

Residents' assessment of promotional activities of Polish towns

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Abstract. The aim of this paper is to analyze the assessment of promotional activities by the residents of Polish cities and towns of various sizes. The conclusions are presented on the basis of a questionnaire conducted between May 11 and August 18, 2011, via the Internet and in direct interviews with respondents from various parts of Poland. Additionally, the author compared the effectiveness of promotional instruments employed by Polish towns, as assessed by those towns' residents, with the results of a survey by TNS OBOP (Centre for Public Opinion Research), conducted at the turn of October 2010 among local government officials in charge of marketing activity. This comparison allowed for the differences in how image campaigns are perceived by the two sides of promotional activity to be identified. The paper provides useful observations to be analyzed by the representatives of local government promotional offices and place marketing experts, and it can also assist urban authorities in selecting the most effective methods of promotion of places, directed at their residents.

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INTRODUCTION

In city marketing, activity should be focused on people first, and only then move on to the infrastructure, attractions, and eventually the image (Kotler, 1999). This particular philosophy of managing a territorial unit calls for responding to the needs of various groups of shareholders, in particular those of the residents (Szromnik, 2007). Unfortunately, in designing their promotional offer, many local governments concentrate mainly on tourists or investors, whereas the process of creating a town's marketing strategy should primarily involve its residents, who should be made aware of the fundamental values of the brand, presented in a comprehensible way, and have its assumptions explained logically (Zmysłony, 2007). Before a new strategy is introduced, it is worth remembering about setting the stage, which requires many meetings and consultations with the local community (Glińska, *et al*, 2009) as this issue is socially significant. One

should also think about winning ambassadors for a new project who could convince public opinion that the strategy to be implemented is attractive and can be advantageous for the town. This role is most credibly played by renowned citizens of the town, but any 'average' citizen to speak in favor of the town can be a valuable ambassador (Wyszyńska, 2009). Winning the local community's support for a new image strategy is of paramount importance for its success, since nothing is more disastrous for a town's promotion than dissatisfied residents (Gryn, 2009). The results of the surveys presented in this paper clearly indicate that the promotional activity of many Polish towns is incompatible with the expectations of their residents.

Taking the above into consideration, the author analyzed the promotional activities undertaken by Polish towns by means of investigating how they are assessed by their main recipients, that is the residents of those towns. The first part of the paper presents a general approach to the promotional activities of towns, i.e. whether the residents notice this activity and are satisfied with it, or whether it is in their opinion sufficiently intensive and accompanied by the allocation of means allowing to promote the town's actual advantages. The next part of the paper presents residents' assessments of the effectiveness of the town's promotional instruments applied in order to improve the town's image, and describes the said instruments. The third part of the paper compares the expectations of residents of small, medium and large towns with respect to promotional instruments to their actual use by local governments.

The overall population of the survey comprised the residents of small (under 20,000 inhabitants), medium (20-100,000 of population) and large (above 100,000 citizens) Polish towns. The survey sample involved 575 individuals divided into five age groups. As many as three out of four respondents were below twenty-six years of age. The survey sample was constructed in this way due to the following factors:

