

Ewa Glinska¹, Magdalena Florek²

STAKEHOLDERS' INVOLVEMENT IN DESIGNING BRAND IDENTITY OF TOWNS – PODLASKIE REGION CASE STUDY³

The main purpose of the paper is to present the results of the process of identifying brand identity distinguishing features of small towns in Poland as seen by local stakeholders. The research method used in developing this paper was focus group interviews carried out with local leaders in Podlaskie region in Poland. Although the results represent the internal perspective, they constitute a significant contribution to the process of town/city brand identity creation. An internal belief in the attractiveness of particular components of a given town is usually a starting point for translating them into advantages that build brand identity of a place. The paper is an attempt to systematise the stakeholders' role in the place branding process. An additional value of the paper is the fact that the analysis of the range of perceived distinguishing features of place identity is based on Anholt's city brand hexagon classification, which has been adapted to smaller towns.

Keywords: marketing, place branding, place identity, place image, Poland.

Ева Глінська, Магдалена Флорек

ЗАЛУЧЕННЯ СТЕЙКХОЛДЕРІВ У РОЗРОБКУ БРЕНДІВ МІСТ: НА ПРИКЛАДІ ПІДЛЯСЬКОГО РЕГІОНУ ПОЛЬЩІ

У статті представлено результати процесу ідентифікації характерних рис бренду малих міст Польщі з точки зору місцевих стейкхолдерів. Використано метод фокус-груп у польському регіоні Підляшшя. Хоча результати стосуються локальних процесів, вони можуть бути використані в процесі створення бренду міста. Внутрішнє переконання в привабливості тих чи інших сторін даного міста, як правило, є відправною точкою для перетворення їх на переваги, які складуть бренд міста. Систематизовано роль стейкхолдерів у процесі формування бренду. Аналіз ряду сприйманих характерних особливостей міста заснований на класифікації міських брендів Анхольта, адаптованої для невеликих міст.

Ключові слова: маркетинг, брендинг міста, індивідуалізація місцевості, імідж місцевості, Польща.

Рис. 1. Табл. 1. Літ. 35.

Эва Глинска, Магдалена Флорек

ВОВЛЕЧЕНИЕ СТЕЙКХОЛДЕРОВ В РАЗРАБОТКУ БРЕНДОВ ГОРОДОВ: НА ПРИМЕРЕ ПОДЛЯШСКОГО РЕГИОНА ПОЛЬШИ

В статье представлены результаты процесса идентификации отличительных черт брендов малых городов Польши с точки зрения местных стейкхолдеров. Использован метод фокус-групп в польском регионе Подляшье. Хотя результаты касаются локальных процессов, они могут быть использованы в процессе создания бренда города. Внутреннее убеждение в привлекательности тех или иных сторон данного города, как правило, является отправной точкой для превращения их в преимущества, которые составят бренд города. Систематизирована роль стейкхолдеров в процессе формирования бренда. Анализ ряда воспринимаемых отличительных особенностей города основан на классификации городских брендов Анхольта, адаптированной для небольших городов.

¹ PhD, Bialystok University of Technology, Poland.

² PhD, Poznan University of Economics, Poland.

³ The study is financed from the funds for science in the years 2010-2013 under the research project No. N N115 155939 "Identification of city identity markers and analysis of the degree to which they are used in city image management in Poland".

Ключевые слова: маркетинг, брендинг местности, индивидуализация местности, имидж местности, Польша.

Introduction. At the start of the new millennium, the focus in the debate on place marketing shifted in the direction of place branding (Kavaratzis, 2008). According to Zenker & Martin (2011) in recent years the branding of places (and cities in particular) has gained popularity among city officials, illustrated by the development of city brand rankings such as the Anholt-GMI City Brands Index or the Saffron European City Brand Barometer.

As Merrilees et al. (2013) stated the purpose of city branding is to create a destination brand for tourists or a strong brand for residents (reaffirming their decision to stay in the city) or to attract investments and immigration.

Place branding has become a subject of interest for local authorities and other leaders who started searching for best options of their place development. The evidence of successful implementation of branding to places, coming from particular case studies, raised the interest of this approach to place management. As such, territorial units of different scale focus on building an attractive image and its communication. On the other hand, it requires from local leaders a special engagement in brand building as they have adequate instruments and possibilities – legal, economic or social to make the process successful and the brand credible. Stakeholders involvement is raised in the literature as a determinant of the place branding implementation and is seen as one of the biggest challenges of this process (Hankinson, 2004; Hanna & Rowley, 2011; Houghton, Stevens, 2010; Kavaratzis, 2012, Kemp et al., 2012).

