

Abstract for the general public

The development of the Internet and digital technologies has been included in the place branding domain and made an impact on the place branding and management process. Over the last years, the growing role of digital technologies, such as social media, user-generated content, IoT, web 2.0 or web 3.0 have enabled the city authorities to find new ways toward more open and inclusive management of place brands, where the Internet is giving stakeholders equal opportunities to share and voice their opinions.

Despite the importance attributed in the literature to stakeholder participation or significance of digital technologies in promoting the place image, there is a gap in research concerning the implementation of digital technologies in the strategic city brand management process. Thus, the purpose of the study is to analyze the role of digital technologies in enhancing stakeholder participation in the city brand management. The success of place brand management significantly depends on the city's planning group capacity to coordinate, cooperate and interact with stakeholders. Furthermore stakeholders have different attitudes toward a place brand, what later influences their intentions to participate in the place branding practices. In light of this, there is a need to examine the views of both sides (local authorities and place brand stakeholders) in more detail.

By conceptualising place branding as a public policy and a governance process, the proposed research will be the **first, interdisciplinary, detailed study** to identify prerequisites and consequences of stakeholders' (citizens) digital participation.

The proposed project has a twofold character: exploratory and empirical. Therefore, two types of research objectives have been adopted:

- The **exploratory** goal is to develop a theoretical concept of stakeholders digital participation in the city brand management process.
- The **empirical** purpose is to provide a comparative analysis of two geographically different cities and give the suggestions to local authorities to improve the relations with internal stakeholders and increase the active participation of stakeholders in city brand management practices.

The planned research process will be divided into the following stages:

I. Designing of research tools (quantitative research questionnaire).

II. Conducting pilot research

III. Analysis of pilot results and correction of the questionnaire.

IV. Since the literature itself recognizes the importance of the local community as the basic stakeholder group of places branding, the random sampling technique will be applied to citizens over 18 from the cities of Poznań (Poland) and Kutaisi (Georgia). Through CAWI (Internet interviews), quantitative research will be conducted among 500 citizens of Poznań (Poland) and 500 citizens of Kutaisi (Georgia).

V. The analysis of data from CAWI interviews

VI. The theoretical concept of stakeholders' online participation in the city brand management process will be developed.

The research is characterized by **an innovative approach to sample selection**, which is based on examples of two countries – Georgian and Polish cities. Thus, it enables the comparison of two country contexts with the background of the developed and emerging economy. Furthermore, in the place branding research domain, comparative studies in multiple locations are generally less frequent, which leads to criticisms of the research being too shallow, descriptive and geographically limited to European territories (Lucarelli and Berg, 2011). Moreover, this study will be **the first comparative analysis** between European and non-European cities with the differences in terms of economic, socio-political issues, resources, governance type and usage of ICT.