

Brand Visual Identity in Architecture

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Abstract. The article presents brand visual identity research results in architectural designing. Architectural brand concept has been presented, the key visual features of architectural forms building the brand have been discussed. The method of creating the architectural brand visual model and the measurements of the brand power in exemplary locations have been presented. The research is aimed at answering the following questions:

- What actions should be taken for an architectural form to shape a strong brand i.e. so that the brand is noticed and appreciated as a significant element of the city attractiveness?
- What should be done to improve the quality of architecture as a brand i.e. the ability to create competitive advantage of the location?

Keywords: architecture, brand, visual identity.

1 Problem

The city brand is created by many features such as the city appearance, life quality in the city, citizens' income, public space standard, municipal transport, services and cultural attractions offered by the city. The article focuses on a significant brand element, namely the appearance of architecture creating the city visual identity.

The research presented is based on the assumption that the architectural surroundings visual identity builds the strong city brand.

The research is aimed at the identification of architecture visual features which have impact on strong city brand.

Landscape research from architectural-urban perspective is most frequently identified with the analysis of visual assets of landscape interiors. Most of this research is based on landscape perception theories originating from the 19th century gestaltism (Gestalt psychology). The emphasis is placed on such landscape features as the degree of diversification, simplicity and the complexity of landscape forms, rhythm, harmony, contrast, composition axes and dominant features, plan view sequence. Attention should be paid to the attempts of landscape quality measurement based on the view analyses. Teledetection analysis of landscape forms may serve as an example [1]. Photos are used here for visual qualitative interpretation of photomorphic units (PMU). Picture analysis relates to such picture features as shape, size, contrast, colour, texture and interconnecting relations. This direction of landscape research has

developed extensively on the basis of intuitive assessments of photographic image, consisting in the selection of hierarchically linked qualitative features. SBE Scenic Beauty Estimation by Terry and Boster [2], used for the assessment of natural landscapes, may serve as an example. VAC Visual Absorption Capacity [3] and LS Landscape Sensitivity [4] techniques are developed on similar assumptions. The LPR Landscape Pattern Recognition method presents an interesting approach [5].

In the above mentioned research landscape visual quality is the combination of the communicative (informational) function and meaning-related (symbolic) function. The landscape brand (brandscape) may be a trigger of reflections and emotions of a person watching the landscape - it may inspire cognitive processes, allow for finding something more than registered by the eye only, for finding identity in the elements of architectural narrative. Elaborating on Arnheim observations [6], visual identity may be considered a method existing between image presentation of space and experiencing its uniqueness. The motif of visual identity appears in works on mediatization of contemporary reality. From this perspective architecture has the power of visual promotion, building identity by strong media impact [7]. The attempt of new insight into visual identity which could be referred to as the photo vision machine is worth noticing [8]. Here emotional dimension of the message, based on "visual thinking" described by Arnheim matters in particular [9]. It includes not only architecture but also film arts, multimedia and graphics. From this perspective the visual identity is a metaphysical symbol describing the space structure, investigating relations between culture, history and space. Therefore, significant visual features of architectural brand may be distinguished:

- visual categorization - assigning symbols to a defined group of messages,
- visual hierarchization - creating a defined structure of ontological dependencies.

Visual identity may thus be a synthesis of knowledge about the world where architectural brand serves the function of a special space quantifier. Two elements make the brand function understood this way:

- the collection of symbols which characterize the urban landscape in a unique way,
- visual features of architectonic forms being the scenery of landscape interiors.

The purpose of the study is to demonstrate that visual features of architecture may be an effective tool creating the city brand owing to the combination of informative function with expression, persuasion, interpretation of cultural and social specifics of the city.

The area of research query comprises central area of the city of Poznan, most characteristic districts: Wilda, Jezyce, Nowe Miasto and Solacz.

