

## ASSESSMENT OF FLOATING GARDEN STRATEGY IN CREATING THE PLACE BRAND OF SZCZECIN

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**Purpose:** The aim of the study is to identify and evaluate the image of the Szczecin brand associated with the Floating Garden strategy among residents of the city and residents of other Polish cities who are potential tourists on the basis of a long-term brand management strategy.

**Design/methodology/approach:** To achieve the objective, the method of comparative analysis was used. Selected identifiers of the Floating Garden strategy, collected in 6 groups of activities undertaken to create the image of Szczecin, were subjected to empirical verification in 2 target groups: residents of Szczecin and residents of other cities (potential tourists). The data was collected using the Internet survey method (CAWI) and the results were interpreted using the Anholt-gmi city brand hexagon model. On their basis, several sets of hexagons were developed according to the criterion of gender and age. Two hypotheses were adopted in the study. The first presumes that inhabitants identify the most important assumptions of the Floating Garden strategy. In contrast, the second one presumes that potential tourists do not know the assumptions of the discussed strategy. The hypotheses were defined based on a need to build the Floating Gardens strategy towards residents and tourists, articulated by the creators of the strategy.

**Findings:** Assessment of the image for the local community, based on the implementation of the Floating Garden strategy, is characterised by a high intensity of associations between the given factors included in the assumptions of the discussed strategy. Residents know and understand the assumptions of the strategy and notice the positive changes taking place in the city and in their everyday lives. Building an image of the Szczecin brand is positively received. Despite great commitment to the promotion of the city's image in Poland and abroad, potential tourists do not yet fully identify the Szczecin brand as Floating Garden.

**Research limitations/implications:** In the study of potential tourists who are residents of metropolitan areas, they were treated as a homogeneous group, thus it is possible, by adopting more extensive criteria, to deepen the results of the conducted research. In addition, models other than Anholt's hexagon can be used to interpret the results, e.g. models using the theory of planned behaviour or semantic profiles for comparing promotional messages.

**Practical implications:** The article contains implications for city leaders who can use Anholt's hexagon in 6 dimensions, both to evaluate an umbrella brand, such as Floating Garden, and to assess an individual brand.

**Originality/value:** In the study, the content of questions concerned not only identifiers associated with the city, grouped into 6 brand dimensions according to the Anholt-gmi city brand hexagon model, but also enquiries about associations and the visual side used in creating the Szczecin brand logotype. Research on the perception of logotypes and their compliance with the strategy of the place brand is also a rarity in literature on the subject.

**Keywords:** place branding, the Anholt-gmi city brand hexagon, Szczecin Floating Garden strategy.

**Category of the paper:** Research paper.

## 1. Introduction

There is a great number of publications on city image in literature on the subject (Kotler, Haider, Rein, 1993; Papadopoulos, 2004; Anholt, 2006; Szromnik et al., 2007; Daszkiewicz, 2009; Florek, Glińska, Kowalewska, 2009; Florek, 2013; Zenker, 2014; Rozhkov, Khomutskii, Romanowski, Muniz-Martinez, 2020, and others).

Often, the conducted research is limited to analysis of homogeneous respondent groups, most frequently - tourists, remaining in the sphere of interest of both the city authorities and researchers (Chan et al., 2021). It is much less common to come across the results of surveys among residents who can be a reference group for analyses of other target groups (Manyiwa, Priporas, Wang, 2018; Ciechomski, Romanowski, 2013; Romanowski, 2019).

The Anholt - GMI City Brand Index (Anholt, 2006) predominates among image assessment methods, but other models, such as the hierarchy of effects (Wijaya, 2012, p. 77) or AIDA (Ghirvu, 2013, p. 94), are also used. To ensure comparability of the results, the author of the article decided to use The Anholt - GMI City Brand Index (Anholt, 2006) method to assess the image of Szczecin. As for the content of the questions on the basis of which the image is assessed, statements assume a rather individualised form in each city, as they refer to the unique identifiers or landmarks of a given place. Research on the perception of logotypes and their compliance with the strategy of the place brand is also a rarity in the literature.

Many studies have been carried out among the inhabitants of Szczecin to assess and recognise the image of the city, but most of them are already out of date. There is also not enough information on the opinions of potential tourists regarding how they perceive the Szczecin brand. Therefore, the choice of topic is related to filling a gap in research and updating data on recognition of the Szczecin brand.

The aim of the study is to identify and evaluate the image of the Szczecin brand associated with the Floating Garden strategy among residents of the city and residents of other Polish cities who are potential tourists on the basis of a long-term brand management strategy. To achieve this objective, the Anholt - GMI City Brand Index (Anholt, 2006) was used. The perception of the Floating Garden strategy's logotype was also analysed.

## 2. Literature review

Image is one of the key and basic concepts in place marketing, as well as in place branding. The interest of scientists in the subject of a city image appeared in the 1960s, and the first researchers were Boulding (1956) and Martineau (1958). In their works, they recognised that "images can have greater impact on human behaviour than objective information about perceived objects or surroundings". However, the increase in interest concerning the issue of image began only after the publication of the work by J.D. Hunt from 1971 (Grzegorzcyk, Kochaniec, 2011, pp. 43-44).

Referring to the interdisciplinary nature of research on a place image, one can come across many definitions of this concept. Most often, the author refers to the definitions created by P. Kotler and H. Barich (1991) and J.L. Crompton (1979). According to them, an image is the sum of the ideas, beliefs and pictures that a person has about a given place. F. Lawson and M. Bond-Bovy (1977) think similarly, according to whom the image includes knowledge about the place, emotional attitude towards it, the picture of it and prejudices. However, some researchers limit research on the image of a place and analyse only the opinions and imaginations of people who do not stay in a given place (Grzegorzcyk, Kochaniec, 2011, p. 44). Therefore, they define image as "a mental reflection of the environment in the minds of people who have never visited a given place" (Kangas, 1998, cited in: Grzegorzcyk, Kochaniec, 2011, p. 44). According to P. Grzyś (2017, p. 7), the image of a place is a fixed added value of an entity that determines its position on the market, for example cities or other territorial units. He adds that the process of shaping this image is often modified and supported by authorities, and this shaping of this image most frequently occurs through the creation of the city's brand and promotion, which is set in strategic documents.

