




THE TRIADIC NEXUS: UNDERSTANDING THE INTERPLAY AND SEMANTIC BOUNDARIES BETWEEN PLACE IDENTITY, PLACE IMAGE, AND PLACE REPUTATION

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Abstract

This study seeks to explore the nature of the interconnections and semantic boundaries between place identity, place image and place reputation. The examination of the relationships between these concepts was based on a meta-synthesis of 153 predominantly empirical studies, most of which examined these concepts individually. The research revealed that the delineation of place identity, place image and place reputation varies considerably depending on the perspective chosen by the authors, which can lead to confusion in the study and especially in the interpretation of the results. In this study, place image is considered as a subjective reflection of an objectively defined identity. In other words, image is the perception of identity, its reflection in the individual's consciousness, encompassing both cognitive and evaluative dimensions. Place identity is understood as a set of elements and attributes that characterise and differentiate a given territory from others. Place reputation represents the highest level of generalisation of territorial perception. It is "formed" as a consensual evaluation by external audiences into a collectively accepted dichotomous assessment: "good" or "bad" reputation. The common and differentiating attributes are compared in a summary table. The study provides a basic theoretical framework of the concepts of place identity, image and reputation applicable to place branding and place marketing and management strategies aimed at enhancing the attractiveness of a place to potential target segments.

Key words

Place identity, place image, place reputation, place branding, perception.

INTRODUCTION

The identity, image, and reputation of a place (cities, regions, countries, or other administrative units) represent three closely interconnected concepts. They are intrinsic components of place branding. A systematic and purposeful approach



to place branding typically enhances the attractiveness of a place for residents, tourists, and investors, and has a positive impact on its overall development and quality of life.

Unlike corporate branding, place branding relies on the cooperation of numerous stakeholders, including representatives of governments and local and regional authorities, the business sector, and various other unspecified stakeholders, and last but not least local residents. The extent to which these actors recognise the importance of identity, image, and reputation for the competitiveness of the place they collectively aim to develop will significantly influence the amount of effort and financial resources invested, and also on the speed and likelihood of achieving their goals. In other words, understanding the importance of place branding and actively managing it can substantially contribute to economic growth and the creation of attractive, prosperous places, and to improving the quality of life within them.

OBJECTIVES AND METHODS

In this context, our primary objective is to elucidate the nature of the interconnection and semantic boundaries of the concepts of identity, image, and reputation. The examination of the interrelationships between these concepts was based on 153 mostly empirical studies, the overwhelming majority of which examined them individually. Based on the consequent meta-synthesis, the paper aim is to provide a theoretical framework applicable to place branding strategies, as well as the place marketing and management. We will focus on the nuances of the interplay and the differences in the specific attributes that define these concepts. This understanding is deemed crucial for effective place management, particularly for branding, which must be based on a profound comprehension of the place's identity and its significant differentiating attributes. Place identity attributes are used strategically to achieve a desirable place image and positive place reputation through coordinated and consistent communication.

RESULTS

Place Identity

Place identity encompasses a collection of elements and attributes that define a particular place and its associated community, distinguishing it from other places. The concept is best elucidated when juxtaposed with the notion of place image. Identity, possessing an inherently objective nature, is considered to be given. Conversely, image represents the perception of identity, reflecting it in individual consciousness and encompassing both cognitive and evaluative dimensions (Matlovičová 2015). Thus, image is understood as the subjective interpretation of an (objectively) established identity (Govers, Go 2009; Zenker 2011). The formation



of an image presupposes an individual's primary or secondary experience of identity. Nevertheless, identity is not static, especially from a social constructivist standpoint. Places are perceived as dynamic social constructs, continually being created and re-created, thereby perpetually emerging and dissolving. Consequently, they can be conceptualised as spatial delineations of social relations (Chromý et al. 2014).

When conceptualizing a place as a region, Paasi (2002) posits that the social process of space formation can be understood on three interrelated levels: territorial, symbolic, and institutional. These levels interconnect and collectively form a unique and distinguishable whole (Chromý et al. 2014). The ensemble of these dynamic elements enables individuals to differentiate one place from another, thereby constituting place identity. The instability and variability of identity elements over time - due to environmental, political, economic, and technological changes - suggests that if these elements are no longer perceived by people, the region effectively ceases to exist (Chromý et al. 2014; Siwek 2011; Matlovičová 2015).

Place identity is intrinsically linked to the individuals who embody it and cannot be understood in isolation from the social context in which it is produced (Cowan, Steward 2007; Skandalis et al. 2017; Rodrigues et al. 2020). The structuralist model of place identification, as referred to by Scott et al. (1998) and based on Giddens' structuralist framework (1984), supports the duality of identity and identification. This duality encompasses strong attachment and belonging to a particular place, but also a distinction between "us" and "them". Identification with a place, defined as the emotional need for group acceptance, is thus seen as a fundamental component of place identity (Matlovičová 2015).

The process of self-identification and belonging to a place encompasses topophilia and the concepts of place attachment and place identity (Matlovičová, 2015). Aitken and Campelo (2011) clarify that although these terms are interrelated in the context of place marketing, they are distinct phenomena. The main difference is that place attachment pertains to the individual, whereas place identity is a collective phenomenon associated with shared identity and culture.

Identification with a place, particularly the deliberate distinction and emphasis of differences based on associated identities, plays a crucial role in the creation and shaping of a place brand (Matlovičová, 2015).

Place identity can be precisely defined as *"the process through which people, through interactions with places, identify themselves in terms of belonging to a specific place"* (Florek 2011). Its intergenerational reproduction is driven by the need of group/local community members to belong somewhere. Place identity is also understood as a social construct within a socio-cultural environment and involves the recognition of similarities and differences between places (Tóth 2023). This is communicated through both tangible and intangible elements of the place, such



as infrastructure and culture (Mueller, Schade 2012; Relph 1976; Szűcs, Koncz 2020). From the perspective of place marketing and branding, it is practical to view place identity as a complex of elements and characteristics that are unique to the place, and provide it with specific advantages over other competitive places (e.g., Anholt 2007; Dinnie 2008; Michalková 2014). However, it is important to acknowledge that this complex is not fixed but fluid and evolves on the basis of experience (Matlovičová, 2015).

The essential characteristics of place identity can be summarised as follows:

Place identity is socially conditioned - The bearers of place identity are the residents, who possess a conception of their identity as a place, including what or whom they embody. Consequently, a place brand strategy that diverges from the inherent identity of the place is likely to be perceived as inauthentic and rejected by locals, and is also unlikely to be accepted by external audiences (Hall 2008). Hague (2005) describes the understanding of the environment from a spatial planning perspective as a process of filtering emotions, meanings, experiences, memories, and activities through social structures. Furthermore, the process of making sense of a place is influenced by the environment, individual perceptions, and the specific social worlds of each person (Wynveen et al. 2012). Therefore, the core of place identity is fundamentally socially conditioned (Matlovičová 2015).

