

PROMOTION OF ENVIRONMENTAL ACTIONS AND ATTITUDES IN POLISH CITIES

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Purpose: The cognitive aim of this article was to elucidate the importance of ecological marketing endeavours within urban settings for fostering city identity, as well as to accentuate the role of residents in environmental stewardship within the city. The objective of the study was to determine how cities promote pro-environmental actions and attitudes among various consumer groups.

Design/methodology/approach: Primary research employed the CAWI method, utilizing a proprietary questionnaire. The study was conducted in 2022. The subjects of the study were cities in Poland. The questionnaire was distributed to all cities, and the analysis was performed on 414 returned and properly completed questionnaires. The presented results constitute a segment of the entire research.

Findings: Cities clearly focus on social media and their own publications for promotion. A large part of the activities is directed at residents, especially the youngest ones. This is manifested in the organisation of festivals and events for residents of all ages. Events of various types are organised on a fairly large scale in cities (picnics, family events, city days, festivals), with environmental issues as their main theme. Encouraging ecological activity and raising awareness also occurs, albeit to a much lesser extent, through activities targeting teachers, business representatives, or employees working in municipal offices. However, what stands out is the low level of cooperation with non-profit and business entities in the area of pro-environmental activities.

Research limitations/implications: The study was quantitative in nature; future research could be expanded to include qualitative studies that would more specifically pinpoint the initiatives undertaken in the city regarding the promotion of pro-environmental actions and green city marketing.

Originality/value: This paper is directed at all individuals interested in environmental marketing, especially city mayors, who are responsible for promotion within cities.

Keywords: green marketing, environmental marketing of cities, ecology promotion, city identity.

Category of the paper: research paper.

1. Introduction

The deterioration of environmental quality, felt effects of pollution accumulation such as smog, noise, waste issues, and the high costs of pollution neutralization have compelled cities to seek alternative development paths. The question of reorientation to environmental considerations is influenced not only by economic and business factors, but also by social issues related to the depopulation of most cities in Poland and changes in ecological awareness in society. These are the premise for cities to reorient their approach to environmental issues. International, political, and economic conditions also played a significant role, triggering the search for new development concepts, including urban development. Environmental dilemmas are not only a problem for city authorities but also for residents and other stakeholders who influence the quality of the natural environment in the city. Therefore, territorial marketing should not only focus on ecological actions but also on building ecological awareness among residents.

Ecology in human life may have various dimensions - intellectual, moral, moral, legal and economic. Ecology transcends mere tangible actions, encompassing all ideas of human development in the world. The severe and progressive degradation of the natural environment, a result of past economic and social progress, poses a significant threat to the sustainability of life on Earth. Conversely, continuous economic development is deemed a necessary condition for improving human quality of life and constructing a civilization based on information and knowledge. The relationship between the realm of technological and economic progress and that of natural environmental conditions is dichotomous. For cities and their inhabitants, not only the global environmental state matters but, more importantly, the micro-world related to living conditions in a specific city. Hence, the primacy of ecological actions has become a significant element of cities' image strategy. On the one hand, the European Union's ecological requirements force cities to implement specific pro-environmental solutions; on the other hand, promoting ecological behaviours among groups that are stakeholders of the city is another issue, not necessarily related to the requirements of EU structures. Managing a city and its environment is not a simple task. Environmental management involves the management of the use, protection, and shaping of the environment (Deluga, 2015). Many cities struggle with limited budgets, which impacts the quality of pro-environmental investments. In cities, in addition to shaping the environment, it is also crucial to form ecological attitudes and awareness among residents and other groups related to the city, as they significantly influence the city's environmental state.

The human approach to ecology is shaped by many factors, including the environment in which one lives, the family background from which one comes from (Kłosowska, 2000). The way ecological ideas are conveyed by the educational system and media also matters. Through the media, we enter the world of ecology, understand the symbolism of the message,

and learn the norms governing the world. Throughout life, individuals assimilate the principles of social resocialization, participating, often unconsciously, in the cultural shaping of their own personality (Niziołek, 2015). The way environmental issues and possible solutions are communicated by city authorities also significantly influences the formation of ecological attitudes. Hence, perceiving green policy through green practices is of great importance (Chang, Chen, Luan, Chen, 2019).