Municipal marketing promoting beneficial image of the city is most often identified with the creation of less or more effective tourism promotions, press and TV advertisements. Visual quality of urban landscape is one of the most effective marketing tools. The attractive appearance of architectural surroundings allures tourists, new citizens and investors. Ugly architecture, composition chaos and repelling views - scare people away. Poor city landscape brand lowers real estate prices and discourages investors.

From marketing perspective, architectural form is a clear sign, the meaning of which corresponds with the product brand. Branded products are distinguished by one of a kind visual features which create their unique identity. One clear analogy between architectural facilities and other products intended for consumer market (such as cars, clothes, furniture etc.) may be noticed in this respect. The appearance of architectural facilities is significant for the following reasons: promotion (it attracts the attention of potential tourists, citizens and customers), value (it presents unique assets connected with tradition and culture), identification (it allows for distinguishing themselves against the competition).

Strong brand gives competitive advantage, it helps to create a positive market image, it wins customers, it helps to identify and recognize a product. All these features refer to an architectural form as a brand giving competitive advantage to the space in which it is located. Thus the appearance of architectural surroundings builds the city brand. Architecture characterized by identity acquires specific nature as a kind of promotional message which is supposed to attract tourists', citizens' and investors' attention. The architecture stemming from the tradition and culture is the evidence of the value of the place in which it was built. Therefore, it is so important to create one's own, unique architecture image as a brand connected with the location. The brand identity in architectural designing inheres in this.

2 Method

The research method comprises:

- a) Architectural brand identity analysis - the creation of the brand model for city of Poznan.
- b) Architectural - urban query used for the assessment of brand power on the basis of a representative sample.
- c) Comparison of the as is condition with the brand model.
- d) Conclusions and recommendations.

Defining architectural brand identity distinguishing Poznan metropolitan area is the starting point for the proposed research model.

Brand identity is, above all, the reflection of the mental brand image connected with the location. It presents the values which space should offer to a person. Brand identity is thus connected with aspirations, personality, system of values, citizen culture. In also involves symbolic and emotional values [10].

The next research step is the visual brand identification. Visual brand identification is connected with the set of architectural form attributes which create the surroundings visual image.

The next stage of research is the measurement of relations between the brand identity and architectural visual brand identification. This stage is used for creating the model of architectural brand for a defined location.

The gap between the brand identity and the brand visual identification attests to the failure to match architecture with the location context. The effect is poor architecture brand.

The most important features building architectural brand identity include:

C₁) *Uniqueness* – distinction of local architecture from competitive equivalents.

Exposing such values as the place tradition, the atmosphere of urban interiors, unique expression. Individualization of architectural details, characteristic proportions of urban interiors, intimate scale, interesting merging with local surroundings may serve as an example.

The uniqueness connected with local tradition is a potential source of new creative inspirations which may be interpreted in an innovative manner, enriching the contemporary appearance of the space, giving an individualized nature to it.

C₂) *Familiarity* – shaping architectural surroundings through the prism of habits and experiences of recipients (consumers). Familiarity is significant for social acceptance of architecture, it evokes citizens' strong relations with a house, street, district and city. The feeling of familiarity has a beneficial impact on strengthening of social bonds, safety condition, care for common good.

C₃) *Personification* – the possibility of using architectural surroundings bearing the hallmarks of one's own tastes and systems of values. It is the expression of difference and original likes of citizens.

Characteristic appearance of such architectural elements as fences, entries to buildings and flats, pedestals, cornices, balcony decorations, facade colours etc. are the display of architectural personification, the expression of aspiration, taste and ambition of citizens, owners of houses, shops, cafes.

Personification displays itself in:

the style referring to citizens' preferences,

architectural forms referring to likes and sensitivity of local community.

C₄) *Prestige* - subjective feeling of satisfaction connected with interacting with "branded" architecture, giving the feeling of pride, importance and respect.

C₅) *Legibility* - the essence of legibility is enabling people clear and precise image of space, owing to architectural forms, combining composition and functional assets in an orderly manner. Within this meaning, architectural facilities are recognizable elements of spatial structure. Legibility means good orientation in the surroundings and it allows for recognizing the role and importance of a particular architectural form in urban structure.