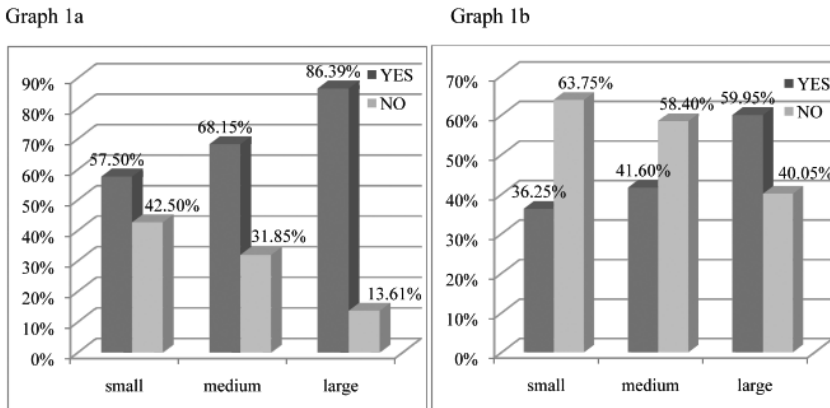
- residents of the town or city are able to assess the promotional activity of their town and characterize its image most accurately, unlike other recipient groups of the town's territorial offer;
- no activity aimed to create a positive image of the town among its external recipients will be effective unless the town's residents themselves are of a positive opinion about their town and its development prospects (Łuczak, 2006);
- the group between nineteen and twenty-six years of age is highly important from the point of view of the town's development as this group is at the stage of making decisions on settling down, therefore forming an attractive recipient of the town's promotional message (Florida, 2008);
- if people over twenty-six years old decide to settle down in a given town, they will be instrumental for its development potential and local labor market assets (Florida, 2008);
- the above group is one of the strategic recipients of local government activities owing to the high mobility of the younger generation, who are deciding on where to settle down on the basis of social and living conditions and the atmosphere in the town; this makes them both easy to win and easy to lose (Barańska-Fisher, Łuczak, 2006).

The survey was dominated by women, accounting for 59% of all respondents. Their higher proportion in the survey corresponds to the current population structure in Poland, where women account for 52% of the population (GUS, 2011).

THE ASSESSMENT OF PROMOTIONAL ACTIVITIES PERFORMED BY TOWNS ACCORDING TO THEIR SIZE

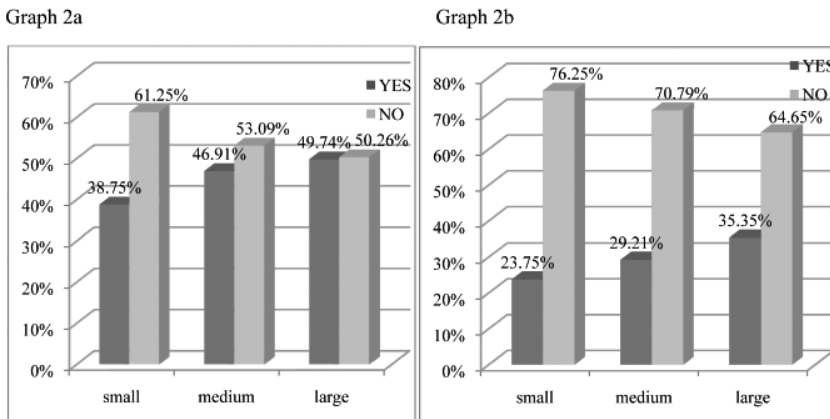
Considering the size of the town respondents live in or identify with, it can be generally concluded that the larger the town, the larger the proportion of people who notice the town's promotional activity and are satisfied with it (Graph 1). The difference in the noticeability of promotional initiatives in the smallest and

largest towns amounts to nearly 30% (Graph 1a). As regards the satisfaction with these activities the discrepancy is barely smaller and amounts to 24% (Graph 1b). Poorer assessment of marketing activity of smaller towns is likely to follow from the limited budgets of their promotional offices, whose resources allow them only to produce promotional gadgets and subsidize local events.



Graph 1. The proportion of residents of small, medium, and large towns, who notice marketing activity to promote the town they live in (a) and are satisfied with this activity (b)

Source: author's own concept.



Graph 2. The proportion of residents of small, medium, and large towns, who believe that the instruments of town promotion are adequate for the promotion of their town's actual advantages (a), and that the intensity of promotional activity of local governments in their place of residence is sufficient (b)

Source: author's own concept.