2. Ecological Marketing and Place Identity

Ecological marketing is a relatively new trend in marketing. It is crucial to understand marketing from the perspective of social marketing, which assumes that an organisation will meet the needs, desires, and interests of target markets by delivering desired satisfaction more efficiently and effectively than competitors, but in such a way as to improve the well-being of both consumers and society simultaneously (Kotler, Keller, 2020). The previous marketing perspective, without

Without considering the social aspect, traditional marketing often overlooked the discrepancy between immediate consumer expectations and needs versus their long-term needs and existence. This prospective view becomes particularly vital in the era of environmental issues, resource scarcity, and the global climate crisis. Hence, incorporating an environmental perspective in marketing planning appears to be a necessity. The importance of communicative and promotional organizational actions aimed at supporting pro-environmental social campaigns, promoting a healthy lifestyle, and conveying information about the ecological and environmental aspects of an entity's activities also emerges (Pilarczyk, Nestorowicz, 2010; Papadas, Avlonitis, Carrigan, 2017). This social dimension of marketing also applies to entities such as cities. The essence of territorial marketing, in line with the relational paradigm, is creating a friendly community by initiating, maintaining, and enriching long-lasting ties between the city's stakeholders and local government units (Glińska, 2017). Territorial marketing is a directed and regularly conducted activity of local government administration and distinct services and institutions. In this activity, the desires and needs of the local community are recognized, shaped, and satisfied. Actions are tailored to the interests of residents, other groups of people, and economic entities (Szromnik, 2016). J. Gehl sees the relationship between the city and its beneficiaries as mutually dependent, stating that "first we shape cities, then they shape us" (Gehl, 2014). These reciprocal relations between stakeholders and the city stem from various factors (historical, economic, social) and can also be shaped by local government authorities.

Ecological territorial marketing should be one of the priorities for cities where environmental issues are a serious challenge. What is ecological marketing? R. Dahlstrom defines ecological marketing as the process of planning and executing the marketing mix to enable the consumption, production, distribution, promotion, packaging, and recycling of products in a way that maximally supports environmental protection (Dahlstrom, 2011). Similarly, R.M. Dangelico and D. Vocalelli define ecological marketing as the process of planning, implementing, and managing product development, pricing, promotion, and distribution in a manner that meets the criterion of satisfying consumer needs, achieving business objectives, and integrating these processes with the ecosystem (Dangelico, Vocalelli, 2017). It is crucial in the ecological marketing of cities to incorporate environmental issues into the city's identity. The ecological aspect is significant not only for providing adequate living conditions for residents and other groups associated with the city but also for the identity of people living in the area and their connection to the place.

Identity can be considered in terms of city, territorial, or regional identity. It is this identity that constitutes the authenticity of a place and has significant implications for the sense of belonging and the community's engagement with its environment. Incorporating environmental concerns into the identity of a city not only enhances its livability and attractiveness but also strengthens the community's commitment to sustainable development and ecological stewardship.

The subjective character of the identity of the place (Łuczak, Leśnik, 2021). A place is closely connected to a specific location and also carries an emotional resonance. It is natural for places to have their identity, which can be shaped over centuries or merely momentarily. Place identity can be defined as the core that integrates various values of a place, thus generating a bond between individuals and the place (Łuczak, Leśnik, 2021). The identity of the city is shaped by people and has an individual and subjective character, as it is primarily formed by the surrounding environment (Owerczuk, 2017).

The identity of place influences the formation of individual identity and collective identity. Each individual interacts with a place differently. In perception, the meaning of history, memories, associations, and surroundings, etc., play an important role (Pazder, 2008). A place should not be understood as a space in the physical sense, but as the sum of three elements: physical location, meanings attributed to it, and activities undertaken within it (Bańka, 2002). Place identity is a strong identification with one's place of residence, usually leading to the development of a sense of connection with the group inhabiting a given space. It is also the elusive atmosphere of a place that makes it achieve the highest degree of social acceptance. Thus, what obviously connects a place to public space in a social sense is the location and the activities undertaken there. Both places and public spaces (as understood here) have their locations and social actors who undertake actions in them. More debatable is the significance related to the place, which is directly linked to two other important categories: the identity of the place (and public space) and the *genius loci* (Bierwiazzonek, 2016, 2018). In this context,

an example can be the approach of Christian Norberg-Schulz, who sees *genius loci* as a component of place identity. According to the Norwegian architect, "genius loci is created by the meanings that buildings possess, which gather (within themselves) the characteristics of the place and make it close to man" (Norberg-Schulz, 1980). In such circumstances, at the expense of losing spatial identity, we receive a certain pseudo hyper-modernity. According to Auge, a place should have its specific identity, distinguished by having social and historical characteristics. The antithesis of this is the non-place as difficult to define, without any distinguishing features. This boundary between place and non-place is increasingly being crossed within the built spaces of structures and objects (Auge, 2008). In cities, there are more and more spaces that create non-places. According to J. Jacobs, urban space is a physical, social, and cultural area that encompasses places inhabited by people and elements of infrastructure and architecture. It is a comprehensive concept that considers both material structures and social interactions occurring in a given area. Urban space is where people live, work, meet, and cooperate (Jacobs, 1961).

