

## **Identification between Individuals and Places of Residence**

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## **Identification between individuals and places of residence**

Competition between cities for population, tourists, investors and enterprises that create values has been intensifying in the past few years. The success factor encompasses social cohesion of regions, which includes local identity awareness. Winning citizens and integrating them into marketing processes belong to primary tasks, since this has several roles in place marketing. This article attempts to determine factor groups reflecting identification of citizens with their settlements and to define elements determining identification.

*Keywords: identity, identification, place branding, identification factors*

## **Research problems and research objectives**

Competition between cities for population, tourists, investors and enterprises that create values has been intensifying in the past few years. The success factor encompasses social cohesion of regions (Lengyel, 2000) which includes local identity awareness, 'self-image' and 'we-awareness'. Taking into consideration the recent city research, it can be claimed that stronger identity awareness promotes competitiveness, success and development of cities, regions and countries (Bierbaum, 2006).

What does identity mean? The concept of identity got into the centre of attention in the 1980s and since then it has been widely used. However, it is difficult to give a concise statement to the meaning of the word. This term has been widely applied in psychology, politics, sociology and marketing. In a narrow meaning, identity is 'to know oneself, to be known and to be acknowledged'. 'Identity is identity awareness; it means being aware 'who I am' and primarily, the awareness of the fact that I am me'. While socially interacting with others and experiencing others reactions, individuals realize their own existence and define themselves. A constituent component of identity is the group status and the social identity taken in a narrower meaning. Social identity is identification with a group, that is, there is a shift from 'I' to 'we'. (Bierbaum, 2006) Identity is the outcome of an integration process where self-identity is in balance with community identity.

As for the psychological approach of this concept, Aronson's theory is the most widely applied. He distinguishes three types of responses to social impact: conformity, identification and internalisation. The concept of identification is of great importance since the subject of influence wishes to be like the influencer. The individual believes in adopted opinions and values. Aronson considers the force of attraction to be the major component of identification. The influence identifies himself/herself with the model and would like to adopt the model's

views. (Aronson, 1987). The evolution of identity awareness and its strengthening in communities can be described on the basis of the principle of identity. (Bierbaum, 2006).

The above mentioned approach provides a theoretical basis for place marketing in order to promote the process of identification of residents, the major target group, with their place of living. Capturing inhabitants is extremely essential since inhabitants are a constituent part of a place product and are one of the place attributes (planned and actual) of identity. It is the residents that make up a major target group of the place. In addition, they are communicators and even ambassadors for their place (Braun et al., 2010). This means that inhabitants should be integrated in marketing processes and their relation to their place of living should be consciously crafted. One of the ways to do this is to apply place branding which provides a theoretical basis for dual approach to identity. According to the first approach, place identity is a mental representation of places and a cognitive construction existing in the individual's mind, which identifies and differentiates. This can be interpreted as a place personality. The second approach considers that identity is identification of individuals with their place of living and a feeling of connection to the place and interdependence with it (Piskóti, 2012). The picture about the place created in the head of individuals plays an essential part in choosing a place, since decision-making is image based. The process of identification can start only after a mental picture has already been shaped.

Places should make every effort to make themselves different from their competitors. The task of place marketing is to consciously position a particular place. Besides this, more emphasis should be placed on personal experiences than on a rational decision-making process in terms of consumer decisions. Brands offer exactly this to their customers, namely, experiences that other products fail to offer or they provide them of a poorer quality. That is the reason why branding practices ensure success for place marketing: finding unique

characteristics of a place and shaping them promotes competitiveness of that particular place. (Boros, 2010)

The branding definition is as follows: “a network of associations in the consumers’ mind based on the visual, verbal, and behavioural expression of a place, which is embodied through the aims, communication, values, and the general culture of the place’s stakeholders and the overall place design. Essential for this definition is that a brand is not in reality the communicated expression or the ‘place physics’, but the perception of those expressions in the mind of the target group(s).” (Zenker et al., 2010).