Place identity is pluralistic - Plurality of identity has been well documented in business, organizational (e.g., Balmer, Greyser 2003; Cillia et al. 1999), personal (e.g., Barker, Galasinski 2001) and place (e.g., Baxter et al. 2013) literature. For instance, de Cillia et al. (1999) assert that "*there is no such thing as a single and exclusive national identity*." Multiple identities emerge as a result of various evaluations of the place, spanning a spectrum from favourable to unfavourable (Hall 2003). The uniqueness of a place is subjective and varies for each person who lives in or interacts with it, based on their individual experiences (Hall 2003; Baxter et al. 2013; Matlovičová 2015). From a marketing or branding strategy perspective, it is crucial to consider the interactions among existing identities. These identities may complement, contradict, or even oppose each other, including in relation to pre-existing place strategies (Baxter et al. 2013; Matlovičová 2015).

Place identity is fluid - Altman and Low (1992) conceptualize places as repositories of contexts within which interpersonal, community, and cultural relationships emerge, which are inherently dynamic rather than static (Su, Huang, Hsu 2018). This conceptualisation leads to an understanding of identity as a social and relational construct, emphasising its dynamic nature. The attributes constituting identity are in a constant state of flux. The fluidity of place identities indicates that they represent an ongoing developmental process rather than a final outcome. Consequently, multiple identities emerge from a continuous process of meaning-making between individuals and the place they inhabit (Morgan, Pritchard, Pride 2011). From a perspective of spatial planning, it is important to



continuously monitor the sources that contribute to identity, both within and outside the place (Matlovičová 2015).

Place identity is co-created - The existence of place, as distinct from space, is contingent upon human interaction. The co-production of place identity therefore involves the creation of meaning through the relationship between residents and the place. From a marketing perspective, this implies that residents act as both co-producers and consumers of place identity (Morgan, Pritchard, Pride 2011). Place identities reflect how individuals interpret elements of the place, such as its culture and physical environment (both natural and anthropogenic; Money, Hillenbrand 2006). These identities are formed through interactive processes between the place and its inhabitants, as well as among the inhabitants themselves. Place identities are co-created to the same extent as the physical appearance of a city or landscape, through experience, observation (eyes), reflection (mind) and the observer's intention (purpose; Relph 1976; Proshansky 1978; Hernández et al. 2007; Matlovičová 2015).

Place identity is layered - This characteristic aligns with the delineation of place as part of a scalar hierarchy (Matlovičová, 2015). Spatial identities frequently correspond to the administrative hierarchy, although individual levels can sometimes overlap, contradict, or complement each other - both in terms of the spaces these "places" occupy and the contexts in which they are deemed significant by the public. Consequently, individual levels bind identities that are selectively layered at different scales (Boisen et al. 2011). The challenge lies in understanding the identity of "non-standard" regions created recently and lack historically established identities (Terlouw 2009). These regions often represent new forms of spatial identity, that are less defined by administrative hierarchies, and are created with specific intentions (e.g., new forms of intercity or interregional cooperation), that aim to establish an additional layer of identity across existing or entrenched ones (Boisen et al. 2011). Cross-sectional research on identities in non-standard places led Terlouw (2009) to theoretically conceptualise the layering of identities in such regions. According to Terlouw (2009), it is possible to assess place identities based on their robustness, ranging from "robust" (old, entrenched, and more stable) to "thin" (new, less stable, and less entrenched). From a branding perspective, examining the layering of place identities is utilized in the "artificial" creation of new regions to advance their functional, often economic, objectives (Terlouw 2009). Terlouw further notes that, in the process of layering, new entities frequently build their spatial identity by adopting existing, older place identities. This can involve copying the identity of neighbouring places or transferring it between hierarchical levels - either narrowing or expanding it. Horizontal transfer refers to identity transfer between neighbouring places, while vertical transfer pertains to identity transfer between different hierarchical levels. Downward transfer, from a higher to a lower level, is known as identity narrowing, while upward transfer, from a lower



to a higher level, is termed identity expansion (Terlouw 2009). This highlights that identification with places is highly contextual, particularly when considering new, less traditional, or “weak” spatial identities (Boisen et al. 2011; Terlouw 2009). The layering of place identities facilitates the emergence of new “places”. Without such layering, places would remain unchanged in the perception of their target audiences. The acceptance of a new meaning for a place signifies the emergence of a new identity (Boisen et al. 2011). The belief in the ability to influence this process creates opportunities for the development of place branding (Matlovičová 2015).

Place Image

The creation of a desirable place image has become a common practice worldwide, stemming from the ongoing efforts of territorial managers to attract investors, tourists and new residents. The growing interest in the concept of place image has led to numerous attempts to establish a foundational framework that aims to provide a comprehensive theoretical basis for practical application.

Different approaches vary according to their objectives. According to Smith (2005), place image can be approached as a form of communication (e.g., Burgess, Wood 1988), a means of social control (e.g., Debord 1994; Smith 2005), a form of urban management (e.g., Stoker, Mossberger 1994; Smith 2005), an expression (e.g., Philo, Kearns 1993) or a marketing method (e.g., Fretter 1993). In practice, these approaches are often combined and intertwined. Most attempts to conceptualise and differentiate existing approaches are based on identifying the more or less dominant attribute in their understanding (Matlovičová 2015).

The Perceptual Approach to Place Image

As we have noted in earlier work (e.g. Matlovičová 2015, Matlovičová et al. 2019), among the most prevalent approaches to understanding place image are the perceptual approaches, grounded in the principles of Gestalt psychology or environmental psychology (e.g., Ashworth, Voogd 1990). Gestalt theory interprets place perception as a holistic process, positing that individuals tend to perceive the overall image rather than its individual features (e.g. Mayo, Jarvis 1981; McCleary 1999; Papadopoulos, Heslop 2002, Zenker, Braun 2010, Kavaratzis, Hatch 2013, Cheng, Zhang 2021). Thus, the entirety surpasses the combined value of its individual components (Matlovičová 2015). This statement is supported by Cheng, Zhang (2021), who argue that place image is the cumulative result of people’s experiences, beliefs, feelings, knowledge, and impressions about a place that exist as mental representations in their minds. It encompasses the overall perceptions that individuals hold, including their beliefs and ideas about the place. A place is a complex and evolving spatio-temporal phenomenon, with symbols and impressions continually changing. This mechanism elucidates how we manage



