

**DEVELOPMENT OF THE IMAGE OF TOWNS  
IN A TOURIST REGION BASED ON THE EXAMPLE  
OF WARMIŃSKO-MAZURSKIE VOIVODSHIP**

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Key words: identity, image, town image development strategies, tourist town.

Abstract

Increasingly often, authorities of towns notice the need for targeted development of the town image. As a consequence, they undertake various actions that are to lead to the situation when the town is not seen in an accidental way but in a way consistent with the intentions of the town authorities. That desirable image is to be coherent and expressive as a consequence of which it should contribute to town development as a source of its competitive advantage. This paper aims at assessment of the image development strategies of the towns from Warmińsko-Mazurskie voivodship. The research was conducted in towns of Warmińsko-Mazurskie voivodship at the turn of 2009/2010 applying the survey method. The results indicate positive verification of the formulated hypothesis that the towns from Warmińsko-Mazurskie voivodship, as a consequence of their location, aim at developing their image as that of a tourist town.

**KSZTAŁTOWANIE WIZERUNKU MIAST REGIONU TURYSTYCZNEGO  
NA PRZYKŁADZIE WOJEWÓDZTWA WARMIŃSKO-MAZURSKIEGO**

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Słowa kluczowe: tożsamość, wizerunek, strategia kształtowania wizerunku miasta, miasto turystyczne.

Abstrakt

Władze miast coraz częściej zauważają potrzebę celowego kształtowania wizerunku miasta. W związku z tym podejmują różnego rodzaju działania, które mają doprowadzić do tego, że miasto nie będzie odbierane w sposób przypadkowy, ale zgodny z intencjami władz miejskich. Pożądanym

wizerunek ma być spójny i wyrazisty, przez co powinien przyczynić się do rozwoju miasta, stając się źródłem jego przewagi konkurencyjnej. Celem opracowania jest ocena strategii kształtowania wizerunku miast województwa warmińsko-mazurskiego. Badanie przeprowadzono w miastach województwa warmińsko-mazurskiego na przełomie lat 2009/2010 metodą ankietową. Wyniki badania wskazują na pozytywne zweryfikowanie wysuniętej hipotezy, mówiącej o tym, że miasta województwa warmińsko-mazurskiego ze względu na swoje usytuowanie dążą do kształtowania wizerunku miasta turystycznego.

## **Introduction and methodology of study**

The positive image is increasingly often treated as a significant source of competitive advantage. And this applies not only to the entities focused on maximization of profits. The opportunity of that type was noticed also in case of managing an entity as complex as a town. Increasingly often it is heard that towns aim at development of a specific image expecting that the image would become their intangible asset that in a long-term time perspective will attract investments, tourists, residents and other groups of entities to the town contributing as a consequence to its development. Initially the knowledge on purposeful development of town image was shallow and practical actions undertaken were shallow and inconsistent. Nevertheless, the knowledge on the methods of effective town image management has been increasing and as a consequence the results are improving. It comes out that towns, increasingly often, start planning the identity strategy conscientiously developing its desirable image. As the effect, the activities related to the development of the desired town image are currently, in most cases, planned and consistent and at the same time, to a different extent, included in the comprehensive town, or even entire region, development strategy. Also, increasingly often, the town authorities start noticing the need for creating a clear image of the town focused on a few attributes or a selected market segment and as a consequence they aim in their activities at the development of the image of, e.g. a tourist town, a town of culture and science, a town of exhibitions, a student town, etc.

This paper aims at assessment of the town image development strategies in Warmińsko-Mazurskie voivodship with particular focus on the fact that those towns are situated in the region considered a tourist region and as a consequence many of them would probably like to be seen as tourist towns. Formulation of that hypothesis was allowed by studies of the literature, results of earlier conducted studies and in depth market observation. The survey by mail was the research method used in the here-presented project. Thirty-four towns from Warmińsko-Mazurskie voivodship participated in the survey. Actions undertaken by the town authorities for development of the town image represented the subject scope of the survey. The first stage of the survey was conducted from October 2009 through January 2010.

## Town image and identity

At the beginning the key notions such as identity strategy, image and identity should be explained.