Different target audiences have their own distinct values and perceptions regarding place branding and places since they have different expectations for places and the depth and wideness of their experience acquired about the place differ. According to the Social Identity Theory in-group members develop stereotype associations regarding a particular place, whereas out-group members experience and perceive this in a differentiated way and from several aspects (Tajfel and Turner, 1986).

It is important to find out what different target groups expect from a particular place, what factors they consider to be important, what factors trigger identification and what factors can ‘ring a bell’. The process of identification should be investigated in order to channel the relationship between residents and their place in a positive direction by applying marketing tools. The inhomogeneous composition of target audiences makes implementing this aim difficult.

This paper is based on partial results of mapping and overall research conducted in the field of social marketing in Hungary. The objective of the research is to identify social problems of great concern, to analyse people’s involvement and to measure health and environmental awareness of Hungarians.

In addition to the above mentioned objectives, this paper attempts to develop an identification model and its components explaining identification of residents with their place and to identify correlations between them. This paper provides only such partial results as partial coherence of the identification model, identification factor groups ensuring assistance with designing effective place branding, compares the importance of identification factors with their satisfaction rate, the knowledge of which provides bases for defining directions of product development of places and their communication.

### **Research method and discussion**

A questionnaire survey was conducted and responses were evaluated. The data were collected in Hungary in July and August 2011. About 1603 people over the age of 18 were sampled with 95 per cent confidence level and with  $\pm 2.45$  per cent error limits. The survey was representative and was broken down by gender, age groups, place types and regions.

The results of sociological and socio-psychological research, namely TORA, the theory of reasoned action (Ajzen and Fishbein, 1980) and its version TPB, the theory of planned behaviour (Ajzen, 1985, 1991) provided bases for creating an investigation model supporting place marketing. Research into place marketing brings success for marketing, but it is in infancy in Hungary and this research has only partial results at international level as well. The theory of social identity (Tajfel and Turner, 1986) also promoted the formulation of the model. A scale elaborated by Kahle was used to analyse the scale of values of Hungarian residents (List of Values – LOV) (Kahle, 1983).

The bases the research questions were formulated were as follows:

What is the place level the Hungarian population is committed to?

What attributes are considered to be the most important in terms of identification?

How satisfied are the residents with their place of living?

What is the migration willingness of the population like?

What communication sources do residents use to get information about their place of living?

How satisfied are the residents with the communication of their place?

While conducting analyses of the research information we were looking for an answer to the question whether general values had any impact on the importance of identification factors and on the satisfaction with them. We were also interested in whether there was any connection between commitment and migration willingness. We also made attempts to find out whether migration willingness could be explained by factor importance, satisfaction with factors or general values.

Relationships in the initial partial model have only been partially justified and are illustrated below:

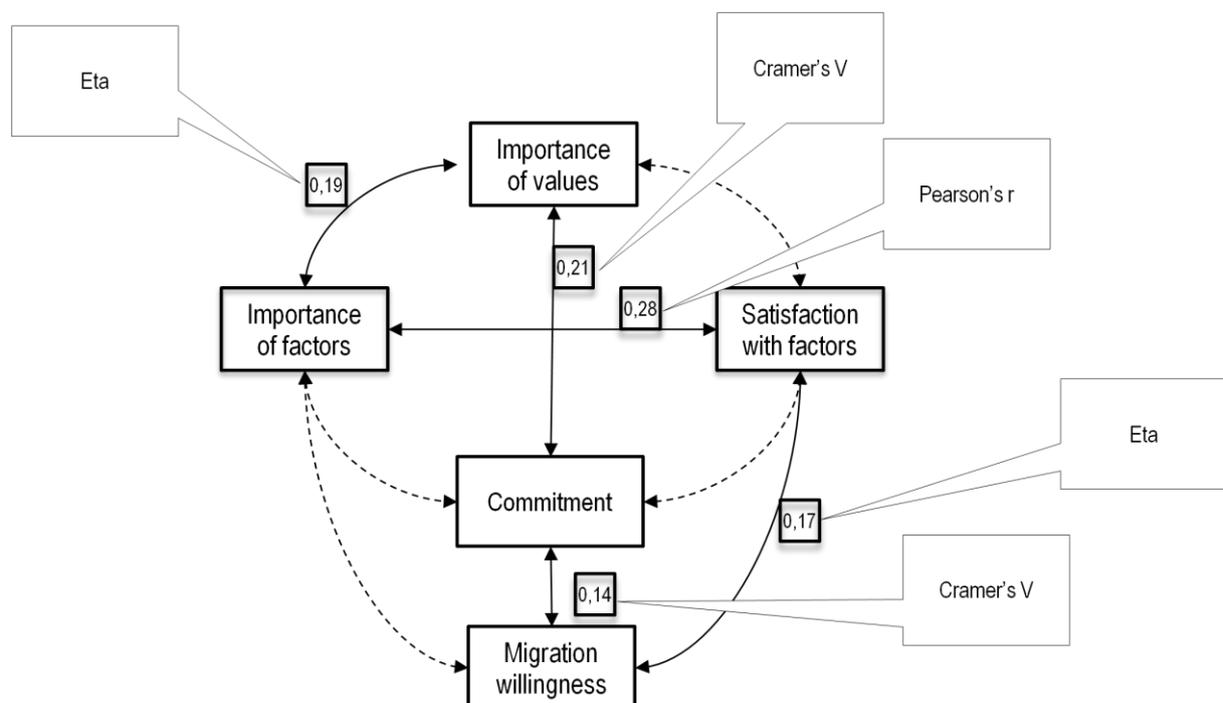


Figure 1 Partial model of population and place identification  
Source: Developed on the basis of research results

A weak and positive correlation justifies our assumptions claiming that the responded values determine commitments of residents to their place of living and the importance of identification factor. Migration willingness is partly explained by satisfaction/dissatisfaction with factors and commitments to the place in case of a poor and positive correlation. The broken lines illustrate the lack of correlation and require further analyses.

The participants of the research evaluated thirty-six factors regarding their extent of identification with their place of living. They classified particular factors by importance. Responses show that the factors that had the strongest impact force were public security, tidiness and job opportunities. These factors were closely followed by access to health services, public transport, natural conditions and geographical location of the place.

A factor analysis was conducted with the help of the Varimax rotation. After ten iterations had been performed, thirty-six factors got formed into six factors. (Total Variance Explained: 62,525)

Factor names are as follows:

1. Place management (work of major's office, work of municipality members, environmentally conscious place development, liveliness and democracy of local public life, local rules and regulations, health conscious place development)
2. Services (entertainment facilities, leisure sports facilities, public transport and parking facilities, shopping facilities, public institutions, place picture and architecture attraction, restaurants and hospitality, tourist attraction, residents' friendliness)
3. 'Plus' (cultural and art life, existence and standard of higher institutions, success of competition sports, presence and standard of higher education, fairness and activity of the local media, famous people of place, development and operation of civil sphere)

4. 'Essentials' (job facilities, public education, health and public security, health care and services, public security, economic development, place tidiness)
5. 'Atmosphere' (natural characteristics, history and traditions, geographical location and accessibility)
6. Environment (quality of the environment and surroundings, real estate features, standard of infrastructure, demographic features of the population)
7. Price level (property prices, plenty of residents)

Particular factors were analysed in details by a variation analysis and a PostHoc test. As a result, a correlation between demographic factors was experienced.

The results of the age factor are as follows: in the case of the environmental factor, the older the respondents were, the lower the mean values were, and thus components belonging to this factor are not so essential. As for the price factor, the situation is quite the opposite. The older the respondents were, the more important this factor became. As far as the 'Essentials' and 'Atmosphere' factors are concerned, the respondents between the age of 31 and 45 gave values lower than the mean. They interpreted these factors as basic expectations, whereas the respondents belonging to the age group of 46-60, thought these two factors were important.

There is a significant correlation between the type of the place and several factors. Residents living in county seats laid more emphasis on 'Place management', 'Services' and 'Atmosphere' than the ones that lived in other places. Respondents from cities did not consider 'Place management' to be as important as the mean, whereas in the case of people from smaller places this figure was higher than the mean.

