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## CITY BRANDING AS A TOOL OF THE LOCAL DEVELOPMENT (CASE STUDY OF KOŠICE, SLOVAKIA)

**SUMMARY:** The increasing competition of the cities caused implementation of the marketing principles in the local development strategies. The very important segment of the territorial marketing is the place branding. This term could refer to a country, region, tourist destination or a city. The city branding is based on strategic approach to public relation, stating that a change of image is an ongoing, holistic, interactive and wide-scale process (Avraham, Ketter 2008, Hospers 2004).

The paper will focus on the implementation of the place branding principles in the local development (Case Study of City of Košice). Košice, the second largest city in Slovakia (234 000 inhabitants), is the centre of the eastern Slovakia. The city of Košice has the ambition to be an example of successful transformation of post-socialist industrial city, to the city open for citizens and visitors, providing the best conditions for creativity in all areas (Interface 2013). Košice has been successful in the competition for the title of European Capital of Culture 2013.

*Key words:* city branding, case study, actual place branding of Košice, ECOC

Map 1: Košice location



## 1. NATIONAL LEGISLATIVE FRAMEWORK

Transformation processes after 1989 associated with the transition to the market economy in Slovakia and the quest for integration into the European Union, has raised the urgent need to change the existing, or create new legislative and institutional rules of society functioning. The need for complex system of regional development support at all the scale levels had led to the formation of still absenting legal regulation in 2001.

The new law imposes to cities and towns the necessity of elaboration, approval and periodic evaluation of the development strategy of their territory (The Economic and Social Development Program PHSR). This document is a supplement to land-planning documents and should be consistent with them. The legislation in force does not determine the need of using marketing tools in the process of regional development and therefore a marketing plan of a municipality is considered a soft Planning Document.

## 2. GENERAL CHARACTERISTICS OF THE CITY

Slovakia is currently considered as a new leader in automotive industry. With the production of 105,7 vehicles per 1000 inhabitants has often been marked as a “new Detroit”. This adjective is more or less specific for the western part of the country.

Košice, the second largest city in Slovakia (234 000 inhabitants), is the centre of the eastern Slovakia, and with the third largest Slovak city Prešov (91 000 inhabitants), form the second major centre of population in Slovakia. The area of the city lies in the Košice basin on the both sides of the Hornad River and is surrounded by the Slovenske Rudohorie on the north. Accessibility of the city is favorable by train and by air (international airport in Kosice). Road transport still lacks the direct connection to European motorway network, but the assumptions for its completion is the question of the near future, by the express road R4 to Budapest, and also by constructing the motorway D1 via Prešov and Žilina to Bratislava, the capital city of Slovakia.

## 3. CITY BRANDING – HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Already in the Middle Ages Kosice became important economic, cultural and social center. The first written record is from 1230 and in 1290 it acquired the status of the city. In the 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> century the city flourished in trade and crafts (with wine, metals, furs and other goods). Kosice was a residence of Hungarian authorities, economic and cultural institutions. In 1369 as the first European city it obtained Escutcheon list signed by the king and in 1657 The Jesuit University (University of Kosice – later the Royal Academy with the printing office) was established there.

The 19<sup>th</sup> century accounted for Kosice the period of prosperity and raise of their significance. Increasing economic importance brought the formation of manufactories and their subsequent transformation to the factories. Since the mid 19<sup>th</sup> century as a result of the processes of industrialization, Kosice (also known as Kassa) has become the most developed city in Hungary. In 1857 the “First Upper-Hungary Industrial Exhibition” (Balassa Z., 2007) was organized in Kosice, and it was visited by Emperor Franz Joseph I. This activity is a strong demonstration of an active approach of the city to the promotion of its potential for industrial development.

