Slovakia	Typography which represents the best of Slovakia	-	-	-	Past	Core values: Diversity Ingenuity Vitality Authenticity	The logo is a slogan which consists of the name of Slovakia. The fonts are created by Peter Biľak – a famous typographer.
Slovenia	-	Undefined organic	-	-	Future	Family Attachment to local goods Health Responsibility	Green is a symbol of preserved natural environment that joins Slovenian cultural and natural heritage in a balanced whole.
Spain	The logo consists of a red sun with a broad black edge and an additional broad yellow edge below the word 'España' in naif hand-written black capitals	-	-	-	Timeless	-	The oldest logo was created by Joan Miró in 1983, a few months before his death. Spain was the first country having a promotional logo.

Sweden	Consists of the flag and the word 'Sverige' (Sweden) – what is known in typography as a 'bouma'. The word 'Sverige', which means Sweden, refers to the shape of a cluster of letters, the whole word.	-	-	-	-	Communication Dialogue Relationship	'Sverige' is in this case a clear and unique message as it is used in a combination of the flag together with communicators 'Swe' or 'Sweden'.
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All presented logos were obtained from official sources in 2015–2017 (accessed: 30.09.2021): Austria – <https://www.austriatourism.com/marke-urlaub-in-oesterreich/marke-erlebbar-machen/das-markenzeichen/>; Belgium – <https://visitbrussels/site/en/article/logos>; Belgium – Flanders – <http://www.flanderstoday.eu/politics/region-flanders-launches-new-logo-and-communication-concept>; Belgium – Wallonia – <http://walloniebelquetourisme.be/> (a complete system obtained from the WBT organization, made available for research and scientific analysis); Bulgaria – <http://bulgariatravel.org/en>; Croatia – <https://www.croatia.hr/pl-PL>; Cyprus – <http://www.visitcyprus.com/index.php/en/>; Czech Republic – <http://www.czechtourism.com/pl/home/>; Denmark – <https://www.branddenmark.com/ln-int/denmark/denmarks-visual-identity>; Estonia – <https://brand.estonia.ee> – graphic files available after registration; Finland – <https://toolbox.finland.fi/brand-identity-guidelines/>; France – <https://sg.ambafrance.org/The-new-face-of-French-tourism>; Germany – <http://www.germany.travel/pl/index.html> (a complete system obtained from the DZT organization, made available for research and scientific analysis); Greece – <http://www.visitgreece.gr/>; Hungary – <https://helloworldhungary.com/pl>; Ireland – <https://www.irelandcontentpool.com/account/landingpage/> (graphic files available after registration); Italy – <http://www.italia.it/en/home.html>; Latvia – <https://magneticlatvia.lv/>; Lithuania – <http://www.visitlithuania.net/lithuanian-tourism-trademark>; Luxembourg – <https://luxembourg.public.lu/en/toolbox/brand.html>; Malta – <http://www.mta.com.mt/official-logos>; Netherlands – <https://www.nlplatform.com/>; Poland – POT visual identity manual was available on POT webpage during research period; Portugal – <https://www.visitportugal.com/en>; Romania – <http://www.romania.travel/en/> (a logo obtained from the “Romania Travel” organization, made available for research and scientific analysis); Slovakia – <http://slovakia.travel/pl>; Slovenia – <http://www.slovenia.si/ifs/>; Spain – <https://www.spain.info/en/>; Sweden – <https://identity.sweden.se/>.

4. Discussion of results

The logo design is a creative work which allows a country to be perceived through a symbol in a specific, intended way. Analysing the content of the logos of the European Union countries, one may emphasize that they 'speak' very little about the states they symbolize. They are imagined, not realistic. Most logos refer to traditional symbols such as national colours, flags, or coats of arms.

The authors of logos assume that recipients have quite wide and deep cultural and historical knowledge about a given country. In some cases, a sender (creator of the logo) anticipates that an observer will know the Greek mythology or other legends, myths or traditional symbols. These are the cases of Greece, Cyprus, France, and Holland.

It is very difficult to recognise what a particular logo means, reading only its visual content. One who wants unmistakably to understand a particular sign, needs to read the brand book, where the sense of symbols is habitually explained. Nevertheless, it should be stressed that not every country releases a brand book. When such a document is available, it is assumed that a tourist or another person, who is interested in visiting a particular country, has access to the website and he/she wants to find some more pieces of information about the meaning of the logo.