Profound analyses of factors by regions were also conducted. The findings are as follows:

The 'Place management' had the lowest value in Southern Transdanubia and was considered to be the least important factor. The respondents from the Southern Hungarian Plain, Northern Hungary, Central Transdanubia and Northern Transdanubia make up a middle group. Inhabitants from Central Hungary considered this factor to be more important than the mean. 'Services' received the highest mean in the Northern Hungarian Plain and the lowest one in Southern and Northern Transdanubia. The other regions made up a middle group. The 'Plus' factor received significantly higher scores in Central Hungary and the lowest scores in the Northern Hungarian Plain. 'Essentials' belong to the most important factors in the Southern Hungarian Plain and Northern Hungary. Other significant differences in the case of this factor were not experienced. The 'Atmosphere' factor received low rating only in Northern Transdanubia. The means of the environmental factor shifted in the positive direction in the Northern Hungarian Plain and in Southern Transdanubia. In Northern Hungary the price factor was considered to provide a poor basis for identification.

**Rotated Component Matrix<sup>a</sup>**

	Component						
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Work of the major's office	,730						
Environmentally conscious place development	,709						
Work of municipality members	,686						
Liveliness and democracy of local public life	,679						
Local rules and regulations	,670						
Health conscious place development	,653						
Entertainment facilities		,716					
Leisure sports facilities		,611					
Public transport and parking facilities		,611					
Shopping facilities		,605					
Restaurants and hospitality		,598					
Place picture and architecture attraction		,563					
Public institutions		,518					
Tourist attraction		,441					
Residents' friendliness		,350					
Cultural and art life			,786				
Success of competition sports			,731				
Presence and standard of higher education			,666				
Fairness and activity of the local media			,580				
Famous people of place			,521				
Development and operation of civil sphere			,487				
Job opportunities				,754			
Health care and services				,740			
Public security				,590			
Public education facilities				,515			
Economic development				,503			
Place tidiness				,477			
Natural characteristics					,688		
Geographical location and accessibility					,681		
History and traditions					,649		
Demographic features of the population						,696	
Standard of infrastructure						,621	
Real estate features						,474	
Quality of environment and surroundings						,383	
Property prices							,678
Plenty of residents							,640
<b>Total Variance Explained:</b>	<b>62,525</b>						

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis

a. Rotation converged in 10 iterations.

**Table I Components of Identification Factors**  
Source: Developed on the basis of the research results

In the following stage of our analysis we compared the importance of factors with satisfaction with them by factors and components. This was induced by extreme values in the case of both importance and satisfaction evaluations (importance scores were 4.49 and 3; satisfaction scores were 3.65 and 2.76)

The results of component factors are illustrated graphically in Figure 1. Since all component groups were considered to be important, relative differences were analysed. Relatively the content of the 'Plus' factor is considered to be least important in terms of strengthening identification. The most important factor is 'Essentials', the components of which provide bases for everyday life. It is followed by the 'Atmosphere', 'Environment' and 'Services' factors. 'Place management' and 'Price' are at the bottom of the quarter.

From the considerations above it follows that 'Atmosphere' is considered to be the most important factor with the highest satisfaction score. The most critical place is taken by 'Essentials', since it comprises the most important components with the lowest satisfaction score. 'Environment' and 'Services' factors show slightly better values; however, their satisfaction figures are still low. 'Place management', 'Plus' and Price factors can be found in the less important range with low satisfaction values, thus, they do not belong to the current weight point areas.

Taking into consideration the above mentioned information it should be claimed that experts involved in place marketing should pay attention to the importance of the 'Essentials', 'Atmosphere', 'Environment' and 'Services' factors whose high standard can be formulated as fundamental expectations. Development of competencies required by these areas and their proper and efficient communication is mandatory.