During the inter-war period, the importance of the city has grown and its

territory has become an important industrial base as well as the administrative center of surrounding region. It was also supported by the improvement of transport connection with the capital city by means of passenger airline operated by Czechoslovak Airlines Prague – Bratislava – Kosice in 1924 (Airport Kosice, 2009). In those times the first idea of holding cross-country race on 42 km long track has originated there – so called International Peace Marathon. The fact that the tradition of holding the Kosice Marathon maintained up till present, makes it the oldest marathon in Europe, and the second oldest in the world (after the Boston marathon) (koscimarathon.com). About four years later (1928) the foundations of further sporting traditions in Kosice, cycling race Kosice – Tatry – Kosice, has been laid (Cycling club friends Slovan Safety Kosice, 2009). For the visualization of the town of Kosice as a cultural center, the year 1927 was important, when the Czechoslovak Radio founded its studio in Košice and started regular broadcasting of dramatic sessions, initially for young people. The Mass from the Cathedral of st. Elisabeth was broadcasted for the first time in Slovakia, what can be considered as the beginning of religious broadcasting in Slovakia. Since 1929 the radio orchestra started to play in Košice (Draxler V. 2006). This period was also significant for Kosice because of discovery of so-called Golden treasure of Košice (1935), it was the finding of old golden coins belonging to the largest of its kind in the world. Today it is one of the most popular exhibits of the local East Slovakian Museum (East Slovakian Museum Kosice, 2009). The cultural profile of the city was fulfilled by establishment of the first technical university in Slovakia (1937- Technological university of M. R. Stefanik), which has continued in neighboring Prešov, later in Martin until it finally ended up in Bratislava (Pik, Jaša, 1937). The main objective of the inter-war strategy of the city was to create a strong regional cultural center of its relevance counterbalancing the effect of eccentrically located Bratislava (Pik, Jaša, 1937).

The period after the Vienna arbitration at the end of 1938 meant the cessation of development of Kosice, with the consecutive decrease of their significance, decline of population, increase of inflation and unemployment.

The turning-point of pro-development trend was in January 1945, when it (until the liberation of Prague) became the capital of Czechoslovakia for short period of time. During the period of extensive socialist industrialization occurring in the Central European states after 1945, the city shaped itself into the metropolis of Eastern Slovakia. The postwar boom was caused primarily by metallurgical industry, having a very deep tradition of compacting the iron ores in the vicinity of the city, within a period ranging up to 600 BC (U.S. Steel Kosice, 2003). The significant milestone regarding the importance and the size of Kosice, however, was the year 1959, when the biggest Slovak metallurgical combine was founded in Kosice, known as Vychodoslovenske zelezarne, (its construction lasted for 6 years). The political decision on the location of the factory to the backward areas of Eastern Slovakia (at that time engineering and mining of magnesite was developed there), significantly affected Kosice in many fields. The dominance of the cultural attribute as the main characteristic of the inter-war image of the city, was replaced by another characterization – major national, or transnational, industrial center. As a result of migration of workers from all over Czechoslovakia the population of the city has increased for more than quadruple in the next 30 years. The increase of the number of new residents affected not only the ethnic structure, but it was an important impetus for the wide residential construction, development of services, education, science and research. In the period between the end of the 40s and during the 50s of the last century, 3 universities were established in Kosice and the city became one of the major center of Slovak academic education. East Slovakian Gallery, The State Scientific

Library, Technical Museum and several other cultural institutions were founded in Kosice. The importance of the city and its surrounding was supported also by the opening of a new airport in Barca in 1953 (now the second largest airport in Slovakia) and relocation of military aviation school to Kosice (1959). Transport accessibility of the city had been enhanced by construction of the 88 km long broad railway from Užhorod to Haniska near Kosice. Impetus for its construction was the need to transport iron ore from Ukraine. The 60s of the 20<sup>th</sup> century reinforced the importance of Kosice at the clerical-administrative level, when it became the official center of the Eastern Slovak region (one of the three territorial units in Slovakia). The cultural importance of the city was highlighted by the establishment of a studio of Slovak Television in Košice in 1962, which contributes to the national public television broadcasting up to these days.

In the 70s and 80s of the last century a typical construction of socialism period – visually boring, with the dominance of buildings serving for office and administrative purposes – took place in Košice. Nowadays it represents the large residential areas of the city. From the perspective of preservation of the historically most valuable urban part of the city, it was very important to declare the town center as a historical town reserve (1981), which is now the largest in Slovakia. Since the 70s the popular music and entertainment program for children called The Golden Gate (1974) was created in studios of the STV Kosice, having high ratings and it significantly influenced the image of the city as a center of culture in the former Czechoslovakia.