The paper provides therefore an attempt to systematise stakeholders' role in the place branding process and the way a place distinguishing features identified by them may be classified. The analysis of the range of these features is based on the adaptation of Anholt's city brand hexagon (Anholt, 2006) to smaller towns since the literature focus in this context on cities rather than places of smaller scale.

Place brand. Although place branding is a relatively new concept, researchers and practitioners commonly agree that places may be objects of brand development and management, in the same way as consumer goods and services are (Caldwell & Freire, 2004, Kotler et al., 1999; Killingbeck & Trueman, 2002). On the other hand, Kavaratzis & Ashworth (2005) point out that marketing specialists "too easily assume that territories are simply extended products".

According to Hankinson & Cowking (1993), "brand is a product or service distinguished by its positioning against competitors and by its personality containing a unique combination of functional features and symbolic values." Schroeder & Salzer-Morling (2006) believe that brand, acting as a differentiator and as an identifier through the aggregation of symbols and meanings, affects consumers' behaviours and ways of thinking. Place branding aims to create such associations with a place which are of emotional, mental and psychological nature as opposed to functional and rational attributes (which, obviously, do not remain ignored in the brand building process either).

According to Maheshwari et al. (2011), "brand assists in developing an image of a place that is more appealing and exciting, thereby making it a critically important phenomenon". And as Kotler & Gertner (2002) summarized, place branding has

become a necessary requirement due to technological advancement and increased mobility of both people and resources in the twenty-first century. In such circumstances the audience needs a 'shortcut' that a place brand concept offers (Florek et al., 2006). Place branding enables a place to build on all its strengths, and make a meaningful sense out of the complex, multi-dimensional characteristics of a place (Hankinson, 2005). Therefore, according to Kavaratzis (2005), place branding is the "approach to integrating, leading and directing the place management process". More precisely, it is a process of designing, planning and communicating place identity in order to build and manage its image (Anholt, 2007). Simply put, branding is the process of transforming the original (initial, starting) image of a place into its desired target image.

However, according to Dinnie (2004, cited in Kaplan et al., 2010) and Fan (2006, cited in Kaplan et al. (2010)), it should be noted that place branding is a more difficult and complex process as compared to branding of goods and services, due to the fact that this process involves many factors and associations to consider, such as geography, tourists attractions, natural resources, local products, residents characteristics, institutions and infrastructure. Fan (2006) states that place brand differ from goods and services brands with regard to offer, attributes, image, associations, purpose and ownership. Attributes of places are more difficult to define, their image is more complicated and the associations they evoke are more numerous and diverse as opposed to goods and services. The ownership of place brand is unclear due to existence of multiple stakeholders, which leads to a diverse audience. Therefore, it is of great importance to find place's distinguishing features common for many target groups, which would form the basis for building a strong image of a place.

Participatory place branding. An important part of creating an effective branding strategy for a place involves examining the needs of internal stakeholders. They might include local businesses, government and residents. According to Kemp et al. (2012), without buy-in from stakeholders, place branding strategies are likely to fail. Hankinson (2004) described place branding as a set of relationships with stakeholders that spread the core of place brand. As Houghton & Stevens (2010) state stakeholders engagement enriches and deepens the quality of branding discussion, introducing new opinions, ideas, perspectives.

Braun et al. (2013) distinguished 3 types of roles that can be attributed to residents in the development of a place brand: residents as integrated part of place brand, residents as ambassadors for their place brand and residents as citizens. These roles may be complemented by the fourth one, related to participation of residents, in particular a place's socioeconomic leaders in the process of designing place identity unique distinguishing features (Glinska & Florek, 2013; Braun et al., 2010)

Kavaratzis (2012) indicated 3 reasons for increased interest of participation of local stakeholders in place branding. The first is that place branding is a public management activity and such activities need to have support from public for various social and political reasons. Another reason for arguing in favour of increased stakeholders' participation in place branding is the recent turn towards a participatory branding in general (Hatch and Schultz, 2010 cited in: Kavaratzis & Hatch, 2013).