It is directed at friendly and comprehensible perception of spatial impressions. Legible architecture creates a more comprehensible environment, providing a bigger number of emotional stimuli.

C₆) *Cultural identification* - the system of symbolic and emotional values, being the result of identification with culture, tradition, history and collective memory of the location. Cultural identification is an important element of stylistic autonomy in architecture,

C₇) *Fashion* - the wish to attract attention by "being in vogue". At first impulse, the willingness to distinguish oneself from surroundings is a stimulus creating fashion. This is a stage of *distinguishing* and it comprises a small group of pieces of

art designed by the elite of worldwide architects. This is owing to them that some architectural forms become fashionable. Next, elite fashion is copied more and more extensively and it becomes mass fashion. Imitation results from subconscious desire for identification with fashionable patterns. Finally, mass fashion gets out of date, people turn away from previously fashionable patterns, they search for new fashion.

The importance of the above mentioned factors for building architectural brand identity at the area of Poznan metropolitan area was determined by questionnaire surveys.

The surveys covered the group of 50 respondents: architects, developers, real estate agents. The question referred to which factors give competitive advantage and thus have impact on long-lasting increase in the space value. Each expert was asked to indicate three, in his/her opinion, most important factors building architectural brand, from amongst seven listed possibilities.

The applied survey procedure was based on standard methods of qualitative measurements of brand image (*freelist*), broadly described in the reference literature [11], [12]. Table 1 presents survey results.

Table 1. The ranks of architecture brand identity building features at the area of Poznan

<i>Feature that builds the identity of an architectural brand</i>		Wilda District		Jezyce District		Nowe Miasto District		Solacz District	
		Number of indications	Feature significance	Number of indications	Feature significance	Number of indications	Feature significance	Number of indications	Feature significance
C ₁	Uniqueness	80	67,23	108	100,00	30	66,67	91	75,83
C ₂	Familiarity	78	65,55	96	88,89	18	40,00	105	87,50
C ₃	Personification	65	54,62	71	65,74	27	60,00	120	100,00
C ₄	Prestige	25	21,01	45	41,67	13	28,89	89	74,17
C ₅	Legibility	76	63,87	58	53,70	36	80,00	95	79,17
C ₆	Cultural identification	119	100,00	94	87,04	12	26,67	89	74,17
C ₇	Fashion	18	15,13	25	23,15	45	100,00	15	12,50

The research was conducted with respect to four districts of the city of Poznan: Wilda, Jezyce, Nowe Miasto and Solacz. These districts distinguish themselves with characteristic urban landscape which is the reflection of unique tradition and history. Thus in each district the importance of partial elements influencing the place identity is different.

3 Brand Visual Identification

Brand visual identification is aimed at answering the question what makes some architectural facilities considered branded ones and others not? What visual features prejudice that we can say of a given building that it is distinguished by strong brand identity? Visual features of a building emphasize its *Uniqueness* (C₁), *Familiarity* (C₂), *Personification* (C₃), *Prestige* (C₄), *Legibility* (C₅), *Cultural Identification* (C₆), *Fashion* (C₇). Therefore, it is about the assessment which visual attributes make a building have strong brand. The answer to this question comes from the theory of construction of architectural forms and research linking these forms to the location.

Based on reference literature [13], [14] 20 standard visual attributes of a building regarding colour, material, texture, scale, articulation, roof shape, cornices and balconies, composition structure were distinguished. These features are significant elements of architectural design.

The following visual features of buildings were taken into account:

- color of the facade consistent with the background,
- color of the facade in contrast with the background,
- material: brick,
- material: wood,
- material: plaster,
- material: glass + aluminum,
- material: stone,
- flat roof,
- sloping roof,
- bay windows and balconies,
- dominant cornice,
- elevation devoid of ornament,
- ornament on the façade,
- rhythmical façade,
- horizontal articulation,
- vertical articulation,
- small scale,
- large scale,
- traditional detail,
- modern detail.