Similarly, residents of smaller towns less frequently believe that their towns are promoted by adequate promotional means, although the discrepancy between the residents of small and large towns amounts only to 11% (Graph 2a). Practically the same difference (11.6%) applies to the assessment of how intensive the activity of local governments is in respective locations (Graph 2b). The fact that three out of four (76.25%) residents of small towns are of the opinion that the promotion of their place of residence is insufficient, means that even in the smallest urban centers local community recognizes the necessity to run territorial marketing activities. This shows that the residents of small towns should be involved in their promotional activities, since a definite majority of the population considers them to make sense. Six out of ten respondents are of the opinion that the instruments of promotion their local governments apply are insufficient as concerns the presentation of the town's local advantages (Graph 2a). This clearly means that many small towns are promoting themselves inadequately. This may follow from the low level of competence among town council workers. The lack of competent personnel in turn results from the small number of experts in this field, as in Poland knowledge on place marketing can be acquired mainly on paid courses or post-graduate studies. Consequently, numerous promotional activities of smaller localities are incompatible with their territorial offer.

EFFECTIVENESS OF PROMOTIONAL TOOLS TO IMPROVE THE TOWN'S IMAGE

In order to examine the effectiveness of a town's promotional tools in the opinion of its residents the author subjected four types of such tools to be assessed on a four-degree scale (Table 1). Respondents found such promotional materials as gadgets, fliers and promotional brochures ineffective (2.18%). Their low effectiveness follows from the fact that town councils do not pay them enough regard. Regardless of the size of the town, the majority typically offer the same set of gadgets, including ball pens, straps, key hangers, mugs, hats, and T-shirts. They only differ in terms of the colors and advertising slogan of the town. What is more, these keepsakes are usually of low quality, making few recipients willing to use them. The fact is that such gadgets are actually needed by the residents, allowing them to identify with their town and its brand, as well as to reinforce positive relations with the town. Promotional gadgets have great potential – the residents only need to be convinced to use them, gaining in this way cheap, but essentially reliable advertising of the town. In order to make it happen, though, the gadget has to be innovative, high quality and reflect the town's character. The problem in Poland is, however, that towns and cities do not have the right to run business activities, including the sale of gadgets. As a result, guided by economic calculations, towns manufacture limited numbers of cheap gadgets (Florek, Proszowska-Sala, 2010).

Public relations activities (2.92%) and promotional advertising campaigns (2.88) were deemed relatively effective by respondents. PR is defined as “the effort to build good relations with an organisation's publics by obtaining favourable publicity, building up a good public image and handling or heading off unfavourable rumors, stories or events. Major PR tools include press relations, event publicity and lobbying” (Kotler, 1999, p. 182). Using PR instruments in town promotion is becoming increasingly popular as an inexpensive method that simultaneously offers a high quality of information provided. Importantly, PR is particularly significant in the promotion of the town addressed to its residents (Glińska, *et al.*, 2009). The lower assessment of PR compared to events may follow from the fact that such activity is frequently not visible to average citizens and the campaigns designed by experts in this field are usually directed at a precisely profiled recipient group. Additionally, many residents do not realize that the positive news releases about their town they encounter in the mass media are the outcome of PR experts' activities. The relatively high

assessment of this promotional instrument mainly corroborates residents' appreciation of the cooperation between their town and celebrities, and ensuring good relations with the media.

Table 1

The effectiveness of the town's promotional instruments in improving its image in the opinion of residents of Polish towns and cities

Promotional instruments / Assessment	Ineffective (1)	Barely effective (2)	Relatively effective (3)	Most effective (4)	Average
Promotional materials	105 (18.27 %)	284 (49.4 %)	164 (28.53 %)	22 (3.83 %)	2.18
Events	5 (0.87 %)	30 (5.22 %)	168 (29.22 %)	372 (64.7 %)	3.58
Public relations activities	34 (5.92 %)	126 (21.92 %)	270 (46.96 %)	145 (25.22 %)	2.92
Promotional advertising campaigns	29 (5.05 %)	145 (25.22 %)	271 (47.14 %)	130 (22.61 %)	2.88

Source: author's own concept.

