

ABSTRACT

Title: Brand Management of Functional Urban Areas

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This dissertation addresses the issue of brand management in Functional Urban Areas (FUAs), combining the theoretical perspective of territorial marketing and place branding with the practical realities of how these complex territorial structures operate.

Contemporary approaches to place branding increasingly emphasise the importance of involving stakeholders in the co-creation of brand identity, particularly through the development of identity, image and coherent communication. At the same time, urban sprawl and the fragmentation of settlement systems have led to the emergence of the concept of polycentric development, aimed at reducing excessive concentration in regional centres and making better use of the potential of smaller localities. As a result, FUAs have evolved – spatial systems comprising a core city and surrounding municipalities linked by social and economic relations. The complexity of their structure and the multiplicity of actors involved make brand management of FUAs' fundamentally different from that of traditional territorial units.

The main objective of the dissertation was to develop a model for managing the brand of a FUA. A thesis was put forward that the specific nature of functional urban areas redefines their brand management, going beyond classic city brand management models.

Due to the exploratory nature of the research, exclusively qualitative methods were employed, while the reliability of the results was ensured through the use of two distinct methodological approaches. In order to achieve the objectives of the study, the following methods were applied: literature review and critical analysis, bibliometric analysis, the flexible pattern matching method, an extended case study (including document content analysis and in-depth interviews with representatives of Integrated Territorial Investment office of voivodeship FUAs), thematic analysis, logical analysis and construction, and the Delphi method, supported by consensus analysis and the assessment of inter-expert agreement.

The research results confirmed both hypotheses. Key barriers and supporting factors in the FUA branding process were identified and grouped into five categories: financial, socio-organisational, political, communicative and internal. The resulting conceptual model of FUA brand management – evaluated using the Delphi method – integrates components typical of

place branding with elements specific to FUAs, such as the FUA brand management group, brand partnerships, and local governments acting as brand ambassadors.

The practical implications of the study concern the potential use of the proposed model by FUA management teams as a tool for diagnosing and improving branding activities. The model can support local authorities and institutions within FUAs in developing coherent communication strategies, reducing internal conflicts, and creating an integrated brand narrative encompassing both the core city and its surrounding municipalities.

KEY WORDS: place branding; place brand management; place branding model; functional urban area; FUA