Umer Zaman and Murat Aktan (2021, pp. 394-395), on the other hand, point out that a place image has been operationalised in the literature in 3 dimensions: cognitive, affective and conative, referring to the model of hierarchy of effects. The cognitive dimension is connected with the features and attributes of a place and refers to the beliefs and knowledge of people about the physical properties of a given place, which helps them shape its mental image. These include climate, landscape as well as cultural and tourist attractions. The affective, or emotional dimension of a place image, concerns subjective emotions, feelings and even fears or prejudices related to the attributes and characteristics of a given place and its surroundings. In turn, the conative dimension, sometimes also called the behavioural one, is an element of taking action towards a given place, such as the intention to visit or arrive.

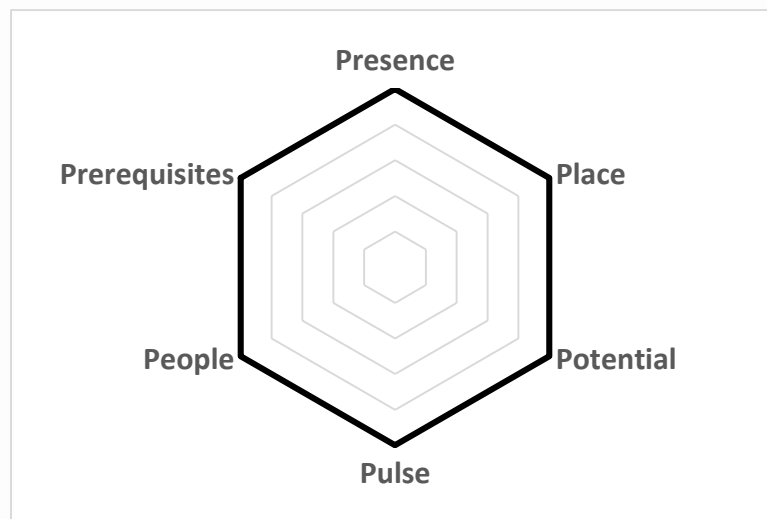
Most of the defined definitions of a place image in literature can be summarised in such a way that the image of a place is a mental structure (visual or non-visual), integrating elements, values and impressions that a person has in relation to it. This structure is based on the knowledge that a person has about a specific place, as well as on perception of a more emotional

nature (Glińska, 2010, p. 129). The image will therefore be the sum of attitudes declared towards a city.

Such an approach to the concept of image requires the use of a method that will allow to map the ideas of potential target groups about a given place. This type of method is the Anholt - GMI City Brand Index (Anholt, 2006).

### 3. Research methodology

The model proposed by Simon Anholt consists of 6 dimensions, which can be represented in the form of a hexagon (Figure 1).



**Figure 1.** The Anholt - GMI City Brand Index.

Source: Own elaboration based on Fasli, Kalantarzadeh, 2018, p. 85.

The index is estimated using of the average of dimensions that comprise the model. The first dimension is ‘Presence’, which refers to the international status and position of the city. The second is attractiveness or physical appearance of the city (‘Place’), which is related to a favourable climate for living, the purity of natural environment or the attractiveness of buildings and public places. The third component is called ‘Prerequisites’, which defines what features determine the choice of a city, such as: price attractiveness, standard of public facilities (e.g. hospitals or schools), public transport or sports facilities in the city. The ‘People’ dimension refers to the characteristics and behaviour of local society. This aspect also relates to a sense of security in the city. ‘Pulse’ defines the possibility of filling free time with various types of additional activities. The indicated dimension also specifies the degree of excitement of the city in relation to new places to discover. ‘Potential’ measures educational and economic benefits in the city, the possibility of finding a job in line with expectations, the degree of ease for running a business (Anholt, 2007).

When creating the Szczecin brand strategy, it was stated that it cannot be created based on the historical past of the city, which is why the assumption was made to shape the brand of Szczecin on the basis of what the city may look like in the future (Kordek, Worobjow, 2015, p. 141).

The Szczecin brand strategy primarily refers to the richness of nature around the city and is based on the assumption that the development of Szczecin must be based on its assets, i.e. the use of numerous rivers, canals and backwaters, as Szczecin has a chance to become the "New Green Venice of the North". Therefore, the strategy assumes, among others, a return of the city to the water and the development of numerous islands of Śródmieście, so that they become the new heart of Szczecin (Mosir, 2022).

Another assumption of the strategy is readiness and openness to new things, which are deeply embedded in the identity of the city. Therefore, the strategy assumes making visionary decisions, taking advantage of Szczecin's unique location, such as its cross-border location, and undertaking extraordinary projects without being afraid of bold architectural solutions. Therefore, one of the assumptions and key elements of the brand manifesto is a need to create an architectural object that will attract the attention of Europe as a whole, due to its class and innovation (UMS, 2022a). The Philharmonic of Szczecin, rated very well in the survey, was one such facility.

The aim of such an approach is to move away from the image of Szczecin as a port and industrial city and to eliminate the barriers that hinder the development of the city (UMS, 2022b). In addition, the strategy also assumes that Szczecin will become an open city, which is why an important element included in this strategy is to facilitate access to the city by people from outside Szczecin due to road investments and reconstruction of its main thoroughfares (UMS, 2022a). Therefore, a document entitled "Revitalisation of the centre of Szczecin - directions of activities 2019-2050" was created (Wacinkiewicz, 2019, pp. 3-19). According to the Floating Garden 2050 strategy, the city should invent and "build itself" from the beginning.

An expression of turning towards water and openness to new things was to create a new logotype for Szczecin Floating Garden 2050 (Figure 2). The colours of logotype refer to the above-mentioned natural values (blue – water, green – city greenery, white – space). This colour code also illustrates the goals of the Floating Garden strategy, related to respect for nature, building the perception of the city through the prism of water and greenery (UMS, 2022c). The graphic symbol in the lower part of the logo refers to the pools intertwined with greenery, creating a space unprecedented on such a scale in the middle of one of the largest Polish cities.



**Figure 2.** Promotional logo of Floating Garden 2050.

Source: UMS 2022c.