the diverse and extensive array of landscape appearances and visual schemas. Principles of Gestalt psychology are employed to uncover how individuals organise, logically reason, and model information about places, thereby creating a meaningful image (Downs, Stea 1973, Mayo, Jarvis 1981, Gartner 1993, Baloglu, McCleary 1999, Kappraff 2002, Matlovičová 2015). These principles were already described in the early 1960s by Lynch (1960). Lynch's seminal work on urban design and the image of the city is based on the principles of Gestalt psychology, emphasising how people perceive the city as a whole (discussed in more detail below). Later, e.g. Downs and Stea (1973), Nasar (1992), or even Kappraff (2002) discuss how Gestalt principles are applied to the perception of the spatial aesthetics of the urban environment and shaping place images from a holistic perspective. Other approaches and techniques have been indirectly inspired by environmental psychology through behavioural geography (Tuan 1975, Gould, White 1986, Golledge, Stimson 1997, Kitchin 1994, Smith 2005). Downs, Stea (1973) and Kitchin (1994) discuss the concept of cognitive mapping and mental maps, which are fundamental to understanding how people perceive place images through the lens of environmental psychology and behavioural geography. In addition to mental maps, choice sets, and various other techniques are also used when examining quantitative data. These methods have proven highly useful for understanding the effects of place image based on physical visits to a place (primary image; e.g. Merrilees et al. 2016; Kavaratzis et al. 2017; Zenker et al. 2017; Kalandides 2018). Their use is less justified for exploring a place image formed without direct experience, relying solely on mediated information about the place (secondary image; Smith 2005).

These approaches are often criticised for being overly influenced by environmental behaviourism and for underestimating the impact of cultural factors (Greiner 2016; Smith 2005; Rausell-Köster et al. 2022). For instance, Shields (1991) argues that when perceptualists study place imagery, they are simply recording memories of individual scenes. Furthermore, while perceptual research emphasises the subjective nature of place symbolism, such research is limited by the generalisation of the "*individual inner world into a socially closed system of shared meanings*" (Shields 1991; Smith 2005). These are the main arguments for criticising an over-concentration on environmental behaviourism. Greiner (2016), Smith (2005) and Rausell-Köster et al. (2022) therefore highlight the importance and need to consider cultural factors in particular in the development of cities and the shaping of place image. Another challenge in examining place image from a place branding perspective is the excessive emphasis on its static structure, neglecting its dynamic nature (Gospodini 2016; Kavaratzis 2017). Such a perspective likely reflects a highly simplified understanding of the process as communication between the source of information (message milieu) and the recipient (Matlovičová 2015).



The Processual Approach to Place Image

According to the processual perspective perspective, place image can be conceptualised as a communication process involving the gradual and continuous transmission of information between the source, referred to as the message milieu, and the recipient (Matlovičová 2015). The message milieu, recipients, and communication channels, along with the content of the messages, are considered key elements of the entire communication system (Lasswell 1948). This approach assumes that the place image can be shaped through the deliberate influence of the message milieu (Smith 2005). Common marketing communication tools are utilised in this process. The process of information transfer does not end at the moment of information delivery. After processing the information, the recipient becomes its bearer and disseminator, and thus a part of the information milieu (Matlovičová 2015). However, the content of the disseminated information remains a question, as the process of retransmission (reception by the recipient, processing, and broadcasting of the processed information) modifies the original set of informational messages derived from the place identity (Matlovičová 2015).

In this context Ashworth and Voogd (1990) propose that communication methods act as a link between an individual's perception of a place and the desired image that the place aims to project. Anholt (2010) further adds that the process of place image creation involves conveying the identity of a place to the public, taking into account that some aspects may be lost or altered due to communication noise and individual or external influences. Although this model has potential as an analytical tool, it is crucial to note that it relies on a significantly simplified concept that separates the sender from the recipient and it overlooks many symbolic attributes of the place that cannot be consciously planned for, as well as those whose reception is uncontrollable (Anholt 2010).

Perceptual-Processual Approach to Place Image

This approach introduces further variations of the processual understanding of place images, enhanced by elements of the perceptual approach: place image as a reduced form of reality, and place image as a modified supplement to reality (Matlovičová 2015).

- a) *The effect of narrowing reality in the creation of place images:* In this context, the place image can be conceptualised as a mental reflection in the mind of an individual, formed by a set of selected feelings and information associated with the place. However, it is not a process of passive reception of information or perceptions, nor is it a mechanical reduction of complex reality, but a cognitive process wherein selected attributes of the place undergo further processing (e.g. Stea 2017; McCunn, Gifford 2017). The human brain cannot perceive all



stimuli with equal intensity; it reacts more sensitively to certain stimuli while being resistant to others (Gardini et al. 2009). Each individual extracts only certain information and feelings from the informational environment, which Reynolds (1965) refers to as the “message milieu”. These extractions result from an active creative process where the individual receives, decodes, and abstracts specific elements of information (Matlovičová 2015). According to Miller (1956), these elements are then transformed into a system of better-organized and more understandable units, or “chunks”. Ashworth and Voogd (1990) describe this transformation process as a “radio” analogy. The creation of these better organised units of input stimuli facilitates memorisation and is crucial for easier retrieval in long-term memory (Matlovičová, 2015). The effect of reality narrowing in forming a place image is evidenced by the reduction of the transmitted information set from the “message milieu”, influenced by a set of internal factors related to the recipient (Matlovičová 2015). These elements create specific filters through which we interpret reality. Therefore, the image of the territory often has a decisive influence on the selection processes of the territory (e.g. in the decision-making of investors, tourists, residents). Thus, we can conclude that the correction of reality perception in line with an already formed image can lead to the reality narrowing effect (Matlovičová 2015). In this scenario, the individual disregards those parts of the transmitted informational messages that contradict the preformed image (Johnova et al., 2007). Here, the place image is influenced by the favourable or unfavourable bias of the recipient or the sender of information regarding the place’s attributes (Parenteau 1995).

- b) *The effect of reality expansion in place Image creation:* The image, or specific perception of an object (a place) is not formed solely based on its present real nature. Instead, the current reflection in our mind is transformed into a simplified and personally acceptable form. This transformation process is influenced by our judgement, personal value system, previous experiences, and various external influences (Matlovičová 2015). The multitude of factors involved, and their variability over time, significantly complicates the study of this process, even when considering the perception of relatively simple objects (Matlovičová 2015). The inherent subjectivity and frequent individual distortions of the transmitted information suggest that the place image can be considered as a system of interferences (Matlovičová 2015). However, after the transformation mentioned above, the individually formed images of a place only partially reflect the real picture of the place and are often only indirectly related to it (Gelli et al. 2019; Yanitskiy et al. 2021; Rodriguez et al. 2021). The process of generalising and reshaping reality involves additional factors that not only reduce it, but also “enhance” it (both positively and negatively) with supplementary attributes (Matlovičová 2015). These supplements to reality



are typically stored in memory before an individual encounters the place. Their distinctive feature is that they are “added” to the perceived reality subconsciously, regardless of whether they align with the currently transmitted information (Matlovičová, 2015). Prejudices, for instance, often serve as substitutes for missing information under certain circumstances. In cases of conflict between transmitted stimuli and recalled memories, they can influence the process of selective perception (e.g., Wäckerlin et al. 2019; Manyiwa et al. 2018; Stanowicka 2020). In other words, individuals tend to adapt information according to their pre-formed personal opinions (Matlovičová, 2015). Subsequent cognitive processing, irrespective of the objective reality, tends to reinforce individuals’ initial perceptions. Essentially, this illustrates a confirmation bias, wherein individuals perceive information in a manner that aligns with their pre-existing beliefs. Biases can thus lead to the reality-expansion effect, which occurs when a place is ascribed attributes that it no longer really has or attributes that it never had - in a positive or negative sense (e.g. various myths, superstitions, etc.; Matlovičová 2015). In this context, place image can be perceived as a set of ideas transformed by personally justified and emotionally tinted interpretations (Walmsley, Young 1998; Strandberg et al. 2020). It results from the interaction of perceptual and cognitive evaluations as two interconnected components based on an individual’s feelings towards a particular place (Baloglu, Brinberg 1997; Baloglu, McCleary 1999; Manyiwa et al. 2018; Zhang et al. 2018; Chakrabarty, Sadhukhan 2020).