It can be said that “the identity is the original and the cause while the image is the reflection and the effect” (WOLF 1992, p. 31). The identity means the way in which a given town wants to be identified by the recipients while the image represents how it actually is seen by the people (KOTHLER 1994, p. 54). The identity is the awareness of the town while its image is the picture and the consequence (MOSZKOWICZ 1997, p. 73). There is the opinion that “not so much the elements of the image exist but rather the individual elements of the identity possess their image” (OLSZEWSKA 2000, p. 14).

The thesis can be formulated then that the identity creates the image of the town through its strategy. The identity represents creating and transmitting the information about what can differentiate the town from among the other competitor towns. The town, in building the strategy of its identity, communicates with its surroundings that see it. That perception (“seeing”) results in evaluation of the decoded messages (the instruments of the identity strategy) transmitted by the town and establishment of a specific image of the town in the environment (Fig. 1).

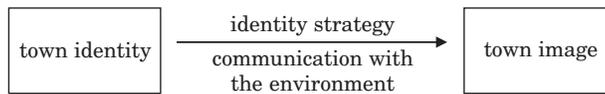


Fig. 1. Correlation between the town identity and image

Source: own work.

As a consequence, the identity strategy allows purposeful development of the town image that represents the result of decoding the messages (the instruments of the identity strategy) contained in the observations received through the stimuli (URBANIAK 2003, p. 36). The author also alternately calls the identity strategy the strategy of development of the desired image of the town (STANOWICKA-TRACZYK 2008, p. 18).

The identity of the town is determined by the (ALTKORN 1999, p. 10):

- urban attitude;
- urban behavior;
- urban communication;
- visual identification (urban design).

The identity is expressed in the individual character of the town, first of all in the visual form. In the English language literature the building of identity is

limited to just the visual presentation of the given subject. In addition to the visual components, the town identity is created by all the actions aiming at own identification such as, e.g. implementation of the town development strategy, organizational culture (way of receiving telephone calls, uniform standard of care for the clients, standards and behaviors), implemented advertising campaigns. The non-visual components of identity also include the: philosophy and mission of activity, historical roots, cultural heritage and remembered successes and failures in town management.

The identity is the set of those characteristics that the town wants to transmit to its environment through the identity strategy influencing by the same the image of the town or its market image. The identity is the set of characteristics of the town giving it the specific, stabile and consistent image (*Zarządzanie firmą...* 1995, p. 594). That image is the sum of beliefs and feelings of the people from the environment. The town can possess a number of different images differing depending on who is the recipient while there is just one identity. The image of the town is its image in public awareness (i.e. what individual groups of the public think of it) while the identity is what the town identifies itself by (ŚLIWIŃSKA 1999, p. 64). The relation between the identity and the image of a town is presented in Figure 2.

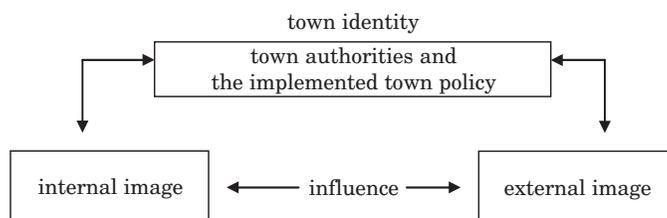


Fig. 2. Town identity versus town image

Source: ŁUCZAK (2001, p. 84).

A major role in building the town identity is played by the authorities of the town that are responsible for expressing the key ideas of activities. They are responsible for the communication policy, formulating the messages targeted at the environment and the whole set of activities related to products, internal communication and behavior in the market (ŁUCZAK 2000, p. 50). The authorities should identify the key determinants of town identity to skillfully use then in composing the instruments of the strategy determining the ultimate image of the town.

## Identity strategies of towns from Warmińsko-Mazurskie voivodship

The market of the urban offer recipients is highly diversified and as a consequence the effectiveness of the identity strategy necessitates conducting market segmentation. In case of a town the point is not the selection of the target market as the town may not focus on servicing a selected group of clients, so the focused marketing is out of question. Applying not diversified (mass) marketing that is identical influencing the entire market by applying the same instruments would also be a mistake. This results from the immense diversity of needs and expectations of the final recipients of the urban product. That is why market segmentation becomes an exceptionally important stage in the process of the town identity development. It aims at identification of relatively homogenous groups of targets and in depth characterization of those groups. The majority of the covered towns from Warmińsko-Mazurskie voivodship notice the necessity of market segmentation in the process of building the desired town image. The largest target groups for which the activities in that area are diversified are the town residents, investors and tourists (Tab.1).