The name inspired by the phonetic notation symbolizes the openness of the city and its inhabitants, regardless of nationality. It is also open to creative behaviour in the city, even in terms of presenting its name. The next part, i.e. the inscription "Floating Garden" in translation, meaning a floating garden, is the slogan of the city and, at the same time, its vision. It was created from the English language, because the city wants to communicate its brand not only in Poland, but also abroad. Moreover, the city authorities want Szczecin to be perceived through the prism of its cross-border location. The last part of the logo is "Project 2050", which shows a systemic approach to implementation. The date and the word "project" emphasize Szczecin's task-oriented approach to its own development. It is also a long-term goal with the time horizon of 2050. Such a long period of time embeds the vision into reality. The given promotional logo of the city is used, among others, to coherently mark all activities that fit into the postulates of the strategy, which are implemented by authorities, residents and organisational units (UMS, 2022a).

In order to examine the image of Szczecin's brand on the example of the Floating Garden strategy, an anonymous online survey was conducted via the Google form, distributed on the Facebook platform. The author assumed that a representative sample was to be made up of 2 research groups: residents of Szczecin and residents of cities with more than 500,000 inhabitants, i.e.: Warsaw, Kraków, Łódź, Wrocław, Poznań and the Tri-City. Due to the fact that it was not possible to obtain representative groups from individual cities with more than 500,000 inhabitants, it was necessary to aggregate a group of respondents from outside of Szczecin. The problem in collecting the second representative research sample resulted from the unfavourable rules and regulations of Facebook groups. It mostly prevented the insertion of links redirecting to other pages, self-promotion and insertion of items unrelated to the subject of the group, which is why the administrators often did not accept the post with the author's study or the posts were deleted. Therefore, in the analysis of the study, the first group consists of residents of Szczecin, while the second group includes residents of other Polish cities with over 500,000 residents. In order to obtain answers from respondents coming from other cities,

a study was made available on various city and travel groups on the Facebook social networking site. The questionnaire was created and made available in June 2022.

In the first question, the respondents were to determine the strength of associations regarding the above-mentioned factors with the statement: "Szczecin reminds me of...", using a unipolar scale from 0 to 5, where 0 meant "I have no associations" and 5 – "I strongly associate it with". All 25 factors were assigned to the 6 dimensions of the Anholt hexagon shown in Table 1. The city hexagon is a general model for studying the image of a territorial unit. In his study, the author assigned the factors that fit into the brand strategy of Szczecin to individual dimensions, guided via the criterion chosen by them.

The 'Presence' dimension was defined by factors from the strategies that determine the city's position on the national and international arena and that testify to the city's reputation and express what the city is famous for, such as, being a seaside, cross-border and metropolitan city. In addition, factors that influence people's familiarity with the city, such as the City's Visual Order and what the city wants to be strongly associated with - the Floating Garden, were also assigned to 'Presence'. The last of the included factors – an industrial city – is not the part of the city's strategy. On the contrary, Szczecin no longer wants to be associated with industry. The factor was included to check the strength of respondents' association with the pre-strategy image of city.

**Table 1.**

*Dimensions of the city hexagon with assigned factors of the Szczecin brand strategy*

PRESENCE	PLACE	POTENTIAL	PULSE	PEOPLE	PREREQUISITES
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• seaside town</li> <li>• cross-border city</li> <li>• Urban Visual Order</li> <li>• Floating Garden</li> <li>• metropolitan city</li> <li>• industrial city</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• greenery</li> <li>• water</li> <li>• eco-city</li> <li>• space</li> <li>• nature-friendly city</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• port town</li> <li>• shipping route to the sea</li> <li>• innovation</li> <li>• entrepreneurship</li> <li>• modern city</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Regatta, the Tall Ship Races,</li> <li>• parks and squares</li> <li>• boulevards as places for meetings, recreation and relaxation</li> <li>• Days of the Sea</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• sense of security</li> <li>• multiculturalism</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• modernised road infrastructure</li> <li>• high-quality sports facilities</li> <li>• world-class, innovative architectural facilities</li> </ul>

Source: own elaboration.

The 'Place' dimension was matched with the factors from the strategy related to the physical aspects of the city and which are attractive in terms of living in it, such as natural values, spatiality of the city and care for nature.

The 'Potential' dimension contains factors influencing the development of Szczecin and proving its economic potential. These factors include employment opportunities for residents and those offered by the market for potential investors and companies, such as a shipping route to the sea and the status of a port city (possibility of developing maritime tourism), attracting investors and other stakeholders related to shipping.

It was assumed that the 'Pulse' dimension will include factors concerning attractive events and activities, interesting forms of spending time and those that make the city teeming with life. These include the largest events organised in Szczecin, such as the Tall Ship Races and Days of the Sea, as well as places visited daily by many residents, tourists and those bustling with life all-year-round, such as boulevards, parks and squares.

The next dimension, 'People', includes the characteristics of residents and their attitude towards tourists, which is why the sense of security and multiculturalism, which are part of the strategy of Szczecin brand, are assigned to this dimension.

The final dimension, 'Prerequisites', defines public facilities, basic infrastructure that serves residents and tourists, and public services offered by the city. Therefore, modernised road infrastructure as well as world-class, innovative architectural and sports facilities have been assigned here.

In the questionnaire, a inquiry related to the compatibility of 3 colours associated with Szczecin in the city's brand strategy was made. The author wanted to find out whether the respondents see the city as the authorities want it to be seen, i.e. as a green city (green), surrounded by water (blue) with large, open space (white).

In the last of the analysed questions, the respondents were asked to define associations with the Szczecin Floating Garden 2050 project logo. The purpose of this question was to find out how the respondents identify the given symbols and whether their associations are in accordance with the assumptions made for the Floating Garden strategy.

The study and its analysis allowed to determine the perception of the Szczecin brand strategy as Floating Garden in the opinions of Szczecin's residents and residents of other Polish cities (potential tourists).