The last major historical milestone, reaching all areas of city life, was the year 1989. The transition to the market economy and open borders to Western Europe have brought enormous development opportunities but also challenges to tackle with new issues and facing new problems. The most important “driver” of urban economies, Kosice Iron Company, managed to cope with new situation at the beginning. In the first decade of the factory operation after privatization, it has undergone a period of various property-law relationships, which resulted in the mismanagement and almost led up to the bankruptcy. The only rescue of the company as well as city and regional economics was the sale of a part of metallurgical complex to American steel company The United Steel Corporation (end of the year 2000) (HNonline.sk, 2008).

Despite the changes in the territorial-administrative division of Slovakia, Kosice retained its position as an administrative center although originally the territory of the East region has been divided into smaller territorial units, Kosice has become the center of the new smaller Košice region.

After the division of the federal state of Czecho-Slovakia in 1993 into two separate states of Czech Republic and Slovak Republic, Kosice has received an additional function as the central seat of the Constitutional Court of the Slovak Republic. Later, the importance of the city was strengthened also in the field of ecclesiastical territorial hierarchy, when during his visit of the city (1995), Pope John Paul II. has promoted the status of Kosice diocese into the Roman Catholic Archdiocese.

The largest investment in the 90s of the last century has been associated with a person of then Mayor of Kosice Rudolf Schuster (later president of Slovakia), who initiated and subsequently launched a complex reconstruction of the historical town reserve. After its completion, the center of the city has become its “showcase” and the most attractive part in terms of tourism. Despite the indisputable benefits, the investment is often regarded as controversial due to the timing of its range. The city budget was overloaded so much that the city found itself on the edge of forced governance and it tries to cope with the debts up to presence.

Recent development of Košice, shows the weakening of its position in

comparison to dynamically developing Bratislava in the context of Slovakia. It is proved by the indicator of the share in the economic aggregate of Slovakia which fell in 1997-2006 from 8.75% to 7.78% (Korec 2009). The reason of lower economic success of Kosice is caused by less favorable macro-location attractiveness, i.e. greater distance from the core economic areas in Western Europe and worse access, due to lack of connections to European motorway network. The specific problems are related to the marginal groups who are threatened by social exclusion (especially the Romany population in the ghetto Lunik IX) having a negative impact on the image of the city.

#### 4. ACTUAL PLACE BRANDING OF KOSICE

The current development strategy of Kosice defined for the period 2008-2015 sets out four priorities for future development:

1. Kosice – the city of culture
  - creating of an international center of culture and cultural-cognitive tourism
2. Kosice – the city of family
  - creating an attractive place of living mostly for young and educated people, but also for groups of people dependent on social assistance and social services
3. Kosice – the healthy city
  - creating of urban environment respecting the requirements for healthy environment
4. Kosice – the city of innovations
  - creating of pro-innovative environment attractive for implementation of new investments with high added value (The Economic and Social Development Program PHSR, 2008)

The necessity of working out a marketing strategy of the city, not the complex one, but only in relation to the development of urban tourism is explicitly mentioned in the strategic planning document The Economic and Social Development Program PHSR for the period 2004-2020 (10-15 years) that has been adopted by the city in September 2004 (PHSR, 2004).

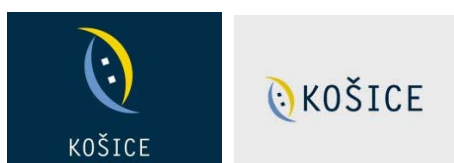
In 2006 the organizational structure of the Magistrate of Kosice was completed by a new department of Marketing and communication, with the aim to assist the market orientation and build a favorable image of the city in Slovakia and abroad, and to promote the city as a place suitable for business and tourism (Némethová R., 2006).

Perhaps the greatest opportunity to change the image and the development of the city followed by subsequent increase of incoming tourists, is according to the city representatives provided by the actual project of European Capital of Culture 2013 (ECOC), which is the largest cultural project in the history of Slovakia. Regarding the realization of the project it is counted with the investments of 83 millions Euro and better promotion of Košice as well as whole Slovakia. The majority of financial resources will be used for improvement and completion of cultural infrastructure of the city. The program of the project is built on the idea of Kosice as an interface resulting from the position of the city on the crossroads between Western European and Eastern European cultures. The major emphasis is put on the long term sustainability of implemented projects. The preparation of the project was very beneficial for the city, too.