Table 1

Segmentation in the process of the development of the desired town image

Are separate activities undertaken aiming at development of the desired image in the individual target groups?	Number of responses	% (N=34)
Yes, in the group of tourists	25	73.53
investors	21	61.77
town residents	25	73.53
other entities	3	8.82
No, uniform activities targeted at all target groups are rather undertaken	3	8.82

*Source:* own work based on the studies conducted.

Over 70% of towns carry out separate activities aiming at development of the desired image in the segment of tourists. Almost all the towns covered aim at development of the image of a tourist town (Fig. 3). A tourist town is a settlement unit that as a consequence of the tourist values and transport accessibility represents a destination or intermediate point in tourist migrations. The authorities of towns of that type focus their activities on active development of the so-called tourist product that consists of the natural, civilization and cultural values, overall regional infrastructure, accessibility of the target location (destination) determined by the time and cost of reaching the tourist attraction (*Zarządzanie marketingowe...* 1999, p. 30). Those are

components of the so-called wide tourist product that is the location (area) product. The narrow (specific) tourist product is just the set of services sold in the market by tourist companies. As a consequence, all considerations concerning the tourist product and the possibility of its active development by the town authorities apply to the wide (area) tourist product.

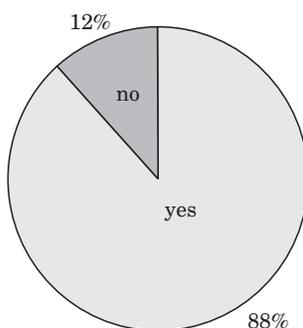


Fig. 3. Are you aiming at developing the tourist town image?

Source: own work.

Almost 90% of the towns covered aim at development of the tourist town image in the identity strategies implemented. Additionally, it is found out that tourists are an important target group for all the towns covered by the study in Warmińsko-Mazurskie voivodship, which is presented in Table 2.

Table 2

Importance of tourists in town activities

Responses	Number of responses	% (N=34)
It is a strategic target group (we are a tourist town)	16	47.06
They are a rather important target group but not the most important	17	50
In case of our town this is not a highly important target group	1	2.94

Source: own work based on the studies conducted.

For almost all the studied towns of Warmińsko-Mazurskie voivodship, tourists are an important target group, which is of strategic importance for a half of them. This is declared by 50% of the respondents confirming at the same time that aiming at being a tourist town or treating the town as a tourist one is the reason for that focus on this specific market segment. Only one of the covered towns from Warmińsko-Mazurskie voivodship does not focus its activities on the segment of tourists.

A tourist town or location is a part of the tourist area, which in turn represents a fragment of a tourist region, which is defined as the area fulfilling the tourist function on the base of certain homogeneity of the geographic environment and the internal service links (NAUMOWICZ 1990, p. 39). In the conducted studies the hypothesis was formulated that the image of Warmia and Mazury as a tourist region influences the image of the towns situated within it at the same time turning activities of town authorities towards building the image of a tourist town. The results of studies on that issue are presented in Figure 4.

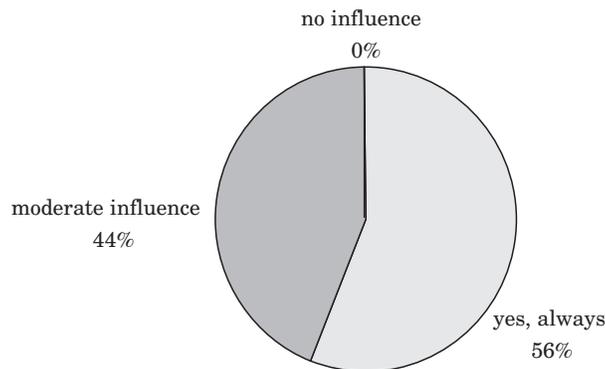


Fig. 4. Influence of the image of Warmia and Mazury as a tourist region on the image of towns situated within it

Source: own work based on the studies conducted.

It was established that all the towns covered confirm existence of that correlation, are aware of it and, as a consequence, almost all of them (as indicated earlier) aim at making use of that correlation. Additionally, a half of the respondents always recognizes the correlation between the image of the region and the image of the towns situated within it while 44% of the respondents believe that the image of the region of Warmia and Mazury has a limited influence on the image of the towns situated within it.