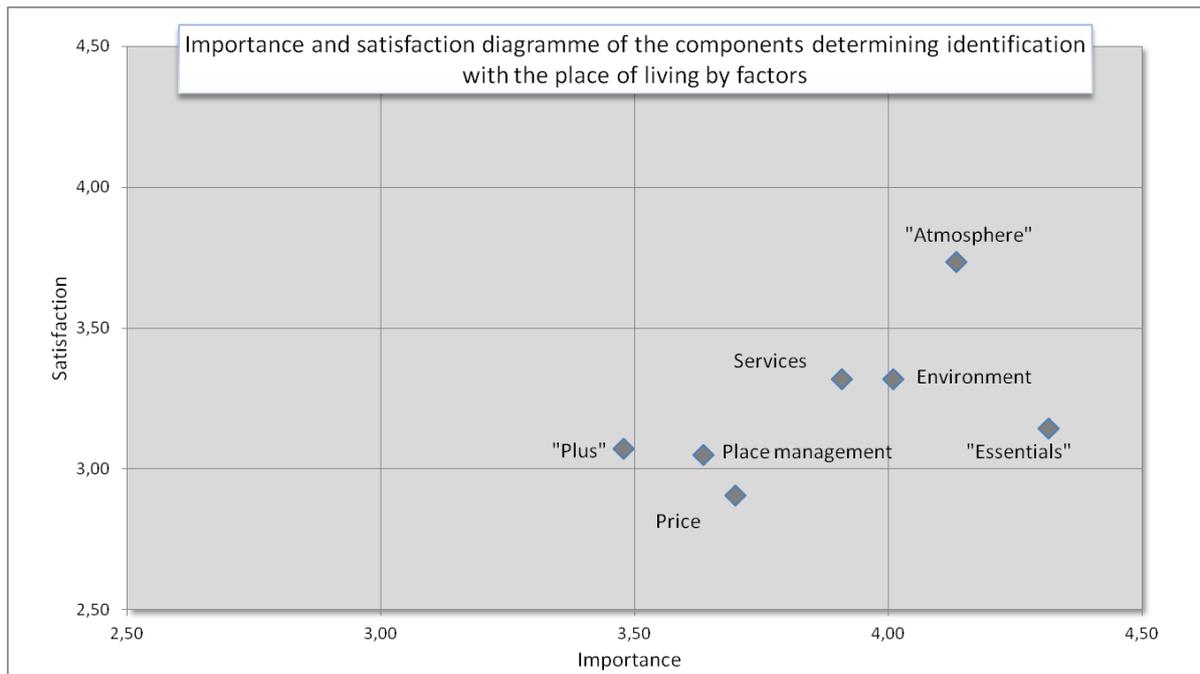


Figure 2 Importance and satisfaction matrix of identification components by factors  
 Source: Developed on the basis of the research results

## Conclusions

One of the areas of social marketing is place marketing, which has become a major issue in the current global place competition. It is a general statement that hard, soft, psychological and social psychological phenomena provide an explanation for differences experienced in economic performance and competition positions. One of these phenomena at place level is identity awareness of the population and their identification with the place, which according to the current research conducted in the field of cities, exert a direct impact on the success factor. More and more places with similar attributes participate in place competitions. As a result of this, a place has to surpass its competitors in some way. The task of place marketing and perhaps the most important one, is conscious positioning of the place alongside with winning the local residents, who make up a constituent part, a target group and are ‘marketers’ of the place. Identifying their preferences, satisfaction and identification processes with the place are an essential condition for successful marketing activities. We

have found partial correlations to our model attempting to provide an explanation for identification of residents and place, which require conducting analyses in further directions and involving additional factors. Findings of our research and analyses contribute to determining the directions of developing local products, to defining the communication content and to promoting the success of branding processes.

### **Implications for Business Marketing Practice**

Capturing inhabitants is extremely essential since inhabitants are a constituent part of a place product and are one of the place attributes (planned and actual) of identity. It is the residents that make up a major target group of the place. In addition, they are communicators and even ambassadors for their place. This means that inhabitants should be integrated in marketing processes and their relation to their place of living should be consciously crafted.

The task of place marketing and perhaps the most important one, is conscious positioning of the place alongside with winning the local residents, who make up a constituent part, a target group and are 'marketers' of the place. Identifying their preferences, satisfaction and identification processes with the place are an essential condition for successful marketing activities. Findings of our research and analyses contribute to determining the directions of developing local products, to defining the communication content and to promoting the success of branding processes.

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