In the context of competitiveness, productivity, and economic benefits, we begin to move more rapidly between home, its immediate surroundings, workplace, and recreation sites. We only perceive the inconveniences of personal life, overlooking the nuisances created by the urban environment. The most critical elements of the contemporary living environment become blurred, leaving only the dilemma associated with moving between them. Human streams in the open public space and architectural objects intersect in many directions (Gaweł, 2020). In this rush, living on the go, in the liquid modernity as Z. Bauman calls it (Bauman, 2006), pausing and feeling a connection with the place can be an important element of personal identity creation. The emotional bond is the most primal form of an individual's connection with the physical-spatial environment. A positive emotional bond with a place creates a safe attachment pattern. Moreover, attachment to a place provides a sense of control, creativity, mastery, privacy, significance, or tranquility. At the group level, there will be a spiritual connection with other people such as family, friends, communities, and culture. In addition to the affective dimension, the cognitive and behavioural dimensions play a significant role. In the former, these are specific meanings (feelings and symbols) of the place for an individual, the accuracy of place knowledge, and the intensity of beliefs. They are based on the physical experience of space, which encompasses real and symbolic relationships with other people. The behavioural dimension relates to the bond with the place, which is a function of an individual's activity in the environment, is a source of responsible behaviours, and forms a structure of purposeful behaviours on an individual and social level (Bańka, 2018).

One of the aspects that influence the identification of residents with the city and its various parts is the state of the natural environment and the approach of the city authorities to ecological issues. However, urban development strategies largely based on social (human) capital require municipal authorities to cooperate and encourage grassroots initiatives, especially in the area of pro-environmental actions. Cooperation and a sense of joint responsibility for the city are

related to the trust residents have in city authorities. The city's social capital allows the utilization of other forms of capital and creates relationships, builds connections, which lead to trust. Social capital thus also has significance in promoting pro-environmental behaviors and the ecological image of the city. People's ecological awareness, their relationship to the city, translates into its development. It must be assessed as friendly for the well-being of stakeholders (Koszembar-Wiklik, 2022). Ch. Landry considers people as assets, paying particular attention to the agency of a creative society combined with the creative policies of city authorities. Greenery in the city is an area where private initiatives are very visible. In no other area of urban life do such intense private initiatives appear, e.g., flowers in windows and on balconies or privately arranged and maintained gardens at homes and apartment buildings. In addition, Landry emphasises the impact of urban policy on the creativity and innovation of residents (Landry, 2013).

Thus, technological solutions for environmental protection in the city must go hand in hand with the education of residents. Also, revitalization actions, as well as those related to environmental reclamation and ecological activities, are easier if the city takes care of the social participation of residents or business entities.

3. Method and Results of the Study

The activities undertaken by cities in the field of promoting green marketing actions should be directed to various recipient groups. Building ecological awareness and the importance of ecology for the well-being of the city, among both children and adults, contributes not only to increasing the acceptance of local government actions but also to creating a new identity for the city and to undertaking civic initiatives for the protection of the urban environment.

The results presented below come from our own research. The study covered a wide range of questions concerning green marketing in the city. The survey was conducted in 2022, using the CAWI method. Questionnaires were sent via the internet to all 954 cities, with 414 returns received. Thus, the research sample is representative with a confidence level of 95% and a maximum error of 5%. The presented results cover part of the study that answers the research question: What actions do cities take to shape pro-environmental attitudes among different groups? How do cities promote activities in the field of green marketing? Are there any studies conducted among residents in the city concerning needs in the area of environmental protection?

As established and presented in the earlier article, the priority target groups for green city marketing remain residents, and promotional activities are primarily directed towards them. The actions are aimed at both children and adults (Koszembar-Wiklik, 2023).

A vast majority of 84% (of cities run educational programmes aimed at kindergartens and schools. Only 8% indicated that they do not carry out such activities. Also in the case of older residents, the cities are active in making them aware of the importance of environmental activities, 70% of cities. Only 14% do not undertake any activity in this area towards older groups (Koszembar-Wiklik, 2023).

However, awareness-raising activities are also conducted on environmental issues involving business representatives, teachers, and municipal employees. Understanding the importance of education in shaping ecological attitudes, some cities direct their actions not only directly to children and youth, but also organise workshops related to environmental education for teachers, who, having an influence on young generations, can impart pro-ecological ideas to them. However, only every third city declares conducting such workshops (12% responded definitely yes, 24% rather yes), 31% could not determine whether such actions are taken, and 34% declare that they do not conduct such activities (Figure 1). It follows that cities prefer to carry out direct actions aimed at the young, while activities in the environment of teachers working in schools in the city are considered supportive.