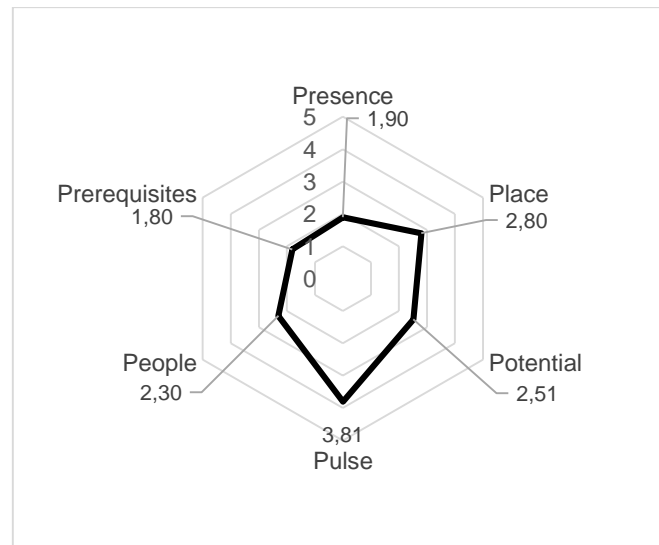
A population of 253 respondents took part in the study, including 86 men (34%) and 167 women (66%). The largest research group (71%) was represented by people between the ages of 18 and 29, and the smallest by people below 18 (1 person) and above 60 (4 people). Therefore, in the subsequent analysis, the age groups were combined as follows: 18-29, 30-39 and 40+, of which a person under the age of 18 from Szczecin was assigned to the first group.

In further analysis, 2 groups of respondents were examined, i.e. 108 (43%) residents of Szczecin and 145 (57%) residents of other cities who can be treated as potential tourists.



## 4. Findings

At first, an analysis for a group of Szczecin residents was performed, of which 71 were women and 37 men. Considering the division into 3 age groups, the largest comprised individuals aged 18 to 29 (69%), the smaller – people aged 40+ (17%), and the smallest – aged from 30 to 39 (14%). Based on the respondents' answers, a city brand hexagon covering 6 dimensions, was created (Figure 3). It consisted of matched factors included in the Floating Garden strategy. A hexagon was created on the basis of drawn averages from each dimension.



**Figure 3.** Hexagon for the image of the Szczecin brand – residents.

Source: Own elaboration.

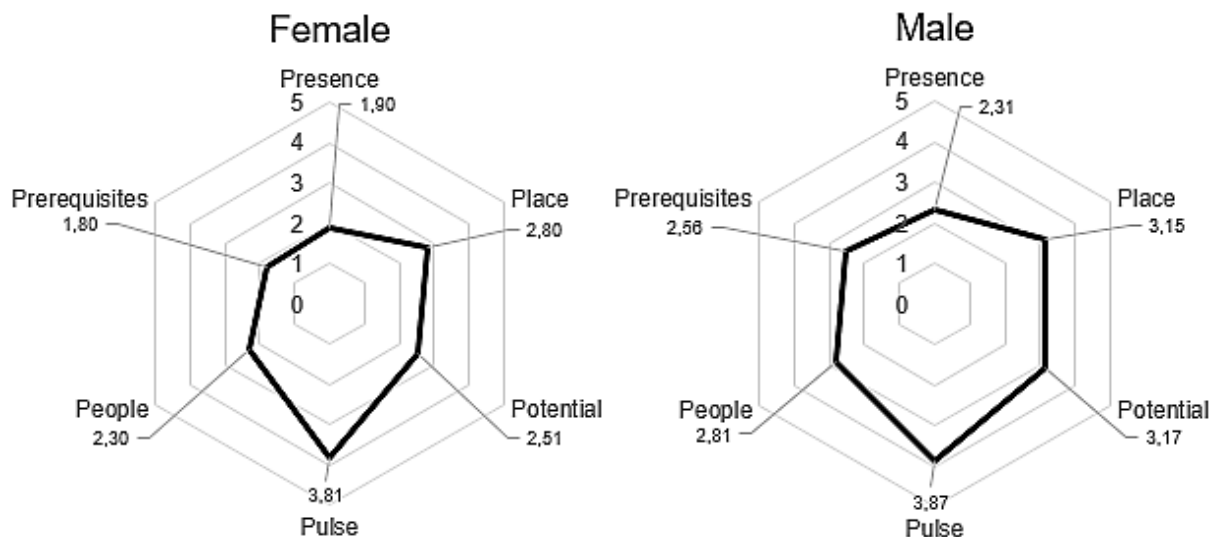
In the case of Szczecin inhabitants, the strongest dimension is 'Pulse', which stands out significantly. Such a situation may prove that Szczecin residents associate their city with cyclical events organised in its area and with places where they can spend their free time and get away from everyday duties. This also shows that residents are most impressed by large events and places for recreation and socialising, rather than small investments.

On the other hand, the 'Prerequisites' dimension was rated the lowest, which indicates that residents do not associate the city with world-renowned architectural buildings or high-quality sports facilities that provide cultural and sports services. It is probable that residents do not pay enough attention to them. The same applies to road infrastructure, still being modernised. Therefore, the lack of associations could be influenced by the fact that the process has not yet been completed and that numerous repairs of road infrastructure are a frequent cause of irritation for residents due to constant traffic jams and closed roads.

It is also surprising that the weakest dimension, apart from 'Prerequisites', is 'Presence'. It primarily represents the resources for which the city is famous and with which it wants to be associated. Moreover, in a given dimension, the industrial city was rated the highest, which contradicts the assumptions of the Floating Garden strategy, according to which the city wants to move away from such an association. This proves that the inhabitants do not fully identify the new vision of the city. This could probably be dictated by the functioning of the Shipyard of Szczecin in the old days, which has taken root in the minds of inhabitants.

The 'Place' dimension was assessed by the residents as the second strongest. This means that the factors greatly emphasized in the strategy's assumptions and being the main part of the Floating Garden strategy (greenery, water, space) were positively perceived by the residents. In this dimension, the highest and lowest grades for individual factors were pointed out, because the highest rated association among the inhabitants of Szczecin were the cyclically organised Days of the Sea (4.06) and Boulevards as a place of meetings, recreation and relaxation (4.02). On the other hand, the lowest grade were given to associations with seaside character of Szczecin and Floating Garden. This means a very low rating for the basic slogan used in the city's identification system.