Symbols used in the logos of the European countries are more imaginative than genuine; therefore, they rather do not present the *genius loci* of a country. They are very classical, which means they are simple, constant, immediately recognizable, reproducible at different sizes, distinct, and easily readable (Stones, 2009, p. 4). Such a conclusion is understandable, because each country is a complicated unit consisting of rich cultural, social, geographical, and political diversity. This means when one detail is presented, another one might be lost.

Summing up, the content of the discussed logos might be divided into the following groups:

- (a) Signs referring to the coat of arms: Flanders and Croatia refer to the flags; Austria, Czech Republic, Denmark, Finland, Germany, Greece, Luxembourg, Portugal, and Sweden mention national colours.
- (b) Signs referring to unofficial symbols of countries. It means they are not included in the heraldic, but are widely known or popular: Bulgaria (rose), France (Maryanne), Malta (Maltese Cross), Netherlands (orange), Ireland (shamrock) use unofficial symbols of countries.
- (c) Logos of Austria, Flanders, Croatia, Cyprus, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia have slogans which are included as an integral part of the country's logo, for example, a logo is a slogan itself or a slogan is a logo.
- (d) In two cases well-known names – famous people are involved in the logo creation:
 - painter Joan Miró is a creator of Spanish logo;

- typographer Peter Bilak is a creator of Slovakian fonts.
- (e) In two cases: Estonia and Sweden unique national fonts (Aino and Sweden Sans respectively) were created to serve as a sign of identity.

In conclusion, content analysis of countries' logos is a quite new subject. Going intensely into the symbols inserted in the logos of the EU countries, it is impossible to recognise the *genius loci* of the country. Nevertheless, to the authors' knowledge, it may be crucial for the tourism industry to acknowledge what is beyond the logo content. The presented research can be regarded as a kind of novelty in critical research in place branding, especially in deeper understanding what a certain logo presents. From the logo content presentation, it is very difficult to recognize what a given sign means, what it should show, or how it should be understood. In the case of EU countries, which are old and well-known in the world, one may assume that logos do not need to disclose the specifics of them. Graphically perfect logo is only one of the many elements that promote a particular destination. It is important but without a promotional strategy and appropriate media management, at present – especially social media management, even the best designed logo does not bring tourists and visitors to the country.

5. Limitations of the study

The presented research has at least two limitations. Firstly, the cases which were very specific – the EU countries – do not allow to make comparisons with other parts of the world. Secondly, the authors concentrated only on four characteristics of the logos (referring to the graphic design classifications), while it might not be enough to recognise their meaning and significance (i.e., studying the perception of a country's logo can give a broader view of its content). Additional cases from other countries, for example, from the American continent, would increase the validity of such research. What is more, the authors focusing on logo content, have not tried to study how citizens, tourists, and visitors recognize and understand the logos.

Conclusions and summary

According to the authors, the key conclusions are as follows:

- (1) All presented logos are static and meet the 'canonical' requirements of a well-designed logo (Stones, 2009). In the dynamic world of changing media, digital communication, the growing importance of social media and mobile communication, this approach is rather conservative and – what requires further research – may limit and weaken the impact of national brands on recipients.

- (2) The public space is filled up with many brands. We live as Lipovetsky (2013) states in 'A Branded World' and as Kreft (2009) writes in the attention economy. Territorial brands, including tourist ones, compete for the 'tourist's gaze' (Urry, Larsen, 2011). Therefore, it seems necessary that the territorial brand should take advantage of the latest solutions in communication, considering social media management.
- (3) Branding practice considers that every organization is a sender. It has its own website, fan page in social media, manages content and influencers. The large number of digital channels, their mutual interactions and synergy clearly show that the management of media presence requires speed, flexibility and 24/7 presence. In such an environment, one cannot create *ad hoc* elements of brand identity, and all messages should be carefully managed (Kanazawa et al., 2021). Here the authors can mention the example of Germany. The identification system of this country is fully adapted to the digital form. Estonia is also a good example – brand.estonia.ee provides all the necessary tools to uniquely identify a country's brand. On the other hand, there is Poland – many sources indicate that the management of the country's tourism brand has and still has numerous weaknesses (Paschalidis, 2017, p. 193; Adamus-Matuszyńska, Dzik, 2017; Zaborowski, 2019).

In conclusion, the authors would like to point out that for media researchers, a crucial source of concepts and methods of new formats and forms of expression (McQuail, 2010, p. 452) might be the achievements of graphic designers, also quoted in this article. Knowledge of visual vocabularies will allow to avoid stereotypes and clichés what are the subject of critiques (Paschalidis, 2017, p. 198). It is noticeable for the authors that in the world of 'Ocularcentric' (Banks, 2007), the thoughts of those who create what will be given as visible to the recipients are worth taking into account.

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