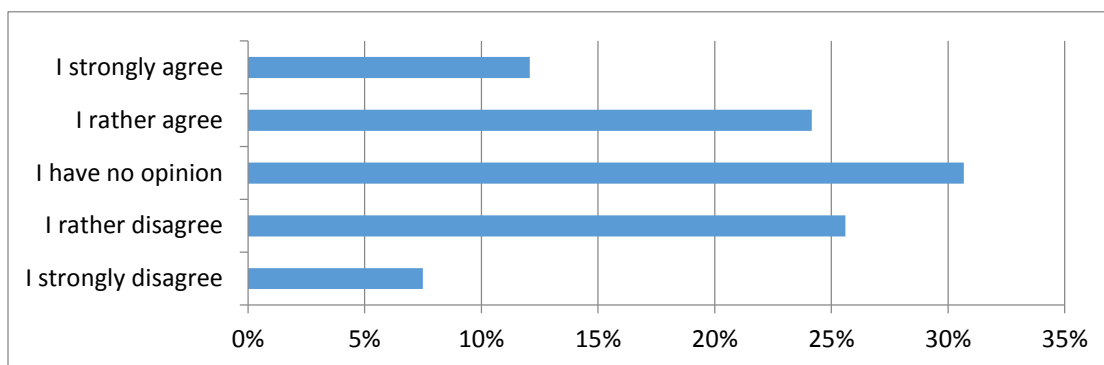


Figure 1. The city organises workshops for teachers related to environmental education.

Source: own research.

40% of cities declare that they take initiatives to attract businesses and entrepreneurs who, in their business practices, prioritise environmental well-being and invest in ecological solutions. Every third city (31%) does not undertake such initiatives (Figure 2). Companies operating in the city have a direct impact on the quality of the environment and life in the city. The city authorities engage in discussions and strive to support those business entities interested in improving the ecological quality of their operations, originating not only from legal regulations.

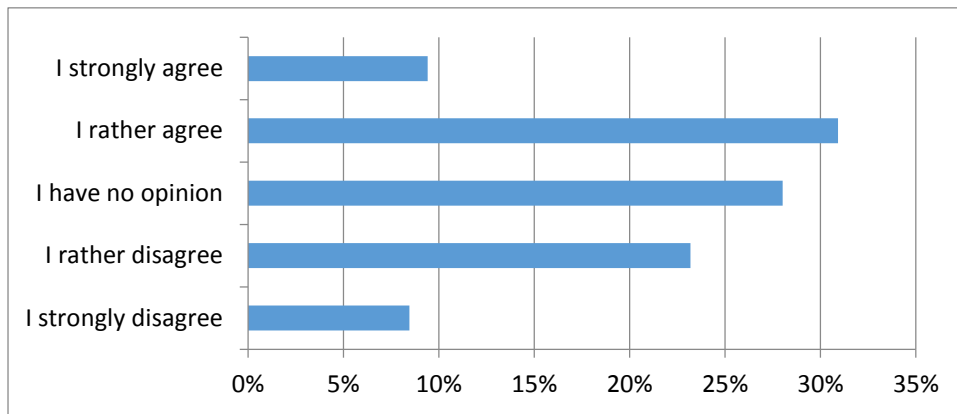


Figure 2. The city undertakes initiatives to attract businesses (entrepreneurs) that invest in ecological solutions.

Source: own research.

In response to the question about cities collaborating with non-profit entities to create a "green city" image, a large percentage of cities responded that they do not engage in such cooperation - 44%. One-third of cities (33%) declared that such cooperation is indeed conducted (Figure 3).

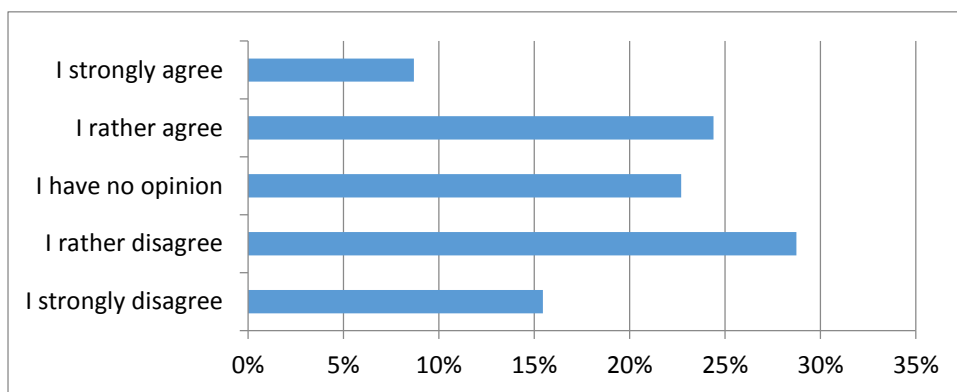


Figure 3. The city closely collaborates with non-profit organizations to create a "green city" image and implement environmental initiatives.

Source: own research.

However, the majority of cities also declare that they do not cooperate with local universities and colleges to develop solutions related to environmental protection and to promote the "green city" image - 54% of responses. Among the surveyed cities, 24% cooperate with universities in this regard (Figure 4). This may be due to the fact that many cities, especially smaller ones, do not have campuses or departments of higher education institutions. However, such collaboration could yield tangible results, as universities can develop specific practical environmental solutions and, through joint initiatives such as seminars and conferences, promote these solutions and raise awareness of the importance of ecology in the city.