Despite the indicated differences, distinguishing between the two aforementioned approaches proves difficult, as they frequently occur concurrently. Therefore, it is more accurate to describe the formation of a place image as an eclectic process of transforming a wide range of perceived attributes of a place (Matlovičová 2015). This process involves both narrowing and expanding the transmitted set of place attributes to include opinions, thoughts, facts, impressions, and beliefs, resulting in a fluid and variable image (Matlovičová 2015). The labelling of the place image as a “process” underscores its fluid nature (Table 1). Place image is constantly evolving in the mind; it is not a fixed transformed mental representation, but is constantly changing and being supplemented with new attributes based on direct or indirect contact with the place (Matlovičová 2015). In other words, it is an unstable mental trace that emerges in the mind of an individual whenever there is direct or mediated contact with the place (e.g., through a photograph, a mention in a conversation, a specific smell, a sound, etc.; Matlovičová 2015).



Post-structuralist Approach to Place Image

The foundation for this approach stems from the critique of semioticians (Matlovičová et al. 2019), who argue that their research overly synthesises representations of places and detaches them from the culture in which they are produced (Matlovičová 2015). A key premise of this approach is the notion that it is people and societies, rather than things themselves, that determine how realities are represented. Consequently, the formation of a place image is not seen as a simple reflection of the place, but rather as a guide for activities (Smith 2005). Building on Foucault and other post-structuralist theorists, Morgan and Pritchard (1999) introduce “cultural” perspectives to the study of place image. These perspectives allow the incorporation of power relations and historical context in the process of place image formation. Unlike perceptual approaches, this method does not focus on individual perception of places, but on shared meanings (Matlovičová 2015).

Traditional models of place image typically emphasise the individual consumer “with minimal or no regard for social relationships” (Selby 2004). But in a post-structuralist perspective, the place image is considered a representation of reality that is constructed socially rather than intimately or cognitively (Phillips 1993). This process involves understanding the “intersubjectivity” of the place image, or the shared nature of experiences and meanings (Shields 1991). Soja (1996) in this respect approaches place as a socially constructed and dynamic concept, emphasising that images of place are shaped by multiple narratives and perspectives. In his work, Soja (1996) explores the concept of “thirdspace”, where real and imagined places intersect. A similar post-structuralist lens on the transformation of modern urban spaces, particularly with regard to their fragmented and decentralised nature, has been explored by Dear and Flusty (2010). In their view, place images are constructed and perceived differently by different groups, reflecting the complexity and multiplicity of urban experiences. Keith and Pile (1993) link the of place image and place identity. They argue that place image is constructed through discourses about the variable and contested nature of place identity on the basis of which the image is constructed.

Finally, certain approaches (e.g., Baloglu, McCleary 1999) recognise that place image is subjectively constructed and varies from individual to individual. At the same time, it is acknowledged as a socially constructed phenomenon, grounded in the concept of collective imagination.

Marketing Approach to Place Image

In this view, place image is considered a type of asset that a place can possess (Young, Lever 1997; Styliadis 2018). This means that it is approached as a set of attributes. If this set is strong and positive, it enhances the “value” of the place and



ultimately facilitates its development (Matlovičová 2015). The marketing approach essentially combines the previously mentioned perspectives, with a greater emphasis on the perceptual attributes that co-create the place image (Matlovičová 2015). For this reason, it is sometimes referred to as the psychological approach. Another reason is that marketing uses analytical tools from psychology to gain insights into the “minds of consumers” (Nghiem-Phú 2015; Huang et al. 2021). It also draws on knowledge from related disciplines that study the human mind. The marketing approach comprehensively examines image formation (interdisciplinary perspective) with a strong focus on sciences studying human behaviour and the human brain (e.g. neuromarketing or cognitive science; Bramwell, Rawding 1996; Matlovičová 2015).

A specific feature of this approach is that, although it recognises (and accepts) high individual variability, it simultaneously assumes the existence of certain collectively perceived traits of places (at the group level) that could be the subject of further research (Matlovičová 2015). From this perspective, the marketing approach views place image as a collectively constructed construct, although it admits that at the interpersonal level it is individually formed at the interpersonal level as a set of unique associations that vary from person to person (Baloglu, McCleary 1999; Matlovičová 2015). This ambivalence makes it possible to study their formation at the individual level, while also exploring ways to influence them at the level of whole segments, once possible common group traits are identified (Matlovičová 2015). Inspiration for the creation of the necessary tools and a coherent concept of place image was primarily sought from commercial companies, which have extensive experience and proven methods in product image formation. However, as will be discussed later, the adaptability of these methods to the conditions of place marketing is problematic (Bramwell, Rawding 1996; Matlovičová 2015).

The marketing approach perceives place image as an individual construct, but also examines it as a group-constructed phenomenon, assuming that it shares common characteristics at a certain level of generalisation (Baloglu, McCleary 1999). This ambivalence is a source of difficulty, as it simultaneously examines a complex and purely individual phenomenon from a collective perspective. This contradiction in perception is reflected in approaches to its deliberate formation. These approaches are based on targeted influence of either a single selected segment (in the case of concentrated strategies), multiple segments (in the case of differentiated strategies), or the entire market uniformly without segmentation (in the case of undifferentiated strategies). The individual is seen as part of these segments and is not approached individually at this stage. Market segmentation assumes that, at a certain level of generalisation, consumers exhibit common traits that distinguish them from other groups. Based on these traits, target groups can be divided into relatively homogeneous segments (in terms of the criteria being



followed), which are expected to respond similarly to the same type of marketing communication (Matlovičová 2015).