When developing the identity strategy targeted at tourists the specific demands of that market segment should be considered. They concentrate around factors that determine tourist attractiveness of the town. In depth analysis of those determinants allows identification of needs of the tourists and development of town identity strategy that highlights those key factors. The following factors are mentioned the most frequently in that context:

- interesting history, monuments of culture, heir condition and accessibility,
- accommodation, gastronomy and cultural-entertainment facilities available in the town,

- natural environment quality and status in the town and its surroundings,
- transport accessibility,
- attractive location of the town,
- events and attractions,
- developed facilities for organization of conferences, exhibitions, symposia, etc.

In the conducted study the attributes highlighted in the implemented identity strategies of towns from Warmińsko-Mazurskie voivodship were analyzed (Tab. 3).

Table 3

Town attributes used in town image development

Town identity attributes	Number of responses	% (N=34)
Cultural and historical heritage (history and monuments)	26	76.48
Attractive town location	32	94.12
Status of economic development of the town (high level of investments, low unemployment rate, etc.)	10	29.41
Professionalism and culture of town authorities	18	52.94
Intellectual potential	4	11.76
Business environment	7	20.59
Developed tourist accommodation facilities	18	52.94
Developed trade and service network	9	26.47
Accessibility and high quality of public services	7	20.59
Availability and affordable prices of real property	4	11.76
Other	6	17.65

*Source:* own work based on the studies conducted.

The attributes of towns most frequently highlighted in the implemented identity strategies are the attractive location of the town (94.12%), its cultural and historical heritage (76.48%) and developed accommodation facilities (52.94%). The identity attributes indicated by studied towns confirm their striving at development of the tourist town image. It is also worth pointing out that the authorities of towns implementing image development strategies started limiting the number of highlighted identity attributes. Towns indicated, in average, four attributes they focus on in the implemented strategies for development of the desired town image. For comparison, in 2003, the towns indicated, in average, as many as ten attributes that as important attributes of their identity were highlighted in the strategies implemented. Limitation of the attributes on the base of which the town identity strategy is designed

indicates that towns start aiming at development of the clear, strong image – in case of the region of Warmia and Mazury the image of the tourist town and as a consequence the focus on the above-mentioned attributes.

Recapitulating, it is worth highlighting that the town identity strategy may not be of mass character and that it should highlight different town attributes in different market segments. As a consequence, market segmentation, identification of the expectations of the individual market segments and next development of town identity strategy on their base are so important. It should, nevertheless, be remembered that while highlighting different attributes of town identity in the different market segments there is risk of creating contradictory images of that town in those segments. Hence it is so important to have consistent, harmonized, top-down planned and coordinated on current bases activities within the frameworks of the identity strategy so that in the future those activities result in developing a homogenous, clear and consistent image of the town. The identity strategy should consider the diversified needs of different market segments and as a consequence build the town identity based on different identified attributes in each of the market segments identified. Those actions should be subjected to a single strategic goal in the form of the desired town image.

## **Conclusions**

1. The image is an intangible resource that increasingly often is seen as an important source of competitive advantage also in the case of towns. Increasingly often the authorities of towns start noticing the need for creating the more expressive image of the town built around a few attributes or focused at selected market segments. This happens in case of towns from *Warmińsko-Mazurskie* voivodship that aim at building the image of tourist towns.

2. It has been noticed that the awareness and knowledge on the methods of effective town image management are increasing. The authorities of towns notice the issue of complexity of the urban megaproduct and as a consequence, market segmentation is becoming an immensely important stage in the process of town identity strategy development. Tourists are one of the key segments of the market in the towns of *Warmińsko-Mazurskie* voivodship. For all towns they are one of the major target groups and for a half of the towns in the region the strategic group.

3. The hypothesis that the image of Warmia and Mazury as a tourist region influences the image of towns situated within it at the same time focusing activities of town authorities on developing the image of the tourist town was verified positively. This is confirmed by the above conclusions and the fact that

authorities of towns base their identity strategies on typical identity attributes of tourist towns. Those attributes are the cultural and historical heritage, location in the tourist region and elements of tourist products such as, e.g. the tourist accommodation facilities. The authorities of towns also start focusing on a few attributes in their identity strategies implemented, which is to create a more expressive image of the town.

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