Place branding is not solely a task for the public sector, but rather a collaborative undertaking of a place's key stakeholders. This will necessitate a strong thread of public-private partnership. Local government has worked as a facilitator and catalyst with an understanding that the success depends on the receptiveness of a host community (Vasudevan, 2008). Therefore local people should be involved from the very beginning in place branding, that is building the brand identity. Also Merrilees et al. (2009) confirmed this point of view showing that residents' expectations from a place brand are very different from those of place officials.

Towards place brand identity design. As regards the real influence on maintaining, modifying or creating the desired image, this may be achieved by activities relating to place brand building. Brand strategy shows how to achieve the target image of a place, taking into account its current image as well as internal and external factors. One of the components of this process is the selection of brand identity elements which identify and distinguish the place in question. Identity is a subject to planning and intentional arrangement of activities within a place. Consequently, the image is the reflection of this identity, and thus identity is a certain objective state while image is a subjective state (Florek, 2007).

In this particular place branding context, the literature often points to corporate branding. Similar to corporate identity, place identity is defined as "the sum of its characteristic features and activities which differentiate it from other entities" (Klage, 1991). Place identity is described by Govers & Go (2009) as "full set of unique characteristics and set of meanings that exist in a place and its culture at a given point of time, nevertheless realizing that this identity is subject to change and might include fragmented identities". According to Barke & Harrop (1994), place identity is what the place is actually like. More strategically, Kall (2001) suggests that "the purpose of identity is to define the meaning, intention and reason for the brand".

According to Aaker (1996), there are 3 notions related to brand identity. First, the brand essence, captures brand values and vision in an ambivalent timeless identity statement. Secondly, the core identity that represents the essence of the brand and contains the associations that are most likely to remain constant over time. Last, the extended brand identity fulfils completeness of the brand providing a consistent direction of the brand. Where core elements are timeless, the extended identity contains elements that do not belong to the timeless foundation of brand identity.

The biggest challenge in the branding process is to define the "heart" of a brand identity, that is brand essence, usually based on the distinguished assets, characteristics, or values of a place. They are very much tied to sustainable competitive advantages (Govers & Go, 2009) that have to be based on individual components of each city's identity. As emphasized by Anholt (2002) and Gnoth (2002), competitive advantage should be based on the unique nature of a place's local culture or physical characteristics difficult to be imitated by competitors, e.g. environmental characteristics (such as climate, flora, fauna, landscape) and cultural heritage (physical characteristics of cities, local history, religion or other means of cultural expression such as art, architecture and design) (Govers & Go, 2009). According to Deffner & Metaxas (2005), place identity concerns those distinctive characteristics that historically more or less provide the place with its character. As such, the distinguished place characteristics might be tangible or intangible.

The relation to competitors and the focus on the brand's distinctive attributes provide the basis for taking a unique position in the target groups' awareness. In this context, the aim of this paper is to present the categories of place brand identity distinguishing features identified by local stakeholders in relation external and internal audience of the analysed towns.

Method. The empirical material used in this article constitutes a diagnosis of identity distinguishing features of 9 towns located in Poland, in Podlaskie Province: Grajewo, Hajnowka Kolno, Lapy, Lomza, Siemiatycze, Sokolka, Wysokie Mazowieckie and Zambrow, as viewed by their socioeconomic leaders. All towns are with population over 10,000 and have not yet developed documents related to town brand or promotion strategy. 8 towns can be classified as small towns with the function of local growth centers. Only Lomza, with the population of 60 ths, can be considered a supra-local centre.

Podlaskie Province is located in the north-east of Poland. It borders with Lithuania and Belarus. It is a mainly agricultural region with dynamically developing food sector as well as light industry, timber industry, construction industry and engineering industry.

The authors analyzed the most popular brand and place brand models in order to find one which components might serve as a source of classification of place brand distinguished features that potentially could construct a place brand identity (see more: Glinska & Florek, 2013). According to the results of this analysis, the authors decided that Anholt's approach for city brands can serve best as the relevant starting point. It covers tangible and intangible assets of a place that can be easily recognized and evaluated by town stakeholders. Anholt sees the features as natural communicators of a place and combine them into hexagon that consists of: presence, place, prerequisites, people, pulse and potential (Anholt, 2006). The use of Anholt hexagon in classifying the surveyed towns' identity distinguishing features required a slightly different interpretation of each of the hexagon's dimensions as well as their adjustment to the towns' scale. Therefore: "presence" has been narrowed to the factors which determine a town's role in the locality and the region; "place" relates to town's physical location affecting its climate and thus the inhabitants' satisfaction level; "prerequisites" includes local living standards and infrastructure; "people" covers a set of factors which characterise the town's population; "pulse" refers to "the pulse of urban life" i.e. the town's attributes which make it possible for the inhabitants to meet their passions and actively spend their free time; and "potential" is a category covering the town's economic characteristics as well as local possibilities of meeting educational needs of the inhabitants (Glinska & Florek, 2013).