In practice, the component approach is most commonly used to study place image. This approach is based on distinguishing the different groups of attributes that constitute or have the potential to constitute the image (Elliot, Papadopoulos 2016). Cognitive (knowledge-related), affective (emotional), and conative (specific activities associated with the place) attributes related to the place are distinguished (e.g., Walmsley, Young 1998; Gallarza et al. 2002; Baloglu, McCleary 1999; Gartner 1996; Matlovičová 2015; Herman et al. 2020a). In addition to these three groups of components, Avraham and Ketter (2008, 20) also identify a fourth group of evaluative components (how an observer evaluates the attributes of the place). In this respect, place image is perceived as the overall result of interactions among personal, individually formed beliefs, opinions, feelings, expectations, and impressions of the object (Chon 1994). Alternatively, the approach can see place image as a concept formed by emotional, personally justified interpretations of to the place, resulting from multiple interconnected and collectively exhibited perceptual, cognitive, and behavioural components (e.g., Walmsley, Young 1998; Baloglu, McCleary 1999; Beerli, Martin 2004; Bujdosó et al. 2019; Asmit et al. 2020; Baloglu, Brinberg 1997).

Marketing conceptualisations of image also differ in how these components interact. Some components may be selective in nature (Fakeye, Crompton 1991; Reynolds 1985), while others may be additive (Crompton 1979; Kotler et al. 1994).

In practice, marketing has adopted a concept that distinguishes between objective information about a place and its subjective evaluation. For example, Walmsley and Young (1998) argue that when identifying place images, it is necessary to distinguish between two “types” of images, depending on whether the emphasis is on perceptual perception (and evaluation) or cognitive creation of information about the environment or elements of the place. Similarly, Gartner (1996), Smith (2005) based on Boulding’s earlier work (1961), asserts that the place image consists of distinct “cognitive” and “affective” (emotional) components. The cognitive component, he argues, is derived from known facts about the destination and needs to be further developed to generate awareness. Behavioural (or affective) components relate to motives, in terms of how the person considers the object (Gartner 1996). This dimension is clearly linked to the shift towards emotional or “mood” marketing in tourism (Morgan, Pritchard 2002; Smith 2005; Klamár, Kozoň 2022).

A significant contribution to the discourse on the conceptualisation of place image can be attributed to the works of Echtner and Ritchie (1991; 1993; 2003). Their perspective on the possible components that form the image is distinct. According to their concept, the image consists of six different groups of components arranged along three intersecting axes (Matlovičová, Kolesárová



2012): 1 - the axis of functional and psychological components, 2 - the axis of holistic components and individually perceived attributes, and 3 - the axis of common and unique components. However, the authors note that there is no clear boundary between the groups, as they overlap. In other words, holistic feelings are based on a combination and interaction of attributes, just as perceptions of individual attributes can be influenced by overall impressions and feelings. In particular, they highlight the blurred boundary between the functional and psychological characteristics of the image (Echtner; Ritchie 1991; 1993; 2003).

Lynch's Urban Model of City Image

In the 1960s, a distinct perspective on place image, particularly city image, was developed within urban planning and architecture by Kevin Andrew Lynch in his seminal work, *"The Image of the City"* (Lynch 1960; 2004). Lynch introduced theoretical principles and terminology, and presented results from pilot studies in Boston, Jersey City, and Los Angeles (Lynch 2004, 14). Unlike the marketing approach, Lynch's model aimed to compare the visual forms of cities as proposed by professionals with the mental images formed by residents and the public, and to evaluate cities based on their spatial form in order to influence urban planning (Matlovičová 2015).

Lynch's approach focuses on the internal image of the city, using the assessments of pre-trained observers as a reference point for residents' perceptions. This method aims to enhance the perception of the city as pleasant, attractive, legible and navigable. Lynch emphasises the study of both tangible elements (buildings, streets, parks) and intangible elements (memories, experiences, feelings). He distinguishes between fixed and movable elements, and identifies identity, structure, and meaning as key components of the mental picture (image) of the city (Lynch 2004, 8).

Lynch asserts that the image of a city should be interpretable and understandable, emphasising the characteristics of the physical environment that contribute to a clear, legible, and memorable image. He introduces the concept of imageability, which refers to the distinctive qualities of urban forms that impact the observer's senses and aid in navigation (Lynch 2004, 9). Lynch's methodology involves comparative mental maps to identify the most distinctive parts of the city as perceived by respondents (Lynch 2004, 144). Lynch's concept posits that cities with high imageability are perceived as well-formed and distinctive, stimulating interest and exploration. He identifies key elements such as paths, edges, districts, nodes, and landmarks, which are interconnected and overlapping (Lynch 2004, 46-49). Lynch views image formation as an interactive process between the observer and the environment, emphasising continuous transformation and open-endedness (Lynch 2004, 1). He suggests that city images can be altered either by



retraining observers or by changing the environment itself, acknowledging the influence of social conditioning and the potential of education to enhance image quality (Lynch 2004, 11, 164).

Lynch's concept of the city image, which focuses on cognitive aspects selectively perceived by individuals, can be classified as a perceptual composite construct. It emphasises the reduction of reality through selective perception, considering memories and previous experiences as factors in image transformation.

Political and Geopolitical Approach to Place Image

The political and geopolitical perspective is primarily assessed at the level of states (country image, national image), with a focus on building territorial reputation, public diplomacy, international relations, and political anthropology. The place image at the geopolitical level is influenced by its geopolitical alignment within the existing structures and groups through which it is perceived. This, in turn, can affect the place's negotiating power in the global competition for resources, particularly capital. This approach considers the perception of relationships between states and alliances that shape a country's image. Examining the quality of these relationships is central to the concept of the "enemy country image" or "ally country image" (e.g., Jervis 1976; Cottam 1977). In these cases, it is possible to study a range of perceptual differences, based on the component approach described in the marketing context. For example, Eicher et al. (2013) examined how value projection differs between allies and enemies, highlighting that images of ally and enemy countries are influenced by perceived security and power. The projection of values is higher for allies compared to enemies, indicating that national images are shaped by relational dynamics and power perceptions. National images are conceptualised as holistic schemas that shape attitudes and preferences in foreign policy (Rišová 2016). By altering subliminal associations with images of allies or adversaries, the study elucidates how cognitive schemas of national images impact perceptions and policy decisions (Castano et al. 2016). Similar to previous approaches, communication plays a pivotal role in influencing the image of a country, both internally and externally. The media significantly shapes a country's image through the framework of international relations and public diplomacy (Pjesivac et al. 2018). The formation of a country's image is influenced by a range of socio-political factors (Capozza et al. 2009). Findings from some studies (e.g., Haque, Lawson, 1980; Čaušević 2023) indicate that country images are formed reciprocally and are significantly affected by the dynamics of mutual relations, conflicts, or alliances. The concept of the enemy country image is unique due to the evident dichotomy and contradiction in assigning the status of "enemy country", depending on the perspective from which it is evaluated (Matlovičová 2015).



The image of states is also influenced by internal political relationships. The political perspective on the country image also focuses on examining the perception of state representatives' attitudes towards domestic and geopolitical issues within states, and their reflection on the country's image. For example, the country image may reflect separatist efforts of certain regions or attempts to change their status within the state (Matlovičová 2015). In the case of internal political problems, a geopolitical perspective can also be applied when the country image is assessed based on the positions taken by influential state representatives towards resolving the internal political problems of another country. These are usually non-standard cases of addressing internal issues that are media-worthy and capable of sparking broader international discussions (Matlovičová 2015).