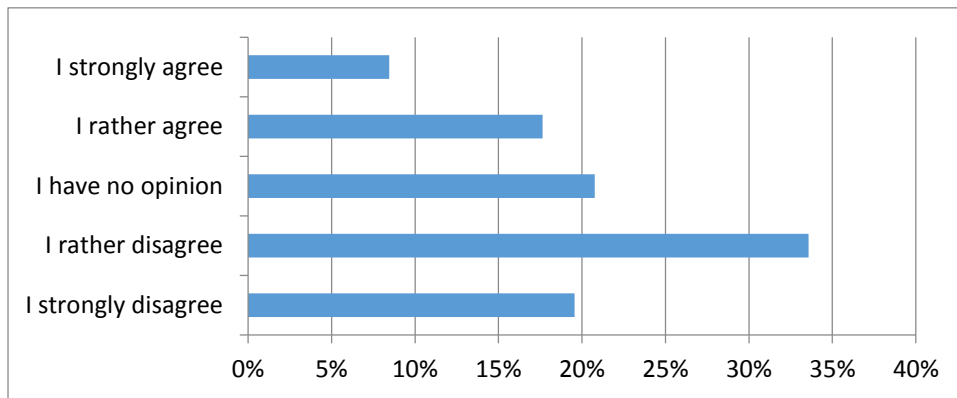


Figure 4. The city collaborates with universities located within the city or nearby areas to develop solutions in the field of environmental protection and to promote the image of a "green city".

Source: own research.

Additionally, cities invest in raising awareness among municipal employees. Forty-three percent indicate that training sessions are conducted for employees regarding environmentally friendly practices and their promotion. Thirty-seven percent do not organise training sessions to increase awareness among employees. Twenty-one percent were unable to provide an answer regarding the organization of such training sessions (Figure 5).

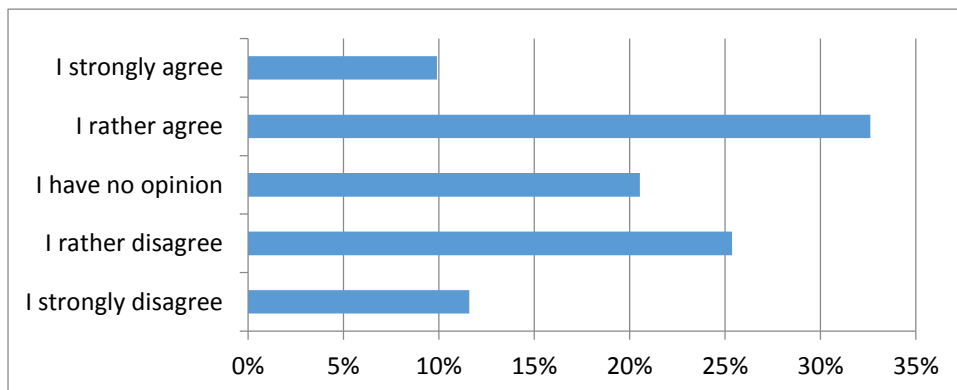


Figure 5. Training sessions for municipal employees regarding environmental protection actions and their promotion are conducted at the City Hall.

Source: own research.

Furthermore, a high percentage of cities (76%) have representatives who participate in conferences, seminars, and congresses related to environmental activities, such as those addressing renewable energy sources (Figure 6).

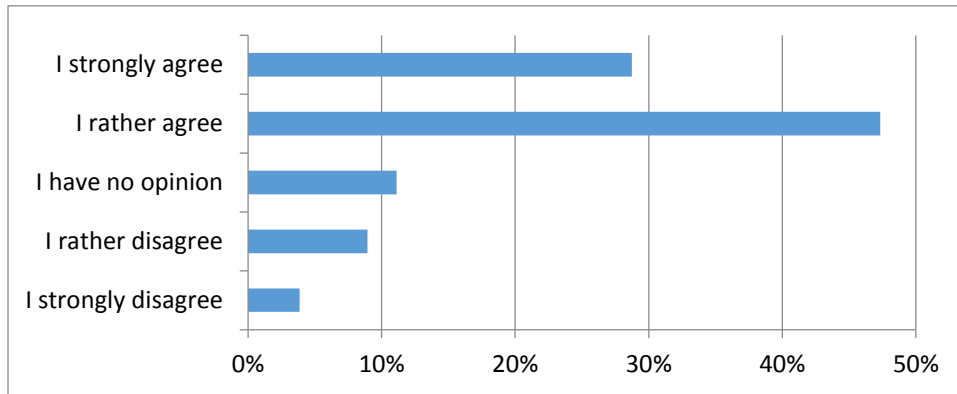


Figure 6. City representatives participate in conferences, seminars, and congresses focussing on environmental initiatives such as renewable energy sources.

Source: own research.

One in four cities (24%) collaborates with businesses, social organisations, and educational institutions to jointly organise seminars or conferences dedicated to environmental protection in the city. However, more than half (54%) do not engage in such collaboration (Figure 7).