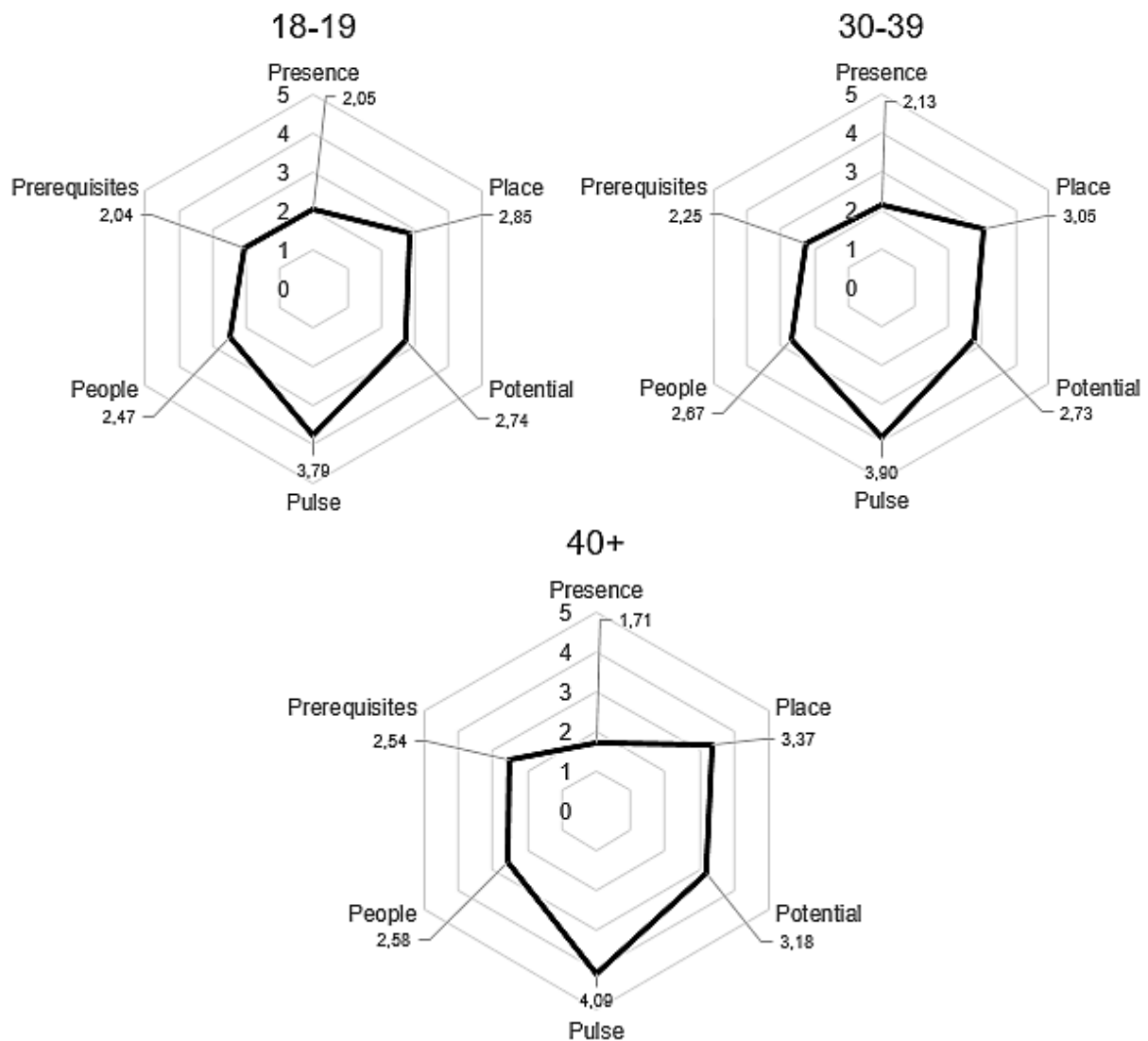
Analysing the hexagon from a gender perspective (Figure 4), it should be noted that men assessed each dimension better than women. In addition, the average hexagon size ratings for men are more evenly distributed than for women. Both men and women associate Szczecin most with 'Pulse', where the average is 3.81 and 3.87, respectively. However, women rated 'Prerequisites' the worst – 1.80. For men, 'Presence' was ranked the worse – 2.31.



**Figure 4.** Hexagons for the image of the Szczecin brand seen through the eyes of the residents – female and male.

Source: own elaboration.

The hexagons for the Szczecin brand image should also be considered through the prism of age (Figure 5).



**Figure 5.** Hexagons for the image of the Szczecin brand in the opinion of residents– age ranges.

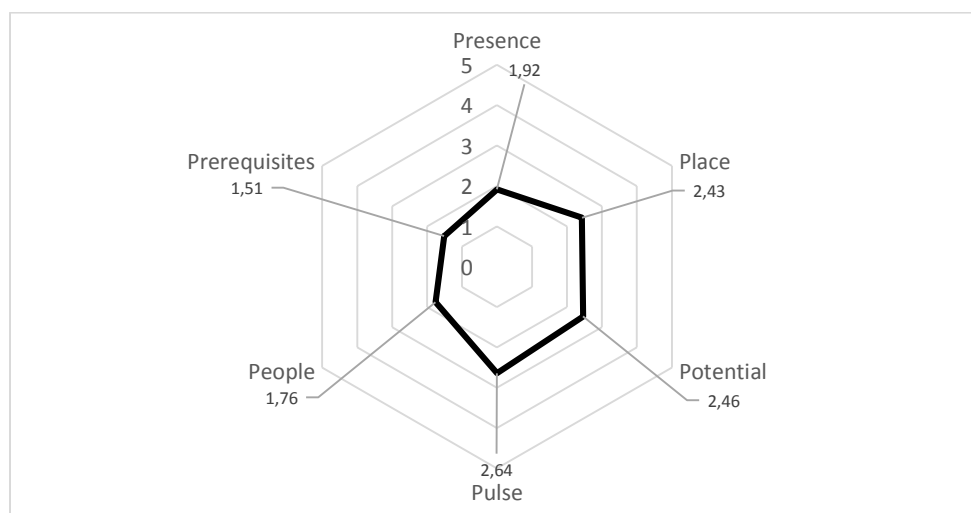
Source: Own elaboration.