Additional Approaches to Place Image

There are also other approaches to defining place image, which vary depending on the prevailing perspective and the objectives of its exploration. In addition to the aforementioned marketing approach (based on a psychological perspective with an emphasis on its contribution to territorial development), urban planning, political, and geopolitical perspectives, place image can also be viewed from a sociological standpoint (e.g. Espelt, Benito 2005; Borer 2006). This perspective emphasises cultural and social filters in the perception of a place. Numerous studies focus on the internal image of a place and its connection to territorial identity, understanding place perception as a "self-image" (Matlovičová 2015). From the perspective of social communication, place image is seen as a discursive phenomenon in personal, organisational, or mass media communication, with an emphasis on content analysis and the impact of media communication, referred to as the media image of a place (Avraham 2000; Herman et al. 2020a, b; Urminský 2018; Greydina 2023). There are also other perspectives on place image that are particularly applicable to place branding. Examples include the semiotic approach (e.g. Matlovičová et al. 2019), the hermeneutic approach (e.g. Jacobs 1993; Malinina 2021), place image as connotation, and the country-of-origin effect (e.g. Peterson, Jolibert 1995; Aiello et al. 2009; Matlovičová 2016), among others.

Place Reputation

The reputation of a place is the final concept in the triad of interrelated constructs and represents the highest level of generalisation of place perception. It is "formed" as a consensus-based collective evaluation by external audiences, including investors, tourists, and potential residents, regarding a specific place (location, city, sub-region, region, or macro-region; e.g. Anholt 2010; Paolucci, Sichman 2014; Yu, Wang, Gu 2022).



Reputation is considered a social construct emerging from collective beliefs and opinions shaped by societal factors (Hohle 2022; Sharman 2007). Simplified, it is the highest possible generalisation of place image into a collectively accepted dichotomous evaluation: good or bad reputation. Its study is primarily based on deduction, and aims to uncover the individual dimensions of the multifaceted constructs of place image and place identity from which it is derived. The connection between place reputation and place identity signifies that it reflects the unique characteristics and values that distinguish it from other places (Bell 2016; Lamour 2014). The connection to place image indicates that, like place image, it is dynamic and constantly evolving - changing over time based on new information, events, and developments (Nelson, 2015). For example, various crises can impact the reputation of a place. In such cases, a long-established reputation often shows significant resilience to negative shocks (Insch, Avraham 2014).

Insch and Avraham (2014) discuss managing place reputation during crises, emphasising strategies for image restoration and the role of residents in rebuilding the brand and restoring trust post-crisis. They highlight the importance of a strong positive image as part of the broader concept of place reputation (e.g., Bell 2016). It can thus be seen as an inherently relational construct, defined by the interactions between the place and its various stakeholders (Foroudi et al. 2020; Mariutti, Denes 2020; Morgan, Pritchard, Pride 2011; Sharman 2007).

Paolucci and Sichman (2014) note that the reputation of a place significantly influences the behaviour of external actors, including investors, tourists, and potential residents. Many authors (e.g., Foroudi et al. 2020; Su, Huang, Hsu 2018; Inch, Avraham 2014; Money, Hillenbrand 2006; Hayden 2001) consider it to be a critical intangible asset that significantly affects the competitiveness and success of development activities across various administrative levels. According to Nelson (2015), place reputation is a composite of perceptions held by external audiences. Akhmetshin et al. (2020) consider place reputation a key source of territorial competitiveness, aiding in establishing partnerships with stakeholders and ensuring the overall potential of the place by enhancing its attractiveness to various actors seeking to realize their interests.

Both authors emphasise the strategic importance of managing and improving place reputation to achieve economic and social goals. Reputation is thus formed by generalising evaluations of various aspects of a place, such as economic performance, cultural richness, governance, safety, and environmental quality, and requires a holistic approach to its management (Bell 2016). According to Bell (2016), place management requires a comprehensive approach that includes efforts to strategically shape its reputation.



The Interplay and Semantic Boundaries of Place Identity, Place Image and Place Reputation

As demonstrated, all three concepts - place identity, place image, and place reputation - are interrelated and overlap in some aspects, yet they also exhibit distinct differences that are crucial for effective management. The primary source of confusion lies in their ambiguous definitions, which are often either too broad or overly general, failing to explicitly delineate the distinguishing attributes from our perspective. *Place identity* and *place image*, as well as *place image* and *place reputation*, are the most frequently conflated or even equated concepts.

a) Place Image vs. Place Identity

The two concepts are interrelated and overlap in some areas, which often makes it difficult to distinguish between them. Let us summarise their main characteristics (see Table 1):

Individual vs. collective nature (or unique vs. pluralistic) - The image of a place has a distinctly individual character, differing from person to person. For each individual, it is a unique set of feelings, knowledge, prejudices, and emotional experiences related to the place. This characteristic can be considered one of the most salient attributes of place image, distinguishing it from place identity, which inherently tends towards a collective unified perception of a place's attributes. Although place image can also be explored for similarities at a certain level of generalisation in relation to groups, it remains fundamentally an individual construct. Thus, the same set of information about place identity is processed differently by each recipient. Although place identity is pluralistic, it is perceived more as a collective construct - representing who we are or what the place is. Image, in contrast, is an individual construct - how individuals perceive the place. Therefore, the bearer of a certain place identity is a group of residents associated with a specific place, while the bearer of a place image is an individual.

Detection vs. emanation - The image of a place has a perceptual-cognitive or detection nature, meaning the received information is processed consciously or subconsciously through a cognitive process into a unique individual perception. A place image is created based on the reception and transformation of a set of transmitted information, making it an active cognitive process rather than passive reception. Conversely, place identity is co-created and transmitted. Identity can thus be seen as an emanation of collectively generated attributes, whereas image is a perceptual and highly unstable entity. In this sense, identity is viewed as an objective entity, referring to a generally accepted consensus on the attributes representing the place. Place identity is understood as the emitted image of the place, while place image, from the perspective of the recipient, is understood as the "received" or detected image of the place.



Active creation vs. passive acceptance - From the individual's perspective, place image involves an active process of creating a specific image of the place that reflects the recipient's expectations. This process emphasises expanding perception to include attributes that mirror personal preferences and perception filters based on the recipient's expectations. In contrast, place identity involves the adaptation, subordination, and acceptance of predetermined image attributes. In other words, place identity "expects" the individual to conform to collectively accepted attributes. Therefore, while the individual sets perceptual filters for the place image, the filters for place identity are set by the collective perception, aligning with the majority's expectations.