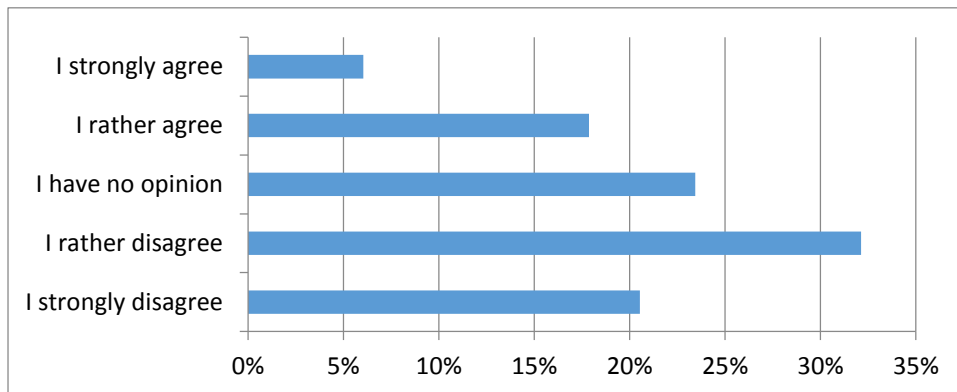


Figure 7. The city organizes congresses, conferences jointly with representatives of businesses, social organizations, and educational institutions concerning environmental protection in the city.

Source: own research.

Over half of the surveyed entities - 55% of cities - declare that they closely collaborate with the media (TV, radio, press) to promote pro-environmental attitudes and actions in the city (Figure 8). The importance of traditional media is particularly significant in communicating with the older generation of residents, which is less rooted in social media. Collaboration with both local and national media therefore increases the reach of influence. 27% of cities do not cooperate with the media in shaping pro-environmental attitudes.

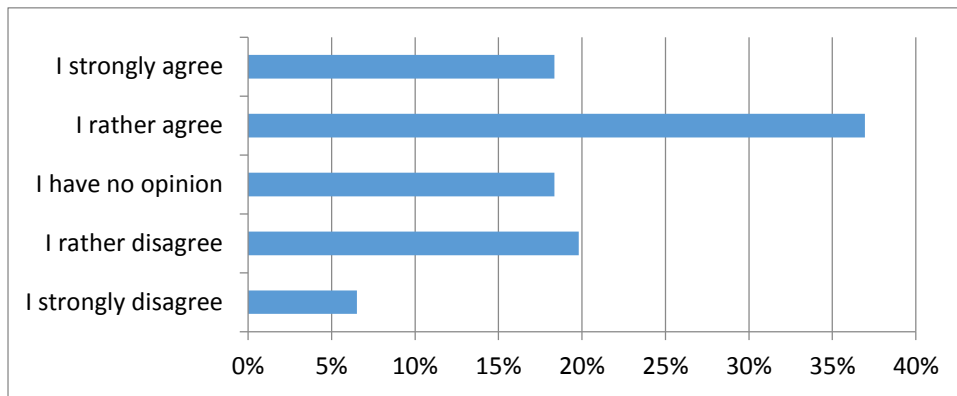


Figure 8. The city closely collaborates with the media (TV, radio, press) to promote pro-environmental attitudes and actions in the city.

Source: own research.

In addition to cooperating with independent media, city authorities use social media platforms eagerly. As many as 73% declare that they promote pro-environmental attitudes using media such as Facebook, Instagram or Twitter. 15% do not use social media platforms for this purpose. To promote pro-ecological attitudes, cities use communication tools that are primarily characteristic of the young and middle-aged generation.

40% of the surveyed cities declare that they post videos promoting environmental protection in the city on the internet, primarily on YouTube and on the City Hall website, with only 16% stating that they do so decisively. 36% do not distribute audiovisual materials related to ecology on the Internet. One in four surveyed cities could not answer whether such videos are available (Figure 9).

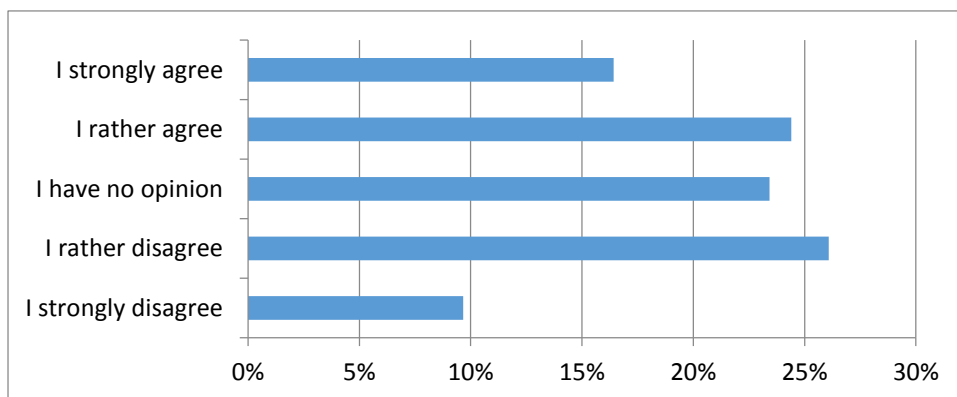


Figure 9. The city develops and disseminates promotional videos regarding environmental protection in the city on the internet (e.g., on YouTube, on the City Hall's website).