In this case, the answers of three age groups were analysed: 18-29, 30-39 and 40+. The hexagon for the first and the second age groups is almost identical, which indicates that the respondents from these groups gave very similar answers and assessed their associations with the factors that fit into the city's brand strategy at a similar level. It is different in the third age group, 40+, where the hexagon is slightly different. In all ranges, the 'Pulse' dimension was rated the highest, the average of which clearly differs from the rest. In addition, the author's attention was drawn to the fact that the highest average in the 'Pulse' dimension was in the oldest age group (4.09), and not, as might be expected, in the youngest, where it was the lowest (3.79). These data indicate that the older the age group, the more Szczecin is associated with organised events and places adapted for recreation, rest and socialising. Interestingly, in the 50-60 age group, as many as 2 factors, such as Days of the Sea and the Tall Ship Races Regatta, achieved an average of 5.0. In each case, the 'Place' was also rated very high. In the 30-39 and 40+ age groups, 'Presence' was given the lowest rates, and in the youngest

age group – ‘Prerequisites’ and ‘Presence’ were graded the worst. What is more, all dimensions of the hexagon were rated the best by the oldest age group, and as the worst – by the youngest.

When it comes to the associations of Szczecin inhabitants with the Floating Garden strategy, 55 out of 108 has some associations with it. Asked about colours, they agree with the assumptions of the Floating Garden strategy together with the logotype. The most frequently chosen colours by all Szczecin inhabitants were: blue (85%), green (83%) and white (55%). Considering that the question was multiple-choice and each respondent could choose different colour sequences, a positive fact for the city is that the sequence: blue, green, white was chosen as many as 45 times. Thus, it may be concluded that it was a conscious choice for the residents, dictated by the accuracy of the Floating Garden strategy in the city's assets and good communication between the brand and residents, and not a random choice. Residents, asked about specific associations with the Floating Garden strategy, pointed out greenery and water areas, ecological aspects of the city together with pro-ecological investments. There were also respondents who were able to professionally define what the brand strategy shown in the Floating Garden was. However, the analysis also showed that there are inhabitants of Szczecin who have not heard anything about the strategy (33%) or heard little or did not delve into the subject.

The residents of other Polish cities constituted a group of 145 respondents in the study, of which 96 (66%) were women and 49 (34%) were men. Also in this case, the largest age group were young people aged 18-29 (105.72%), a slightly smaller group – people aged 40+ (21.15%), and the smallest – people aged 30-39 (19.13%). At first glance, it can be stated that the created hexagon is more even than for Szczecin inhabitants and has no significant deviations (Figure 6).

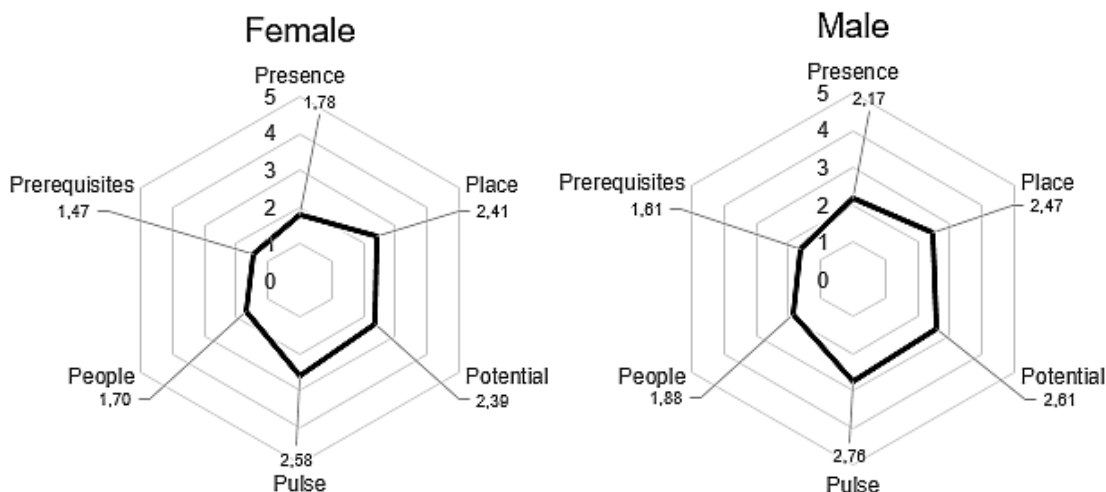


**Figure 6.** Hexagon for the image of the Szczecin brand – residents from other Polish cities.

Source: Own elaboration

However, it can be noticed that, as in that case, the 'Pulse' dimension has the greatest impact, with an average of 2.64. This is not as a big deviation as for the hexagon from Szczecin inhabitants. Nevertheless, such an observation shows how important it is to organise cyclical events in cities that match the city's identity, which later shape its image and are strongly associated with a given territory. Furthermore, they are a strong argument for the arrival of tourists. In addition, the second strongest dimension is 'Potential', with an average of 2.46. This situation shows that residents of other cities view Szczecin as a city with great potential, thanks to the fact that it is a port city and has a shipping route to the sea. What is more, it also proves that they perceive Szczecin as a modern, innovative and entrepreneurial city. Such features seen through the eyes of people from outside the city may make them want to move here, for example, for earning purposes, or investors wanting to commence an investment. The 'Place' dimension (2.43) is almost as strong as 'Potential', which proves that residents of other cities also see greenery, water and space as the greatest assets of Szczecin. On the other hand, the smallest strength of associations was observed within the 'Prerequisites' dimension, where the average was 1.51. Then come 'People' (1.76) and 'Presence' (1.92).