Next, the measurement of relations between the building visual attributes and factors shaping brand identity was made. The expert assessment comprises 140 inter-factor relations. Standard qualitative measurement methods based on Likert scale [15] were used for the research. As a result (Fig. 1), diagrams showing which visual attributes of buildings exert a bigger impact on brand identity in particular districts of Poznan were obtained. These diagrams constitute a kind of architectural brand models, determined for districts subject to research.

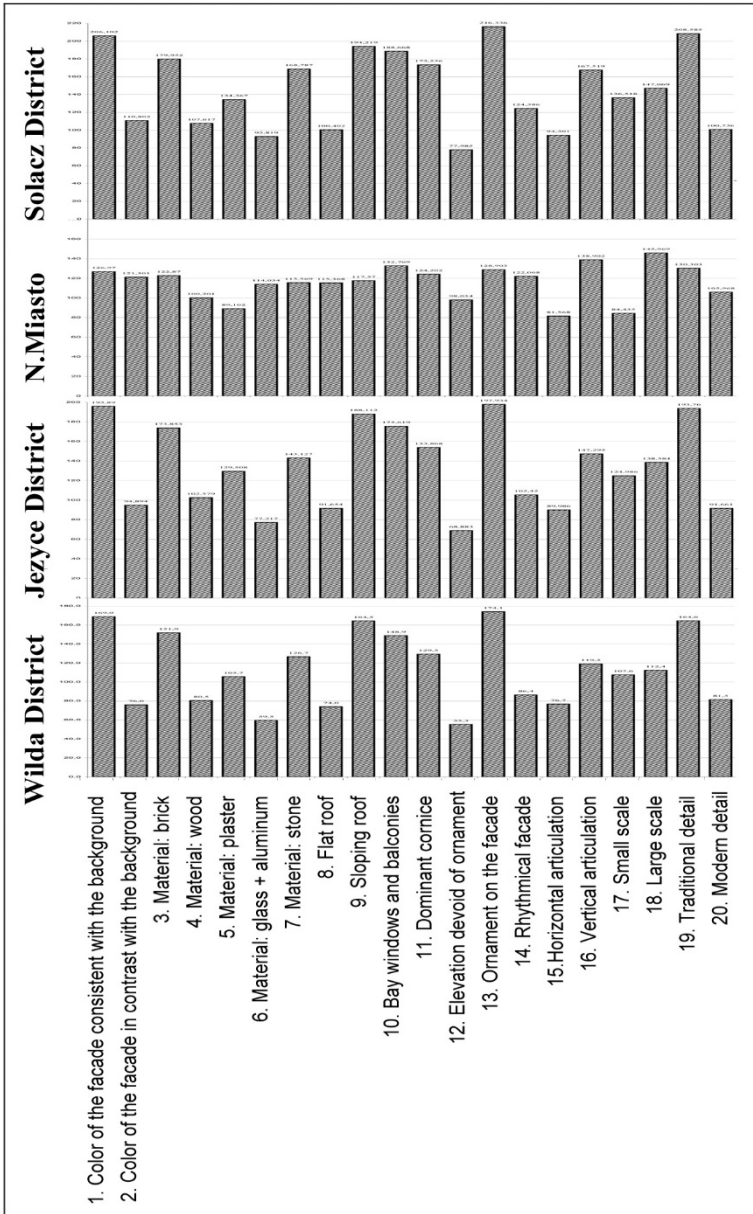


Fig. 1. Model of architectural brand for the examined districts of Poznan: Wilda District, Jezyce District, Nowe Miasto District, Solacz District. Diagrams show which visual attributes of buildings exert a bigger impact on brand identity in particular districts.