Source: own research.

The majority of cities (61%) declare that they have their own publications, such as newsletters, leaflets, and information brochures, which are used to promote pro-environmental attitudes and actions. Having their own publications allows the city to be independent from local or national media. It enables the dissemination of the city's strategy, including in the field of green marketing. 26% of cities declare that they do not have such publications, as they entail costs that not every city can bear. Additionally, in addition to

financial investments, it requires the participation of individuals who will be responsible for these publications (Figure 10).

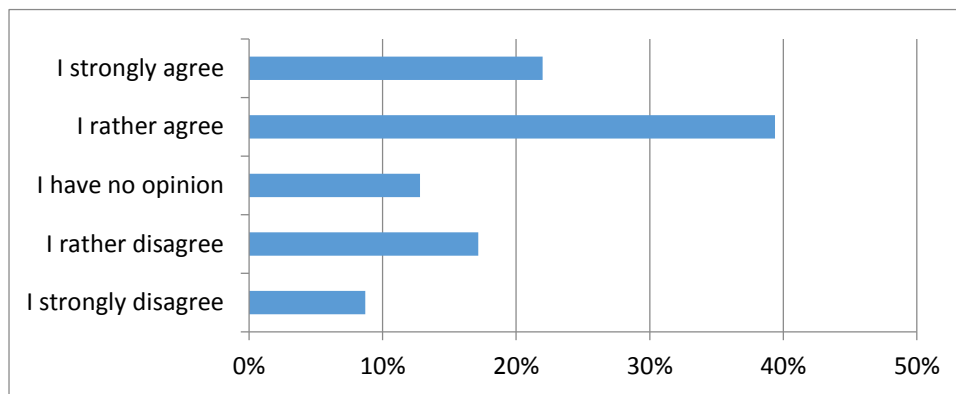


Figure 10. The city has its own publications (newspapers, leaflets, brochures) promoting pro-environmental attitudes and actions.

Source: own research.

In an effort to promote pro-environmental lifestyles and farming among residents, a large percentage of cities 64% organise festivals and outdoor events. Thanks to such events, residents can learn not only about environmental problems in the city, but also about ways to solve them or reduce their negative effects. It is also an opportunity to meet and activate residents. 19% of the cities surveyed do not organise this type of event. 18% could not specify whether such events take place in their city (Koszembar-Wiklik, 2023).

A small percentage (16%) of cities declare that they use the image of well-known individuals associated with the city, such as athletes, actors, cultural figures, politicians, influencers, and celebrities, to promote environmental protection and pro-environmental attitudes in the city.

To promote environmental protection in the city, the image of well-known individuals associated with the city (such as athletes, actors, influencers, etc.) is utilised. Additionally, unconventional forms of promotion such as street art are used on a small scale to promote ecological attitudes. This form of promotion was declared by 17% of the surveyed cities (with only 5% indicating "definitely yes"). 63% do not utilise street art in any way, while 20% were unable to respond (Figure 11).

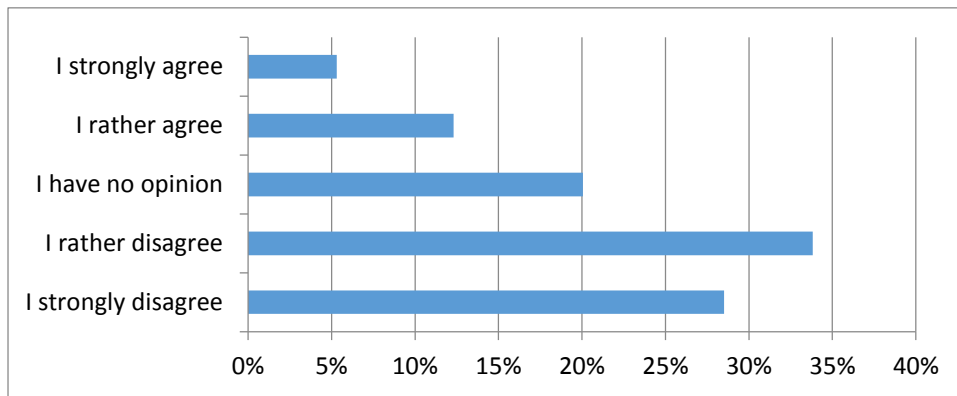


Figure 11. In the city, street art (such as murals, graffiti, stickers) is used to promote ecology.

Source: own research.