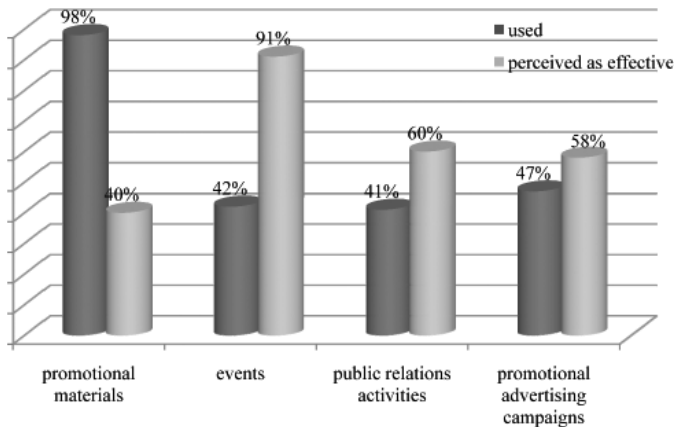
When enquired about the effectiveness of promotional instruments, respondents definitely favored events. Their significance for improving a town's image was assessed at 3.58 (Table 1), where 'four' was the maximum score, which must be considered a very good result. An event is a "one-off occurrence or one repeated with a certain frequency, which lasts for specified period, offering its participants an unusual experience. Such an occurrence or campaign has an economic, sporting, political, academic or cultural character" (Florek, Proszowska-Sala 2010, p. 203). Events are a relatively inexpensive form of promotion whose outcome can be reinforced and prolonged, for example by means of PR activity, or viral marketing. Events work particularly well when building positive emotions and associations of their participants and spectators, and they involve them in the world of the town brand (Kalinowska, 2009). Their main advantage, which is decisive in their popularity, is their interactive character. The recipients of the town's territorial offer do not only want to read about its unique attractions, but they want to take active part in the events organized in the town in order to experience the special atmosphere. Events can also turn out to provide a good tool to build loyalty, as an attractive event and the positive associations it generates usually provide a reason to visit the town again (Florek, Proszowska-Sala, 2010).

DISCREPANCIES BETWEEN THE LOCAL GOVERNMENTS' PRACTICE AND RESIDENTS' EXPECTATIONS

In order to compare the residents' expectations as concerns the promotion of their place of residence with the actual activity of the town's officials, the author ventured to compare the results of her survey with that on the marketing activity of local government officials in Poland. At the request of Brief for Poland this survey was conducted by the TNS OBOP (Centre for Public Opinion Research) via an on-line questionnaire in the period from September 24 – November 11, 2010. The survey admitted 186 districts that declared conducting marketing activities dividing them into three groups: villages (35%), towns up to 100,000 inhabitants (38%), and cities above 100,000 (27%) residents. In order to facilitate the com-

parison, the author counterpointed the first of the groups above with the assessment of the towns below 20,000 residents.

This comparison allowed a number of discrepancies to be noted as concerns residents' expectations of the use of promotional instruments and their actual application by various local governments. In the group of small towns, practically all local governments (98%) use promotional materials, although only two out of five residents believe in their effectiveness (Graph 3). Over 40% of small towns engage in PR activity and run promotional advertising campaigns, albeit only six out of ten residents believe these activities to be effective.



Graph 3. Marketing activities of local governments in small towns, in comparison to the assessment of their effectiveness by residents

Source: author's own concept on the basis of her survey and the results of the survey

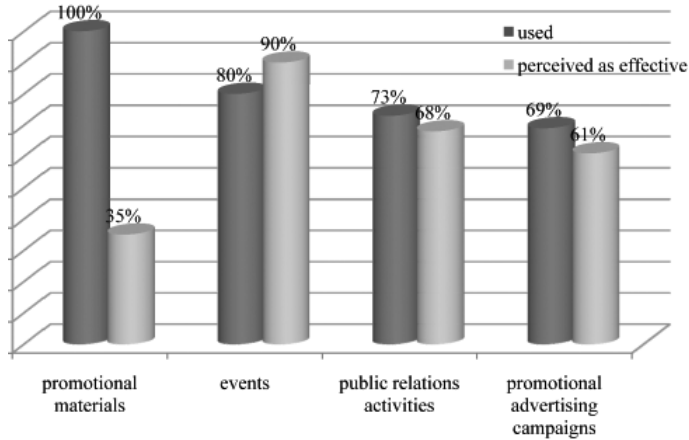
“Marketing activity of local governments in Poland”, conducted by TNS OBOP for *Brief for Poland* in 2010.