The research method used in this paper was focus group interviews (FGIs) carried out in the period July 2011 – June 2012. FGIs covered between 7 and 16 local leaders invited according to the lists compiled jointly with the analysed towns' municipality employees responsible for their towns promotion. The respondents represented the towns' different fields of life including culture, education, business, local associations, media, church parishes etc. FGIs' participants were moderated towards identifying their towns' identity distinguishing features which seem most attractive from the marketing point of view and could potentially be used by local authorities in town image management. Their task was to identify the features as might be seen

from the tourists, residents and investors' perspective. The interviews were recorded and their transcripts were analyzed using the methods typical for empirical material collected with the use of qualitative data collection techniques. During the interviews, projection techniques were used to obtain the synergy effect typical for discussions with groups of respondents.

Results. The research results revealed different focus on the towns' distinguished features depends on the potential targets groups as well as the dimensions of hexagon. Table 1 presents the number of features (the key distinguished features) mentioned during the FGIs in relation to residents, tourists and investors. It also contains examples of them according to particular dimension of hexagon.

The key features could be next classified according to the number of features mentioned in relation to each target group in relation to hexagon dimensions (Figure 1). The respondents (local stakeholders) clearly differentiate their towns' distinguishing features, depending on the target group. As such they do understand that for different groups different distinguishing features may be more adequate or attractive.

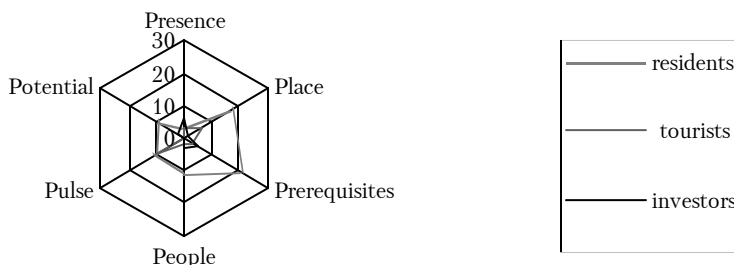


Figure 1. Number of distinguished features of towns according to hexagon dimensions and target groups – a summary (authoring)

As could be seen on Figure 1, most distinguishing features were mentioned in the context of residents, and much less in relation to external target groups. In conclusion, according to the local leaders, the features of the examined places do not seem very attractive externally (in some categories, no features were indicated at all).

The local leaders had no problems with indicating their towns' distinguishing features significant for local residents. Most features were mentioned in the category "Prerequisites" which groups typical functional features important for comfortable living in the town. Quite a large group of features, indicated as the town's distinguishing features that can potentially be used in the town's own brand building, was found in the category "Place". The lowest number of features was mentioned in the category "Presence". As concerns the town's distinguishing features significant from the point of view of local brand building among tourists, most of them were indicated in the category "Pulse" (which, in the context of tourism, is an important element of brand awareness) and in the category "Place". The category "People", important for tourism but also for investors (human capital), was evaluated poorly – residents of the examined places were evaluated as a resource that is insignificant. As concerns the town's distinguishing features significant from the point of view of local brand building among investors, most of them were indicated in the categories "Presence" and "Prerequisites" which relate to local facilities developed with the aim of attracting investors.