Fluidity with higher vs. lower instability - Each place objectively evolves over time. The gradual alteration of its tangible and intangible attributes results in a change in its identity. Since the place image reflects elements of the identity, it also changes concurrently with these alterations. Both place identity and place image are therefore fluid in nature. What distinguishes them is the degree and intensity of variability over time. The higher instability of place image is due to the variability of personal attitudes, opinions, preferences, and other factors that influence its formation. Each subsequent interaction with the place or confrontation with information(s) about it refines or transforms the original image. Place image demonstrates much greater dynamics and instability. Even a seemingly insignificant event can cause a significant change in the place image (e.g., from positive to negative). An individual's place image can quickly change due to an ephemeral event that does not impact its identity. This event, while insignificant from an identity perspective, can create a strongly emotionally tinged mental trace in the individual's mind, which will resurface (sometimes for a long time) and thus influence the perception a particular place. Over time, its character can shift from specific (with all details recalled) to non-specific, transformed into a subconscious unpleasant feeling. In contrast, identity inherently tends toward generalisation and exhibits higher resilience to such effects. Changes in identity occur through regular repetition, stabilisation, and subsequent collective acceptance of specific attributes. Countless diverse ephemeral events experienced by individuals in connection with a place cause changes in the place's image but usually do not affect its identity.

Perspective "from the outside" vs. "from the inside" - The image of a place is more of an external perception, whether evaluated by outsiders or residents closely linked to it (place identity bearers have different perceptual filters than external audiences). It represents an external perspective enriched with feelings. In contrast, place identity is about self-presentation outward, representing an "from the inside" perspective.

Untraceable vs. traceable - Unlike place identity, place image does not leave spatial (visual) traces and it is practically impossible to map it, although there



are techniques to detect it. Place identity, on the other hand, leaves a clear visual imprint on the place, identifiable through various tangible and objective markers (the so-called "semes" - some intangible signs of the place, such as signifying signs of communication are also included among them), which carry and represent the distinguishing features of the place's identity. These can be studied using semiotic analysis, for example.

Eclectic vs. layered - The individual elements of a place image are a mixture of random, very diverse attributes, visual perceptions - images, scenes, experiences, feelings, sounds, etc. - which create an impression in the form of an assemblage of the most diverse elements and attributes of the place. This disorder and even the potential disorderliness is an inherent feature of the image. Identity, in contrast, can be considered layered, with an identifiable internal structure that can be tracked over time. For the image, this is challenging, if not impossible.

b) Place Image vs. Place Reputation

Differences between place image and place reputation can be identified at several levels (Table 1). Reputation, or renown, is understood as the general perception or good name of a place. It is a generalised form of partial images, reflecting the degree of their positivity. When answering the question, "*What reputation does someone or something have?*" we typically expect a response indicating whether it is "good" or "bad". This contrasts with the concept of place image, which addresses the question, "*What image does someone or something have?*" In this case, we expect a specific evaluation, comprising a set of particular subjective attributes, assessments, and feelings related to the place.

Both concepts are interconnected. Place reputation can be viewed as a highly generalised place image, assessed from the perspective of the positivity of partial evaluations, often framed in a dichotomy: good or bad. The challenge of applying reputation to places is that it requires excessive generalisation. In other words, reputation results from a collective consensus on the positivity of partial attributes of the place image, evaluated along a negative-positive continuum. The final evaluation depends on the direction in which public opinion ultimately leans. This means that the resulting assessment is largely shared in line with the presumed majority opinion, despite certain discrepancies in individual perceptions of the place. For instance, a city may have a stereotypically good reputation, but personal experiences of visiting it may be predominantly negative. Thus, in an individually formed image, negative attributes may dominate, yet this will not affect the overall accepted reputation of the city. For example, someone might share the generally accepted good reputation of Paris, but their personally created primary image of the city could consist mostly of negative attributes.



From a temporal perspective, place reputation exhibits greater stability but less specificity compared to place image. This means that changes in some components used in its formation may not immediately result in a transformation of the reputation. The outcome may be a slight shift on the negative-positive continuum. A significant change occurs only after crossing the threshold of neutral evaluation in either direction. Thus, a place may have a good reputation, while its image might be negative in certain evaluations. Place image demonstrates a higher degree of subjectivity, instability, and interpersonal differentiation than reputation.

One of the basic approaches to improving the reputation of a place is public relations. The key aspect here is to identify opinion leaders of a place who possess the power and ability to positively influence public opinion.

Reputation is understood as an aggregate of individual images. It is accumulated and evaluated over a period of time based on collective consensus and socially disseminated as a quasi-objective meta-evaluation of the place, without specifying the evaluator. According to Roebuck (2012), the foundation of reputation formation is the level of individual knowledge, which, through generalisation, reaches the level of social dissemination. Place reputation differs from place image in its greater stability and uniformity, being shaped more on a collective rather than an individual basis. Hohle (2022) and Sharman (2007) regard it as a social construct arising from collective beliefs and opinions, shaped by societal factors.

The aim of building a strong and positive place image should be to achieve a good reputation, that is, to build the place image that can be seen as part of the broader concept of place reputation (e.g., Bell, 2016). The aim of cultivating a good reputation is to attain prestige, i.e., social recognition and respect. When a place seeks to improve its reputation, it seeks to improve to enhance its image and thereby gain prestige, higher status or a greater degree of admiration and acceptance in the eyes of the general public than other competing places.

The interconnection of all three concepts can be summarised as follows (Figure 1): Place reputation is a highly generalised representation of the broad spectrum of partial attributes of place image. Place image, in turn, is the perception of the attributes of place identity as modified by the individual perceptual filters of each person.



Fig. 1 The Interplay of place identity, place image, and place reputation



Tab. 1 The interplay and semantic boundaries between Place Identity, Place Image, and Place Reputation