The most striking discrepancy between the local governments' practice and residents' expectations can be noted with respect to the assessment of the effectiveness of promotion by means of urban events. While only 42% of small town officials admit that they use these instruments, as many as nine out of ten respondents appreciate their effectiveness. Failing to use events as promotional instruments in small towns is likely to result from the conviction that organizing special events is the domain of large centers. It should be borne in mind, however, that such events do not have to be organized for large numbers of participants. Events organized on a smaller scale can also play a promotional role, provided that they have a clearly identified, narrow target group. Smaller localities can organize local events, whose range is confined to the borders of the town and its surroundings (e.g. Fete Days). If an event is well organized in an attractive setting, even being local, with time it can manage to attract tourists from outside a given region (Florek, Proszowska-Sala, 2010).

As regards additional promotional instruments to promote small towns respondents pointed exclusively to “using the town's internet website” and “establishing a relation to identify the town with a concrete field”.

In the group of medium-sized towns a significant disparity was noted in terms of residents' assessment of the effectiveness of promotional materials (35%) that have been allegedly used by all investigated local governments (100%). It is interesting that the percentage of medium-sized towns that admit carrying out

PR activities and promotional campaigns is larger than the percentage of their populations who deem them to be effective (Graph 4). This difference, as regards these two promotional instruments, amounts respectively to 5% and 8% in favor of their use by local governments.



Graph 4. Marketing activities applied by local government officials in medium-sized towns in comparison to the assessment of their effectiveness by the residents of these towns

Source: author's own concept on the basis of her survey and the results of the survey "Marketing activity of local governments in Poland", conducted by TNS OBOP for *Brief for Poland* in 2010.

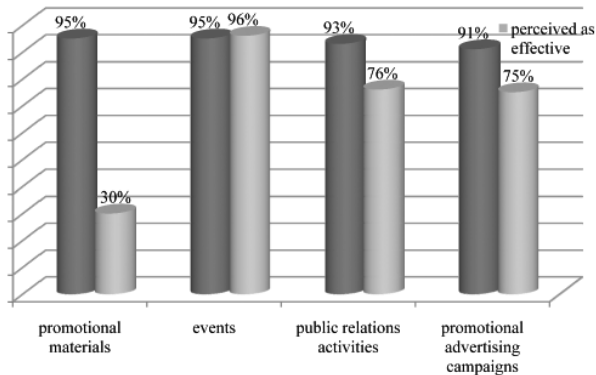
As was the case of small towns, respondents in medium-sized towns said that events are not sufficiently used by their local governments as a promotional tool. As many as 90% of respondents consider them to be effective, whereas 80% of local governments admitted using them. The sector of event marketing has recently developed quite rapidly and at present it not only focuses on organizing huge international events, but also on smaller ones typical of a given region. An example are "hallmark events", i.e. "events characteristic only of a given location, inseparably related to it, and frequently automatically identified with it" (Florek, Proszowska-Sala 2010, p. 215).

Other, effective instruments of promotion, indicated by respondents from medium-sized towns, included local patriotism (3) and professional public services (4).

In the group of large towns investigated by TNS OBOP, 90% of officials are of the opinion that they apply all the forms of promotion under analysis (Graph 5). Although one in every twenty local governments admits that it does not use promotional materials, their effectiveness is generally trusted the least, namely by only 30% of respondents. Three fourths of respondents appreciate public relations and advertising campaigns, while as many as nine out of ten local governments claim to use these forms of promotion. In large cities, the number of indications as far as their respondents' assessment of the effectiveness of events is concerned (96%) is practically identical to the actual extent to which local governments use this form of promotion (95%).