Table 1. Key features of towns which should be used in the process of place branding in relation to residents, tourists and investors – local stakeholder's perspective (authoring)

Hexagon dimension	Key features of towns which should be used in process of place branding in relation to		
	residents	tourists	investors
Presence	3 features (high-quality cultural institutions, numerous non-governmental organisations in the field of culture, local services)	3 features (location along main transit roads, easy transport accessibility, proximity to the country's border)	6 features (for example: successful large companies renowned in the country and abroad; proximity to the country's border; location along main transit roads)
Place	17 features (for example: small town, safety, clean air, varied nature and landscape, peace, rich history, beauty and tidiness, closeness to nature, quietness, multiculturalism)	6 features (quietness and peacefulness, multiculturalism, safety, interesting historical heritage, clean air)	1 feature (the town's pro-investment climate)
Prerequisites	21 features (for example: well-developed technical infrastructure, social facilities, shopping facilities, transport infrastructure; access to medical services, preschools; relatively lower costs of living)	3 features (sports and recreation offers; accommodation facilities; availability of catering facilities)	5 features (well-developed technical infrastructure; presence of an industrial zone in the town; availability of land for investment projects; privileges and incentives for investors; high-quality service to investors at the municipal office)
People	11 features (for example: inhabitants' respect for tradition and history; friendly, open-minded people; hardworking people; friendly local authorities; social participation and inclusion; awareness of local identity)	2 features (hospitality of the residents; friendliness and openness of the residents)	3 features (availability of workforce; hard-working local community; high degree of entrepreneurship of the residents)
Pulse	10 features (for example: positive atmosphere of the town; events which integrate various social groups; varied cultural offer; proximity of churches; variety of sporting and recreation activities)	10 features (for example: richness of nature; proximity of water reservoirs; historical heritage; tourist routes and trails; cultural events; unique folklore; interesting local dialect; presence of religious places; local cuisine)	No features
Potential	9 features (for example: intellectual potential of young people; high level of education)	No features	2 features (well-developed vocational training system; presence of state vocational colleges in the town)

Conclusions. The involvement of the town's socioeconomic leaders in the process of building the local brand may bring numerous benefits. Their participation in the process has made it possible to adopt a multidimensional approach to the

towns' strong points which can become a basis for building positive distinctiveness from other towns. It should be noted that the participants of the study placed great emphasis on finding such distinctive features of their towns, which would make it possible to build emotional associations with the place. This is of great importance as in the process of town brand building, particular attention is paid to attributes which are unique and difficult to copy by other competitive towns. The research results revealed that local authorities are more and more aware of their role in shaping the image of the place they represent as well as the importance of the place branding in general. It is an interesting conclusion also from the social point of view. The personality of a leader can significantly support the process and success of place branding. Persons characterised by dynamic involvement, talents and motivated behaviour are a driving force for the activity of all partners in local self-government units. With strongly involved leader/leaders the cooperation is easier, the decision-making process is faster and the level of conflict is lower. With all those factors in play, the expected effects of branding measures are likely to become a reality.

The adaptation of the Anholt's hexagon seemed to be adequate approach to classify potential features of small town brand identity. The usually wide range of these features makes it difficult to classify and optimize the right set at the final stage. The comparison of different views of possible distinguishing characteristics (depended on potential target groups and) also helps town managers define place brand identity more properly.

References:

- Aaker, D.* (1996). *Building Strong Brands*, The Free Press, New York.
- Anholt, S.* (2002). Foreword, *Brand Management (Special Issue: Nation Branding)*, 9(4–5): 229–239.
- Anholt, S.* (2006). The Anholt-GMI City Brand Index, How the World sees the World's Best cities. *Place Branding*, 2(1): 18–31.
- Anholt, S.* (2007). *Competitive Identity. The New Brand Management for Nations, Cities and Regions*, Palgrave Macmillan, New York.
- Braun, E., Kavaratzis, M., Zenker, S.* (2013). My City – My Brand. The Different Roles of Residents in Place Branding. *Journal of Place Management and Development*, 6(1): 18–28.
- Caldwell, N., Freire, J. R.* (2004). The Difference between Branding a Country, a Region and a City: Applying the Brand Box Model. *Journal of Brand Management*, 12(1): 50–61.
- Dinnie, K.* (2004). Place branding: overview of an emerging literature. *Place Branding*, 1(1): 106–110.
- Deffner, A., Metaxas, T.* (2005). Shaping the vision, the identity and the cultural image of European places, 45th Congress of the European Regional Science Association, 23–27 August 2005, Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam.
- Fan, Y.* (2006). Branding the nation: what is being branded. *Journal of Vacation Marketing*, 12(1): 5–14.
- Glinska, E., Florek, M.* (2013). In searching for town brand distinguishing features – local leaders' inner perspective, *International Journal of Academic Research*, 5(4): 180–185.
- Gnoth, J.* (2002). Leveraging Export Brands Through a Tourism Destination Brand. *Brand Management (Special Issue: Nation Branding)*, 9(4–5): 262–280.
- Govers, R., Go, F.* (2009). *Place Branding. Global, Virtual and Physical Identities, Constructed, Imagined and Experienced*, Palgrave Macmillan, NY.
- Grabow, B., Henckel, D., Hollbach-Gromig, B.* (1995). *Weiche Standortfaktoren (Soft Location Factors)*, Kohlhammer/Deutscher Gemeindeverlag, Berlin.
- Hankinson, G.* (2004). Relational network brands: towards a conceptual model of place brands. *Journal of Vacation Marketing*, 23(1/2): 59–73.
- Hankinson, G., Cowking P.* (1993). *Branding in Action*, McGraw-Hill, London, UK.