PLACE IDENTITY	PLACE IMAGE	PLACE REPUTATION
<i>What is it like?</i>	<i>What is it like?</i>	<i>Is it good or bad?</i>
IT IS WHAT DISTINGUISHES A PLACE FROM OTHER PLACES	THE CURRENT PERCEPTIONS PEOPLE HAVE OF THE PLACE	GOOD OR BAD NAME
A set of attributes that allow places to differentiated from others	A set of attributes, feelings and expectations associated with the place as perceived by individuals	A generalised form of partial attributes of the place image that are dichotomously assessed as being good or bad.
COLLECTIVELY FORMED <ul style="list-style-type: none">Pluralistic, shared, collective construct	UNIQUE (DISTINCTIVE) <ul style="list-style-type: none">Interpersonally specific, distinctive, formed on an individual basisSimilarities are also explored within target groups (segments)	META-EVALUATION <ul style="list-style-type: none">Formed as a consensus opinion on the positivity of the place image
SOCIALLY DETERMINED <ul style="list-style-type: none">Originates from the human need to belong and be part of a community	INDIVIDUALLY CONSTRUCTED <ul style="list-style-type: none">Conditioned by a unique set of subjective attributes of the recipient.Socio-cultural conditioning is also acknowledged	SOCIALLY DETERMINED <ul style="list-style-type: none">Arises from collective beliefs and opinions shaped by social factors.An inherently relational construct defined by interactions between the place and its various stakeholders
OBJECTIVE Perception of the Place <ul style="list-style-type: none">in the sense of a consensus on generally accepted attributes representing the place	SUBJECTIVE Perception of the Place <ul style="list-style-type: none">Varies from person to personA subconscious selection of attributes, their supplementation, modification and reshaping according to individual knowledge, feelings and current perception filters	QUASI-OBJECTIVE Meta-evaluation of the place formed based on collective consensus <ul style="list-style-type: none">Reflects the generally accepted evaluation of the place without specifying the evaluator
LAYERED <ul style="list-style-type: none">It can be mapped over time, identifying its internal structure and changesIt leaves a distinct visual imprint on the place, identifiable through various material and objective markers	ECLECTIC <ul style="list-style-type: none">It is an assemblage of place attributesIt does not leave a spatial (visual) traceIt is practically impossible to map (though there are techniques to investigate it)	DICHOTOMOUS <ul style="list-style-type: none">It is good or bad
EMITTED <ul style="list-style-type: none">It is the intergenerational reproduction, shaping, and dissemination of information regarding the distinctive attributes of a place	DETECTED <ul style="list-style-type: none">It is the processing of transmitted information about the placeIt is a perceptual-creative process of processing of selected information	DETECTED <ul style="list-style-type: none">It is the collective processing and acceptance of transmitted information about the place
CREATES ARCHETYPES & STEREOTYPES <ul style="list-style-type: none">These become inherent and distinguishing characteristics of the place	CAN BE INFLUENCED BY STEREOTYPES <ul style="list-style-type: none">The perception of a place is mostly influenced by specific, individually set filters of perception	CREATES STEREOTYPES <ul style="list-style-type: none">Functions as perception filter with high inertia and resilience to change



PLACE IDENTITY	PLACE IMAGE	PLACE REPUTATION
FLUID with HIGHER INERTIA <ul style="list-style-type: none">Exhibits higher stabilityNaturally tends to generalise and is more resistant to changeChanges occur based on regular repetition and stabilisation, leading to collective acceptance of a specific attribute as part of its identity	FLUID with LOW STABILITY <ul style="list-style-type: none">It has a high degree of instability and variability over time.Instability is amplified by the variability of personal attitudes, opinions, preferences, diverse ephemeral events associated with the place, etc.Also influenced by changes in the identity of the place it represents	FLUID with HIGHER INERTIA <ul style="list-style-type: none">Exhibits high resistance to changes in generally accepted and publicly presented opinions about the placeChanges are conditioned by shifts in public opinion or individual experiences and personal perception filters
EMPHASIS ON COGNITIVE Attributes <ul style="list-style-type: none">Knowledge-producingEmitting information about the differentiation of the placeCollective memory plays an important role	EMPHASIS ON AFFECTIVE Attributes <ul style="list-style-type: none">In addition to cognitive attributes, feelings, experiences, expectations, etc., also enter the process of transformation and reception of information	EMPHASIS ON COGNITIVE Attributes <ul style="list-style-type: none">Primarily cognitive attributes are involved in the acceptance processCollective memory, stereotypes, and prejudices also play a roleAffective aspects may also be present, often as collective emotions (changes in public opinion)
From an Individual's Perspective: PASSIVE Acceptance of Image Attributes <ul style="list-style-type: none">Acceptance of given image attributesPerception filters of the place are determined by the collective perception, in line with the majority's expectations	From an Individual's Perspective: ACTIVE Creation of Mental Picture <ul style="list-style-type: none">An active process of creating one's own, specific mental picture of a placePerception filters are subconsciously set by the individual	From an Individual's Perspective: PASSIVE Acceptance of Majority Opinion <ul style="list-style-type: none">Perception filters are predominantly set collectivelyArises from collective beliefs and opinions shaped by social factors
"FROM THE INSIDE" Perspective <ul style="list-style-type: none">Self-presentation, directed outwards - from the inside out	"FROM THE OUTSIDE" Perspective <ul style="list-style-type: none">A kaleidoscope of perceptions from the external audience through individual perception filters (distorted and enriched by feelings, sensations) directed "inward."Also an internal perspective on oneself, on the place with which one is identified (self-image)	"FROM THE OUTSIDE" Perspective <ul style="list-style-type: none">Collectively accepted perspective directed inward
Co-CREATED <ul style="list-style-type: none">Co-produced, formed through interactive processes between people and the place, as well as among people themselves	REFINED AND TRANSFORMED <ul style="list-style-type: none">Modification of transmitted information.Effect of narrowing and expanding reality	ADOPTED <ul style="list-style-type: none">Arises from collective beliefs and opinions shaped by social factors

Source: own elaboration



CONCLUSIONS

This study sheds light on the nature of the interconnections and the semantic boundaries between the concepts of place identity, place image and place reputation. The examination of the relationships between these constructs was based on a meta-synthesis of 153 predominantly empirical studies, most of which examined these concepts individually. The research revealed that the delineation of place identity, place image and place reputation varies considerably depending on the perspective chosen by the authors, which can lead to confusion in the study and especially in the interpretation of the results.

This study considers place image as a subjective reflection of an objectively defined identity. In other words, image is the perception of identity, its reflection in the individual's consciousness, encompassing both cognitive and evaluative dimensions. Place identity is understood as a set of elements and attributes that characterise and differentiate a given territory from others. Place reputation represents the highest level of generalisation of territorial perception. It is "formed" as a consensual evaluation by external audiences into a collectively accepted dichotomous assessment: "good" or "bad" reputation. We have also shown that a common feature of the triad of evaluated concepts is their reliance on people who are their bearers and thus cannot be perceived separately from the social context. Their additional common and differentiating attributes are summarised in Table 1, which describes the basic theoretical framework of the concepts of place identity, image, and reputation applicable to place branding strategies, and place marketing and management aimed at enhancing the attractiveness of a place for potential target segments.

As shown in Figure 1, all three concepts are interconnected and interwoven. Put simply, place reputation is a highly generalised representation of the broad range of place image sub-attributes. Place image, in turn, is the perception of the attributes as modified by the individual perceptual filters of each person. Place identity attributes are considered strategic for achieving a desirable place image and a positive place reputation through coordinated and consistent communication. Understanding their interrelationships is therefore deemed crucial for effective place management, particularly for place branding, which must be based on a holistic approach and an understanding of the synergy within the triad of place identity, image, and reputation that forms its core.

In summary, the theoretical insights gained from this research underscore the importance of a holistic approach to place branding, one that integrates the dynamic and fluid nature of place identity, the subjective perceptions of place image, and the generalised evaluations of place reputation. By acknowledging and leveraging these interconnections, stakeholders can effectively foster attractive, competitive, and prosperous places, ultimately improving the quality of life for residents and enhancing the appeal for investors, tourists and new residents.



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