The first activities started in late 2006, when the Kosice city council approved

the participation of city Kosice in the competition for the title of European Capital of Culture 2013, which has been announced by the European Parliament and the Council of the European Union since 1985. It led to the mobilization of human creative potential and launched new activities towards the city branding. A complex marketing strategy of the culture development in the city was worked out. One year later (2007) the municipality of Kosice introduced a new logo symbolizing the lentil shape of the historical center with its two architectural landmarks – the gothic Dome of st. Elisabeth and the State Theater. Along with the logo, a new slogan was disclosed: *Kosice – a city that knows it*. Creating symbols, however, did not reflect the nature of the approved city development strategy (see below). Logo can be seen as a symbol of historical town reserve and the slogan is rather a riddle than an expression of reference in relation to the target segments. It is therefore questionable to what extent they will be regarded as communication tools facilitating the transfer of information about the future development of the city in relation to the target segments that are supposed to be addressed by Košice.

Figure 1: The logo of the city Košice



source: [www.kosice.sk](http://www.kosice.sk)

Considering the aforesaid, the original slogan created few years ago “*We’re only number two and therefore we give you the best: we want to become number one*” appears to be more accurate in relation to the intended message. Moreover, the effort of Košice to move closer to the position of Bratislava is still very actual. Another significant potential is sheltered under the project of closer cooperation with its neighbor town, only 40 km distant city of Prešov, by creating a kind of bipolar town in Eastern Slovakia. However, despite several attempts (e.g. Explicit Project – Conurbation Košice/Prešov), it faces an invincible barrier of mutual rivalry and strong local-patriotism of both cities. The actual chance to change the attitudes of local authorities is outlined in the implementation of the project ECOC, due to the fact that the victory of Košice in the competition was conditioned by its cooperation with neighboring Prešov.

The content of the project ECOC follows the traditional cultural events. The most important event is one-week lasting *City celebrations* in May; its 15 years old tradition is associated with about 70 different cultural-entertainment events in honor of the first Coats of arms granted to the city 640 years ago. It also includes international music festival organized by *the State Philharmonic Orchestra Kosice (ŠfK)*, known as the *Kosice Spring Music Festival*, one of the oldest music festivals in Slovakia (regularly organized since 1956). The festival is enriched by annual performances brought by the *State Opera Theater in Kosice*. Until 1991, the *International Organ Festival of Ivan Sokol* used to be a part of the City celebrations, but after 20 years it shifted to the beginning of concert season Šfk in September. Nowadays, the attendance of Šfk is more than 25 000 visitors a year (ŠfK, 2008).

An important cultural event is an international competition of urban and local

television *Golden Beggar*, which is the oldest and also the first festival of its kind in Central Europe. The competitive show of quality local television programs is completed by series of workshops, lectures, presentations, roundtables and forums. There are about 60-70 movies selected for the final showing. In June 2008, 138 representatives from 24 countries (including USA and Australia) attended this festival. The *Festival of sacral arts* in music, singing, art and recitals has 20 years old tradition. The event contributes to the development of understanding, tolerance and religious tolerance (SeeAndLive.com, 2009).

More than 100 years old State Theater building is a dignified representative of deep traditions of stage-craft in Kosice. It is not only a part of cultural infrastructure, but also one of the landmarks in the historical city center. Its branches like ballet, opera and drama annually attract more than 100 000 visitors (State Theater Kosice, 2008). In Kosice there is also an exhibition of the history of technology and sciences situated in the specialized Slovak Technical Museum (annual attendance of around 30 000 visitors – 2008 (STM, 2008). Kosice ZOO, as the third largest ZOO in Europe, with the area of 292 ha, is very popular although only about one third of it is available for animals and visitors (Malesova, E., 2009). The ZOO with over 150 species of animals is annually visited by more than 170 000 visitors (mojmilackovia.sk, 2009).