- Kall, J.* (2001). Silna marka. Istota i kreowanie, Polskie Wydawnictwo Ekonomiczne, Warszawa.
- Hanna, S., Rowley, J.* (2011). Towards a Strategic Place Brand Management Model. *Journal of Marketing Management*, 27(5/6): 458–476.
- Houghton, J.P., Stevens, A.* (2010). City Branding and Stakeholder Engagement. In: K. Dinnie (ed). *City Branding: Theory and Cases*, pp. 45–53, Plagrave-McMillan, Basingstoke, England.
- Kaplan, M. D., Yurt, O., Guneri, B., Kurtulus, K.* (2010). Branding places: applying brand personality concepts to cities. *European Journal of Marketing*, 44(9/10): 1286–1304.
- Kavaratzis, M.* (2012). From "necessary evil" to necessity: stakeholders' involvement in place branding. *Journal of Place Management and Development*, 5(1): 7–19.
- Kavaratzis, M.* (2005). Branding: A Review of Trends and Conceptual Models. *The Marketing Review*, 5: 329–342.
- Kavaratzis, M.* (2008). From City Marketing to City Branding: An Interdisciplinary Analysis with Reference to Amsterdam, Budapest and Athens, PhD Thesis, University of Groningen, The Netherlands.
- Kavaratzis, M., Hatch, M. J.* (2013). The dynamics of place brands: An identity-based approach to place branding theory. *Marketing Theory*, 13(1): 69–86.
- Florek, M.* (2007). Podstawy marketingu terytorialnego, Wydawnictwo Akademii Ekonomicznej w Poznaniu, Poznan.
- Kemp, E., Childers, C. Y., Williams, K. H.* (2012). Place branding: creating self-brand connections and brand advocacy. *Journal of Product & Brand Management*, 21(7): 508–515.
- Killingbeck, A. J., Trueman, M. M.* (2002). Redrawing the Perceptual Map of a City, Working Paper No. 02/08, Bradford University School of Management, Bradford.
- Klage, J. P.* (1991). Corporate identity im Kreditwesen, Deutscher Universitat Verlag, Wiesbaden.
- Kotler, P., Asplund, C., Rein, I., Heider, D.* (1999). *Marketing Places Europe: Attracting Investments, Industries, Residents and visitors to European Cities, Communities, Regions and Nations*, Person Education, London.
- Kotler, P., Gertner, D.* (2002). Country as brand, product, and beyond: A place marketing and brand management perspective. *Journal of Brand Management*, 9(4–5): 249–262.
- Kotler, P., Haider, D., Rein, I.* (1993). *Marketing Places Attracting Investment, Industry, and Tourism to Cities, States and Nations*, The Free Press/Macmillan, New York.
- Merrilees, B., Miller, D., Herington, C.* (2009). Antecedents of residents' city brand attitudes. *Journal of Business Research*, 62(3): 362–367.
- Merrilees, B., Miller, D., Herington, C.* (2013). City branding: A facilitating framework for stressed satellite cities. *Journal of Business Research*, 66: 37–44.
- Schroeder, J., Salzer-Morling, M.* (Eds.). *Brand culture*. Routledge, London and New York.
- Vasudevan, S.* (2008). The role of internal stakeholders in destination branding: Observations from Kerala Tourism. *Place Branding and Public Diplomacy*, 4(4): 331–335.
- Zenker, S, Martin, N.* (2011). Measuring success in place marketing and branding. *Place Branding and Public Diplomacy*, 7(1): 32–41.

Стаття надійшла до редакції 16.07.2013.