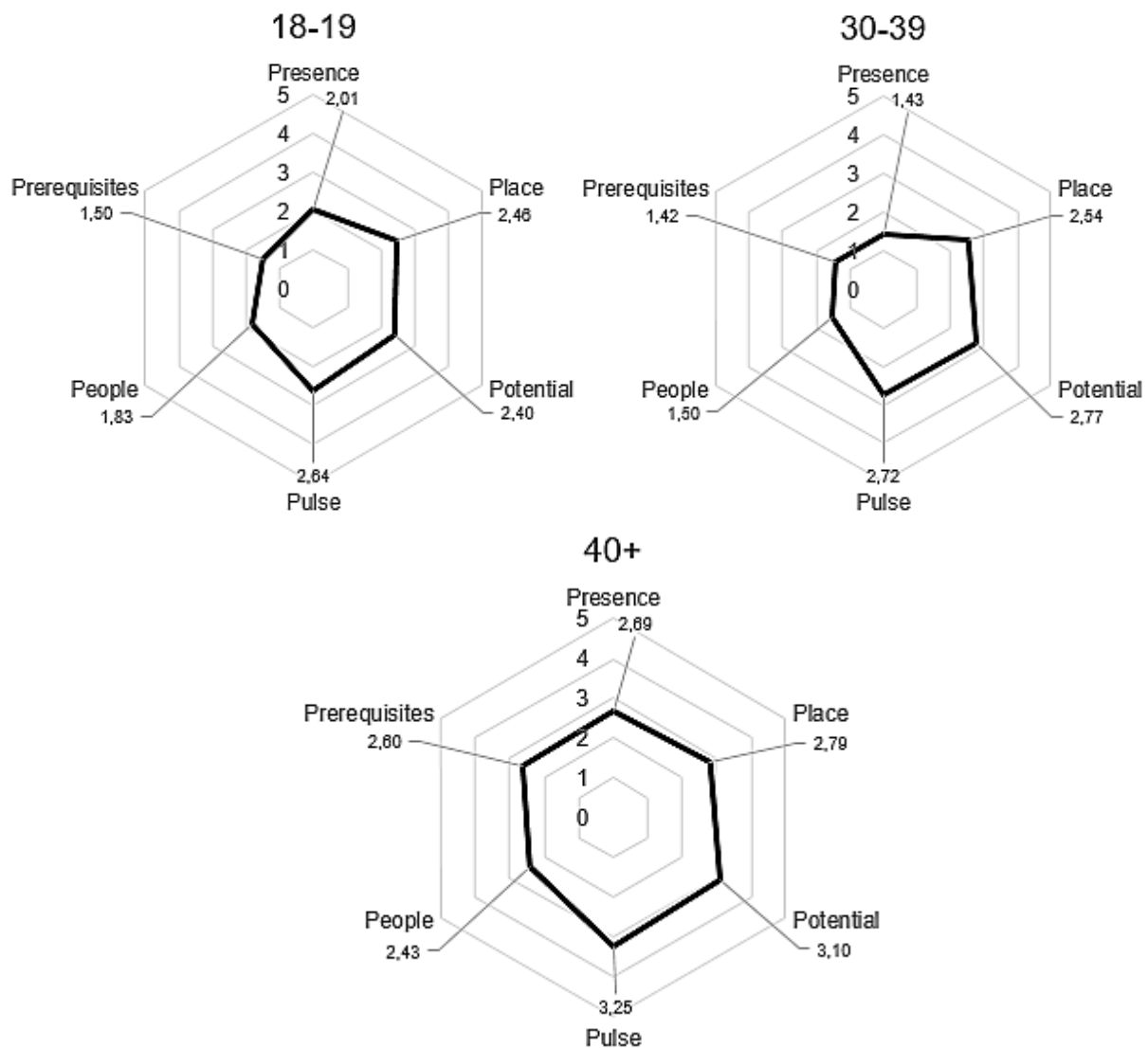
It is worth noting that men also rated each dimension more strongly than women (Figure 7), similarly to the hexagon for Szczecin inhabitants. In both cases, the highest rated dimension was 'Pulse', where the average grade for women was 2.58 and for men, 2.76, as well as the least rated dimension – 'Prerequisites', where this totalled 1.47 for women and 1.61 for men. The 'People' dimension was also rated very poorly (women: 1.70, men: 1.88), which means that people out of Szczecin do not associate the city with a sense of security and multiculturalism. It should also be noted that no dimension exceeded the average of 3.0, which means that each element of the Floating Garden strategy was rated quite poorly in respondents' associations.



**Figure 7.** Hexagons for the image of the Szczecin brand in the opinion of residents from other cities – female and male.

Source: Own elaboration.

An analysis of hexagons was also performed for residents of other cities coming from 3 age groups (Figure 8). Looking at the presented hexagons, it can be seen that there is a similar situation as in the case of Szczecin inhabitants, namely people aged 40+ assessed individual dimensions the strongest. In the case of the 18-29 and 40+ age groups, the strongest dimension was 'Pulse', with the average being: 2.64 and 3.25, respectively, and for respondents aged 30-39, this was 'Potential' (2.77). This means that for the given group, potential in the city may later be converted into a desire to settle or work in Szczecin. The lowest rated dimensions for respondents aged 18-29 and 30-39 were 'Prerequisites', with an average of 1.50 and 1.42, respectively, while the oldest age group rated the 'People' dimension the lowest. Moreover, looking at a more detailed analysis, the strongest association with Szczecin for the youngest age group is a port city, for the intermediate group it is also a port city, and for the oldest, it is water. On the other hand, the association with the Floating Garden was rated the lowest for all age groups.



**Figure 8.** Hexagons for the image of the Szczecin brand in the opinion of residents from other cities – age ranges.

Source: Own elaboration.

When it comes to colour associations with Szczecin, the most chosen colours were: blue (78%), green (58%) and white (44%), which means that residents of other cities associate Szczecin with the colours adopted from the Floating Garden strategy identification system (UMS, 2022c). In addition, these 3 colours were the most frequently chosen sequence. The blue colour was chosen the most times, which proves that the inhabitants of Poland know that Szczecin is surrounded by water. Also, many of them think that Szczecin is located by the sea or is very close to the sea. What us more, 33% of respondents believe that they associate Szczecin with greyness, which has a slightly negative connotation.

The question about associations with the Floating Garden strategy was answered by 129 people from outside of Szczecin, which made it possible to determine which residents of other Polish cities had heard about the City's brand strategy. As many as 73% of respondents from outside of Szczecin have not heard anything about the Floating Garden strategy, and only a few respondents associate the logo with the name. However, there were respondents who were able to define what Szczecin brand strategy is and what its assumptions are. The respondents pointed out that the given strategy includes ecological activities, investments respecting greenery and nature, as well as investments and development of infrastructure in the waterfront parts of the city. In addition, some of the respondents know that Szczecin wants to become a modern, innovative, multicultural and liveable city through the strategy. Moreover, several of them know that the City's Vision is to become a floating garden. Only 27% of respondents were able to say anything about the brand strategy of the city, which once again, confirms the belief that the Floating Garden strategy is not sufficiently promoted beyond Szczecin.