One of the last major investments was the completion (2006) of the reconstruction of original ice stadium of Ladislav Trojak (it started to serve for the public in 1868 as an open artificial ice skate rink, and was covered 100 years later in 1964). Current *Steel Arena* is the most modern multifunctional and unique stadium in Slovakia. In addition to traditional historical dominants (gothic cathedral of St. Elisabeth and building of State Theater) it has become a dominant architectural unit of modern Kosice, having the capacity of 8347 seats and 40 VIP lounges (Steel Arena, 2009). During three years of its operation in this new form there have performed a series of sporting, cultural and entertainment events (concerts: Deep Purple, Bryan Adams, Chris Norman, the Russian State Ballet performances or even the largest ice revue in the world Holiday on Ice: Peter Pan, and a number of others). One of the most important sporting events which will take place in Steel Arena in Kosice (and in Bratislava), is 75<sup>th</sup> World Ice Hockey Championship in 2011, hosted by Slovakia. Along with cultural project ECOC 2013, they represent the most important events in relation to the promotion of the city and the country as well.

Among a range of other sporting events there is the *International Peace Marathon* a strong symbol of the city. Since the first run in 1924, which was attended by 8 runners, the number of participants has raised to more than 5 000 from nearly 40 countries all around the world, making it one of the most famous sporting events in the country and attracting the attention of thousands spectators. The ratings of the last 86<sup>th</sup> year, broadcasted by the Slovak television, exceeded the number of spectators of F1 Grand Prix Singapore and got close to the ratings of a football match of Premier League between FC Liverpool and FC Chelsea, broadcasted on the same day (koscemaraton.com, 2009).

Specific problem in branding of Kosice relates to the marginalized groups who are threatened by the social exclusion, particularly the Romany population. There is the biggest Romany ghetto in the Slovak Republic, known as Lunik IX, on the southwest edge of the town (6-7 thousand Romanies). Frequent conflicts, crime, drug addiction, poverty, diseases, usury and environmental threats in this part of town

regularly attract the undesirable attention of commercial media. From the perspective of branding, the excessive publicity of subjectively interpreted and selected negative news raises social tensions and creates the distorted image of the entire city. Therefore the city approved *Action plan for integrated development of the Romany community in Lunik IX* in 2004. It is a long-term planning document (until 2015) setting objectives, priorities and concrete measures to solve the existing, long-term problems on the territory of ghetto (Gamocová, M., Kravčík, M., 2004). The city expects some improvements also with the implementation of upcoming project ECOC 2013 (project: Romanies – culture and art as a means of communication and social work, reflections of the specifics, intercultural dialogue) (Interface 2013).

The city also promotes investment opportunities (Kosice – the perfect place for your investments) very actively. The most important arguments for attracting the investments are: flat tax of 19%, relatively cheap labor and the adoption of euro (1.1.2009). The current economic base is composed of (except steel) more than 20 thousand business units (including merchants) that provide more than 9% of the production of national GDP. Throughout the city there are more than 600 companies with foreign capital participation (UHA, 2009). One of the strategic areas of the city is the development of information technology sector, which has become one of the elements of the city branding. The association of legal persons so called *IT Valley Kosice* was formed in January 2007 in order to support this industry in eastern Slovakia with a center in Košice. The members are IT companies and universities operating in the region as well as the organizations of local and regional government. IT companies that are members of the association create about 90 percent of jobs in the field of IT and Communication in Košice and its surroundings.

## 5. CONCLUSION

The city of Kosice has the ambition to be an example of successful transformation of post-socialist industrial city, to the city open for citizens and visitors, providing the best conditions for creativity in all areas (Interface 2013). The activities and results that have been achieved in the last 20 years since the fall of the so-called “Iron Curtain” recorded a positive reaction in the prestigious foreign media, not in a form of paid advertising, but rather an objective report. For example, in 2008 the New York Times (Korzar, 2008) or in 2009 in Corriere della Sera, Kosice was labeled as “one of the most promising cities of the future” along with cities such as Pittsburg, Vladivostok or Chinese Tianjin. Kosice was marked as “glocal”, regarding their specific identity, which can be used as the basis for its future development. (Speroni, AM 2009). Despite these encouraging evaluations, the America Times newspaper points at the difficult objectives the city of Kosice will be facing: to overcome the image of „provincial city“, which is permanently caused by insufficient quality of services and poor knowledge of foreign languages, still present as a result of its communist past.

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