In large towns or cities mega-events are particularly effective, i.e. "one-off large events of international renown" (Florek, Proszowska-Sala, 2010, p. 211). Such events are primarily addressed to both nationwide and international recipients, and usually require local governments to make huge outlays, in return, however, for prestige and media renown on a European, or even global scale. Only the largest cities can afford to

organize such events since their costs are enormous, but the benefits can be even larger (Florek, 2006). An example of a mega-event that was perfectly organized, to be appreciated not only by the residents but producing benefits for the city was the Tall Ships Races, organized in Szczecin in 2007. The surveys¹ conducted after the regatta finals indicated that nearly 100% of Szczecin residents considered the event to provide good promotion for the city in Poland and in Europe, and 92% of Polish tourists who took part in the event stated that they were going to visit Szczecin again (Florek, Proszowska-Sala, 2010).



Graph 5. Marketing activities applied by local government officials in large cities in comparison to the assessment of their effectiveness by the residents of these cities

Source: author's own concept on the basis of her survey and the results of the survey "Marketing activity of local governments in Poland", conducted by TNS OBOP for *Brief for Poland* in 2010.

Residents of large towns indicated other effective promotional tools, such as being active in social media, in particular Facebook and Twitter (4). An equally high assessment concerned the fact of hosting such large events as the Euro 2012 football tournament. Cyclical events involving the city authorities and guests, and cooperation with other cities in the organization of such events (4) were among other effective methods to improve the image of a large town. Promotion achieved by means of supporting the culture of the region and marketing activities addressed at its residents (4) were also indicated by respondents as significant in the promotional activity of a town. Respondents also mentioned that it is necessary to be active on the international as well as nationwide arena (4), and referred to the town's participation in a popular movie series (4) to illustrate this range of promotion. This form of promotion, termed *city placement*, has recently become increasingly frequent in Poland. Among other things, it involves placing the action of a feature film or television series in a concrete city, which facilitates the presentation of its characteristic locations, historical monuments, specific architecture and landscape, as well as other tourist attractions the city has to offer. It is even more beneficial when the city is the hero of a series, as its promotional influence is recurrent and it reaches a defined, very large group of recipients at the same time. The popularity of the series can be additionally used in so-called set-jetting, i.e. following the footsteps of the heroes of popular movies and series in particular destinations (Florek, Proszowska-Sala, 2010).

¹ Facts provided on the basis of analysis carried out at the request of Szczecin City Council.

CONCLUSIONS

In conclusion, it can be said that promotional activity of local governments is not fully compatible with the needs and expectations of residents. Although nearly all local governments use promotional materials, they are not very attractive and of poor quality, making residents doubt their effectiveness and so fail to identify them with their town. Small towns have the longest path to walk as regards the improved effectiveness of their promotional activities., less than half of them use the tools of PR, events or advertising campaigns. Other promotional tools named by respondents are worth considering, in particular activity in social media as well as *city placement*.

The comparison of residents' opinions concerning effective promotional methods with the actual activity of local governments reveals a number of differences in this respect. What is particularly surprising is the low percentage of small towns organizing events, which are perceived by respondents as having the largest promotional potential. Such a failure to adapt promotional methods to residents' expectations might be a reason for their profound dissatisfaction with the promotional activities carried out in their place of residence, which is nearly as high as 50%. Significantly, residents' impressions as concerns the desirable forms of promotion are corroborated by numerous opinions from experts in this field. In the opinion of Dariusz Ziemiński, president of the Association to Support City and Regional Development PROREGIONA, the promotion of every town should be based on the organization of an event, permanent activity on the Internet, and public relations (Siłka, 2009). Unfortunately, not all these elements are sufficiently used in Poland, in particular this concerns the promotion of small and medium towns. Promotion of a town is like a virtuous circle: when it is well prepared, it increases the development opportunities of the town, and the outcomes of this development can be further multiplied by means of skillful promotion. It suffices to systematically examine the expectations of appropriate target groups, use the opinions of qualified experts, and, first of all, to intend to improve the town's image.

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