In addition to promoting attitudes and awareness-raising activities, cities declare that they initiate various actions in which residents participate. 73% carry out actions to mobilise residents, such as planting trees or cleaning up litter in the city. This approach certainly increases the residents' sense of empowerment and impact on the immediate environment around them.

Another activity that allows inhabitants to participate in activities for the benefit of ecology are competitions organised for inhabitants, in which they can submit projects to improve the environment in the city. According to the declarations, such competitions are organised by more than half of the cities surveyed - 56%.

Additionally, in the surveys, respondents were asked, in a multiple choice question, what actions are taken to promote ecology in the city. The best choice was to provide information on city websites (85%). On the second place, respondents indicated information posted on Facebook - 61%, as well as 61% mentioned distributing leaflets, newsletters, or brochures, while 38% also mentioned other social media platforms, and 22% publish videos on YouTube. There is a small percentage of mentions for using TV or radio advertisements, both local and national. However, 12% of cities indicated that they include podcasts on their websites that cover topics, including ecology. Among actions not directly related to city media, respondents stated that they organize promotional events related to ecology within the city (38%), sponsor ecology-related events (33%), and endorse environmental events organized by entities other than the city (17%). 22% mentioned organising or co-organising conferences or seminars on environmental protection. Sometimes, eco-related gadgets are distributed at such events. There is minimal use of billboard campaigns, virtual reality, or urban games to promote pro-ecological attitudes.

4. Conclusions

Cities (understood as those responsible for city management) notice and understand the issues related to shaping pro-environmental attitudes within the city. This awareness is an essential element of city functioning, especially as it is currently a widely raised issue in Europe. Cities utilize a wide range of activities to highlight environmental problems to both residents and other stakeholder groups. Among promotional activities, some are more common than others. Cities clearly focus on social media and their own publications for promotion. The widespread use of websites, Facebook, or other online media is economically and socially justified. Cities often have very limited budgets for promotion, so relatively inexpensive promotion using social media has its financial justification. The social aspect is also significant. Considering the media habits of different groups and the fact that a large part of their daily activity takes place on social media, choosing this medium is justified. On the other hand, own media such as publications, TV, radio, or YouTube channels are justified not only economically but also in terms of control. Own media give the city control over the content conveyed. Moreover, the interest of nationwide media in environmental issues in a specific city is not easy to garner, as they, driven by profitability, seek more popular topics. A large part of the activities is directed at residents, especially the youngest ones. This is manifested in the organisation of festivals and events for residents of all ages. Events of various types are organised on a fairly large scale in cities (picnics, family events, city days, festivals), with environmental issues as their main theme. Such actions provide city representatives with the opportunity to have direct contact with residents. However, these are tactical actions and should be treated as supportive rather than as the main way of shaping ecological attitudes. Such meetings with residents provide an opportunity to learn about their views on environmental issues in the city. Few cities conduct surveys of residents' opinions, yet they constitute the essence of city functioning. Encouraging ecological activity and raising awareness also occurs, albeit to a much lesser extent, through activities targeting teachers, business representatives, or employees working in municipal offices. However, what stands out is the low level of cooperation with non-profit and business entities in the area of pro-environmental activities. It is worth considering broad cooperation and greater networking of cities with city stakeholders. Cities could invest more in internal marketing, for example, in training and building awareness among municipal office employees. City representatives participate in various events, but they are usually small groups or individuals. Officials, as individuals having direct and indirect contact with residents, businesses, and NGO organizations, influence the city's image. Regular training on environmental issues will not only translate into the individual awareness of officials but can also be passed on further.

A small percentage of cities use the image of well-known individuals associated with the city to promote environmental actions. The aspect of supporting the city's promotion strategy by recognisable individuals is significant, especially in the current era of authority crisis, when young people are influenced by the examples presented by celebrities, influencers, and look to them for cultural models to emulate. It is worth paying attention to the broader use of the image of individuals who are associated with the city and are recognizable to a wider audience. The problem is that not every city is associated with well-known individuals, and these individuals may not necessarily be willing to lend their image even for the rightful purpose of promoting environmental awareness. The task facing those responsible for promotion is to find such well-known individuals, who may also be locally known figures, and encourage them to participate in the prepared strategy promoting ecology.

The use of virtual reality and street art for promoting ecology by cities is negligible. Virtual reality is a form that is not widely used in city promotion in general. It is not a form that could be applied on a mass scale. The very limited use of street art forms is understandable, as many people (residents) associate murals with acts of vandalism or expressions of rebellion rather than with an artistic form promoting the city. This awareness is slowly changing as cities commission murals to be painted. Some murals serve a promotional function while others are decorative elements of the city. Cities opt for forms that are relatively inexpensive and have a broad appeal, such as promotion on social media. There is still much work ahead for cities in building environmental awareness of residents and promoting environmental actions conducted by the city. These efforts are significant not only for shaping proactive environmental attitudes but also for fostering residents' sense of connection to their place of residence.

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