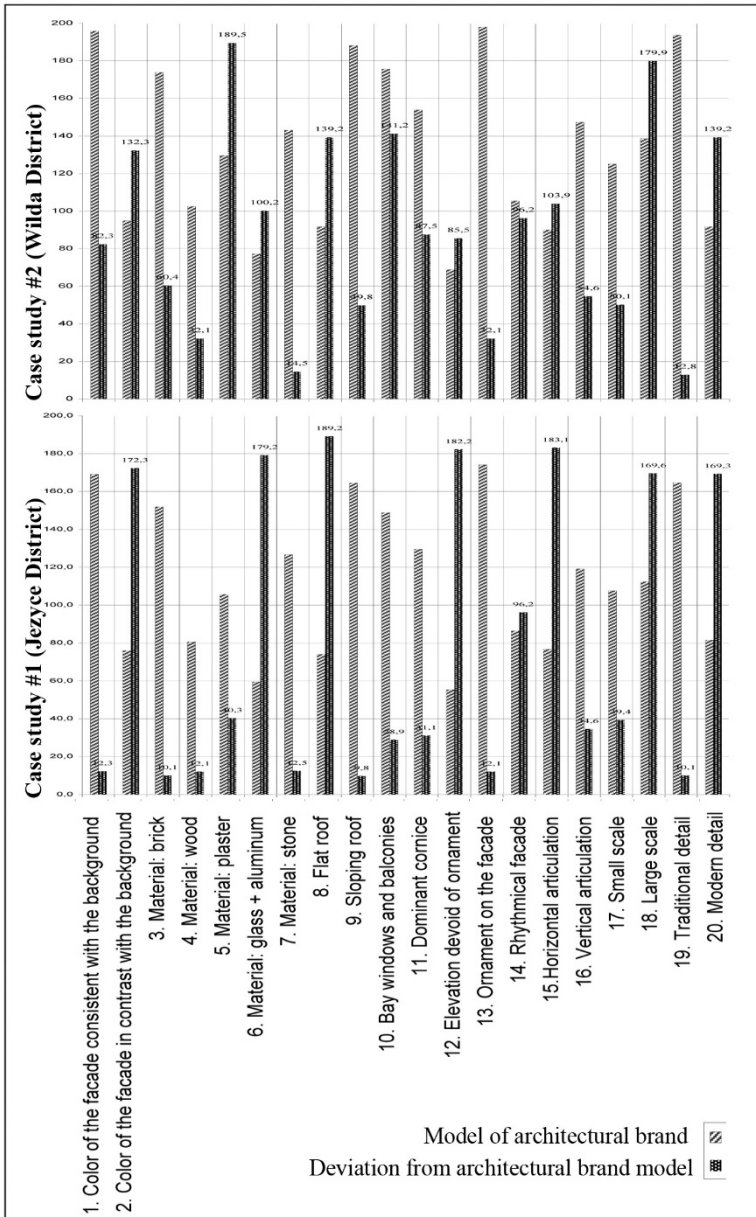


Fig. 2. Deviation from the model of an architectural brand. Results of measurements comparing visual identity of new developments executed over the past 10 years with architectural brand model.

Then visual features of newly built buildings were compared with the brand model in order to determine whether new architecture contributes to the creation of urban landscape (cityscape) visual identity of particular districts of Poznan.

Figure 2 presents the results of measurements comparing visual identity of new developments executed over the past 10 years with generated brand model. The result analysis allows to assess whether and to what extent visual features of new architectural designs build cityscape brand identity in particular districts of Poznan.

4 Conclusions

The brand model prepared was used for the assessment of visual identity of architectural brand of new developments in selected districts of Poznan. Research showed that a substantial majority of new developments is placed within the average and low value.

In particular districts new developments are standardized with respect to style, specific visual features connected with local traditions, characteristic colours and unique materials are disappearing.

New developments cause standardization of urban landscape, the fading of visual diversity influencing architectural brand identity. These are the factors reducing the city attractiveness for tourists, new citizens and investors. For this reason, research conducted should be used by designers, investors and self-government authorities in order to improve the landscape brand (brandscape) of Poznan.

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