The associations of respondents from outside of Szczecin with the Floating Garden logo can be considered as interesting. The question was answered by 128 respondents, of which, 7 people had no associations. Recurring associations included: water, greenery, nature and sea. In addition, there were also such associations as: islands, pools, gardens, the Oder river, future, innovation, modernity. All these associations can be attributed to the assumptions of the Floating Garden strategy.

The most interesting associations concerned the phonetic notation as part of the logotype. The phonetic spelling of "Szczecin", which was supposed to symbolise the openness of inhabitants and the city to others regardless of nationality, is associated by the respondents with integrals, mathematics, strange stamps, but also with the script and language of Arabic, Hebrew, Georgian, Islam, Judaism, Germany and Aztec pictograms. In addition, some respondents stated that the logo is unclear, illegible, incomprehensible, chaotic and overcomplicated for them. Two respondents also commented on the logo's gradient, which they found to be "dicey" and "cheap".

## 5. Discussion

The study was carried out on a research sample divided into 2 groups: residents of Szczecin and residents of other Polish cities with a number of inhabitants above 500,000. Looking at all the created hexagons, in both cases, the 'Pulse' dimension was most often chosen as the strongest and the 'Prerequisites' as the weakest. This proves that large, cyclically organised events in Szczecin have been strongly inscribed in the image of the city. Therefore, one should not resign from organising large events in the city, because they can have the greatest influence on the city promotion, attracting tourists and influence shaping of the city image. In addition, highly rated parks, squares and boulevards in the 'Pulse' dimension show that respondents associate the city as vibrant with life, where a lot is happening and where one can spend his/her free time pleasantly. The so poorly assessed 'Prerequisites' dimension should be a signal for the authorities that appropriate steps should be taken in such a direction that factors from a given dimension have a greater impact on the city's image.

In the analysis of the study, it is also puzzling that the 'People' dimension was not strongly rated, which indicates that neither the inhabitants of Szczecin nor of other Polish cities associate Szczecin with a sense of security or multiculturalism, although due to its cross-border location, the city is inhabited by many foreigners, for example, Germans. Therefore, the city authorities should focus on developing and promoting factors that are among the least rated, and consider developing the promotion of those factors that were of average strength in relation to others.

Additionally, Szczecin inhabitants better perceived the image of the Szczecin brand as a Floating Garden when considering the assessment of individual strategy elements. For inhabitants of other Polish cities, the Szczecin brand is less widely promoted, as evidenced by poor knowledge of the Szczecin brand strategy by 73% of them. It is true that the assumptions of the strategy were supposed to be introduced to Szczecin inhabitants and that they would first get to know the idea of the vision. However, the city authorities should focus on more effective promotion of the Floating Garden strategy in other parts of Poland, bearing in mind the period during which the strategy is being implemented.

It is also of significance that the city not resign from organising the largest events, such as Sea Days and the Regatta, which shape the city's identity and attract hundreds of tourists from other cities, as well as new investments that have been successively implemented so far. In addition, 3 huge investments were completed in 2022 and 2023 – Aquapark Fabryka Wody, the Maritime Science Centre and the New Stadium of Szczecin, creating a powerful opportunity for the city, which must be properly and thoughtfully utilised for promotional purposes shaping the city's image.



## 6. Conclusions

The aim of the article was to identify and evaluate the image of the Szczecin brand associated with the Floating Garden among inhabitants of the city and residents of other Polish cities who are potential tourists on the basis of a long-term brand management strategy. In addition, 2 hypotheses were adopted in the article. The first assuming that the inhabitants identify the most important assumptions of the Floating Garden strategy. On the other hand, the second one assumed that potential tourists do not know the assumptions of the discussed strategy. The proposal of these hypotheses resulted from the need to build the Floating Garden strategy for residents and tourists, articulated by the creators of the strategy.

Residents positively identified the assumptions of the Floating Garden strategy, and the factors included in the strategy of the Szczecin brand had an acceptable intensity regarding association strength, which was at an average level. The research results presented in the form of hexagons showed that none of the dimensions exceeded the value of 4.0 (on a scale of 0-5). The exception was in the group of people above the age of 40, who assessed the 'Pulse' dimension higher than this level. The analysis of individual dimensions indicated that 'Pulse' was the best assessed dimension of Szczecin's image, and 'Prerequisites' – the worst one.

Analysis of the research results proved that the inhabitants know and understand the assumptions of the strategy and notice the beneficial changes taking place in the city and in their everyday lives. This allowed to confirm the first hypothesis. It has been proven due to analysing the associations of Szczecin residents regarding the logotype used in the Floating Garden strategy, colours they associate with Szczecin and the description of associations concerning the brand strategy.

The second hypothesis assumes that potential tourists do not identify the Szczecin brand as Floating Garden. In this case, analysis of the research results also did not allow to confirm the hypothesis. Residents of other cities do not yet fully consider Szczecin as a floating garden, and as much as 73% of respondents in this group declared lack of knowledge and were unable to determine the details of the Szczecin strategy. On the other hand, respondents from outside of Szczecin were aware of the strengths and values of the city communicated by the authorities of Szczecin, but they were not able to fully adjust them to the brand strategy.

In addition, deciphering the logo, including the phonetic inscription, causes them a lot of problems. The comforting fact is that they identified the main factors that are part of the brand's assumptions, i.e. greenery, water, ecology, nature, modernity and innovation. In this group, the 'Pulse' dimension was rated the best, which proves that the biggest events organised in Szczecin are best encoded in the minds of potential tourists.

Recommendations that can be made certainly concern larger and broader activities related to the promotion of the Floating Garden strategy outside the city. This would also help change the stereotype of an industrial city and increase its attractiveness by communicating the greener

character of a port city. Furthermore, an important recommended action is to focus on factors from the least rated hexagonal dimensions, i.e. mainly 'Prerequisites', 'Presence' and 'People'.

As far as the limitations of research are concerned, in the study on potential tourists living in metropolitan areas, they were treated as a homogeneous group, so it is possible, by adopting more extensive criteria, to deepen the analysis. In addition, models other than Anholt's hexagon can be used to interpret the results, e.g. models using the theory of planned behaviour or semantic profiles for comparing promotional messages. Moreover, research could be conducted on both umbrella brands, such as the Floating Garden, and individual place brands that require in-depth analysis.

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