

The role of logos in place marketing – with examples of Hungarian cities

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Abstract.

Logos may be the most tangible elements in the marketing and communications of a city. Logos are good if they capture the character and story of the city, distinguish it from other places, and are capable of inspiring tourists, investors, and, not least, locals.

However, if logos are ordinary and meaningless, they may do more harm than good. A logo that is overcrowded with too many elements at the same time is likely to become an incomprehensible montage, thus does not contribute to the improvement of the townscape. The same is true for logos with an oversimplified little sun shining, carrying no clear message.

Therefore this study first examines what elements make a good logo. What should we take into account when designing and approving a logo? How can it become a part of the entire visual identity? What are the typical examples in connection with it? How do Hungarian cities apply them? All in all, the question is: what makes a good logo in the case of a city?

Keywords: place marketing, city marketing, place branding, city branding, logo, visual identity

1. Introduction: The role of logos

Good brands do not only use good slogans, but they also have good logos and – in a broader sense – good visual identity. Wally Olins, the author of the book *On B&and* (2004) goes as far as to state that "logos are the heart of branding programs".

Others quote Confucius: "A picture is worth a thousand words" – referring to the role of logos that is greater than that of brand names in their opinion.

But they are wrong. On the one hand, the text of the original saying by Confucius says "A picture is worth a thousand gold pieces", which means that visual appearance plays an extremely significant role, but words (including brand names, that is, city names and associated slogans) are even more important.

On the other hand, if we take a look at the origin of the term 'logo', we realize that it comes from the Greek word 'logos', whose original meaning is 'word'. This suggests that the role of logos is no different than displaying the name in a visual way (Healey 2009, p. 90.)

Of course we may also find counterexamples such as Apple, Shell, the Red Cross, Nike or Starbucks, where you do not even have to write down the brand name, because you can identify the brand based on the logo.

However though, if we look at their original logos, we can see their brand names included in capitals, and the brands only omitted them several years or decades later. In addition, Apple, Shell, or the Red Cross could also exclude their brand names because their logos are brand names as well – in English-speaking countries people say apple, shell, and red cross if they see the sign of an apple, a shell, or a red cross. The situation of Nike as a brand is more complicated: the company placed the 'pipe' (or 'swoosh') symbol on its products for several decades, and consumers using the brand met the symbol every single day – they were actually wearing it. Another example is Starbucks: the company has only omitted the caption on its cups, but their cafés still carry the brand name written in huge letters.

Once again: the role of a logo is to support the appearance of the brand name as much as possible. This is usually achieved with a combination of a word (the brand name) and a visual symbol, but there are other options as well.

What is a good logo like? According to graphic designer Paul Rand (quoted by Healey 2009, p. 90.): "An ideal logo is simple, elegant, versatile, practical and unforgettable". However, this definition is not specific enough. If we should provide a checklist with a series of questions about good logos, it would look like (Papp-Váry 2013):

– Does the logo communicate the brand, its positioning and values in an appropriate way? (For example, if the brand is for women, does it use a slim, feminine font? If it is for men, does it use a more robust, thicker font? Does it use colours that support the message? For example, in a somewhat simplified manner, white colour

can be associated with cleanness, black with luxury, blue colour may suggest leadership, violet may be connected with royalty, and green suggests an environmentally friendly character.)

Illustration 1: The original meaning of the term logo is "word" – Apple, Shell, or the Red Cross could exclude their brand names because their logos are brand names as well – in English-speaking countries people say apple, shell, and red cross if they see the sign of an apple, a shell, or a red cross



– Is the logo simple? Are you sure it does not include too many elements? (It is no coincidence that if we consider the logo history of great brands, they have become simpler.)

– Does it work on black and white surfaces as well? (Although the number of black and white press products is decreasing, it is still worth considering a black and white version of the logo as our colleagues may need to print corporate materials in black and white.)

– Does it work in small sizes? (Can it be noticed if it is scaled down to a really small size? Can the brand name be noticed in a reduced size?)

– Can the brand be clearly noticed? Can the brand name be easily read? (We should not think that we are Nike, Apple, or Shell.)

Illustration 2: The original meaning of the term logo is "word" – which means that the word (the brand name) must be easy to read.

The city of Pécs (as the European Capital of Culture in 2010) broke this rule, which was an unfortunate choice. Usually logos with a wide shape are also more practical than vertically elongated ones.



– Can it be used horizontally and vertically as well? (It is usually more useful to create a logo that is horizontally wide in a 2:1 ratio approximately. The reason for this is that many surfaces possess this ratio, e.g. billboards, business cards, e-mail signatures, or the façades of buildings, therefore a logo like this can be placed on them more easily.)

– Can the logo be extended to offline and online identity materials? (After all, a logo is just the basis of visual identity. We need to check if it works on envelopes, writing papers, invitations, advertising materials, e-mail signatures, the website, etc.)

– Are we sure it can not be confused with the logos of other (competitor) brands? (The essence of branding is differentiation. It is no wonder that Pepsi is using more blue colour than before, distinguishing itself from the redness of Coca-Cola.)

– Does it grab attention? (The violet-orange combination used by Fedex delivery services can be noticed from a distance. Bookline online book shops did not only choose neon green because it was different from the competition, but it was also different from the communications of all other online companies – let us remember that we do not only compete with our direct commercial rivals, but also with everyone else as we try to attract attention.)

– Can it be applied on merchandising items and 'gadgets'? (Some time ago a graphic designer told me that one of the basic questions concerning logos is: "Would we take on a T-shirt like that?" And, similarly: would we use a key ring like that? Or would we put a sticker like that on our car?)

2. The logos of cities

”In the case of cities, logos and slogans may function similarly to trademarks of traditional products: they are symbols that represent the city or the region in a simple, easy to understand way”, says Lajos Boros in his study *City Branding – Márkateremtés a helymarketingben* (“*The creation of brands in place marketing*”) (2010, p. 49.)

The difficulty comes from the fact that most cities already have a ”logo”, that is, their coat of arms. However, it usually does not comply with the requirements mentioned above, and, especially, it is not suitable to attract tourists and investors.

The solution is usually the use of the traditional coat of arms in certain official documents, and the use of a ’real’ logo in all other materials reaching the public.

Illustration 3: The duality of the city logo and coat of arms (and, in certain cases, their multitude) is an issue in all cities: The coat of arms and former logo for Győr, Hungary (the logo was replaced in 2017)



Many cities use a coat of arms and a logo at the same time, but the situation is further complicated by the fact that several cities also use a variety of logos serving various purposes:

- the logo used by the municipality / mayor’s office
- the logo used to attract tourists
- the logo used to stimulate investment
- the logo or logos used to promote the sales of local products
- the logos of various local NGOs
- the coat of arms and logo(s) of the local football team, or other important sports clubs
- the logos of local city companies (e.g. public transport)
- logos created for specific events and programmes
- and so on.

If these elements are not correlated in some way, the result may be a gigantic cavalcade of logos resulting in the disintegration of city communication.

This is true even in the case of metropolises, for example, London.

At this point I must emphasize that, however strange it may seem, it is always better to have one good logo that can be used on the long run than a series of brilliant logos replaced each year. The reason is simple: in the latter case there is not enough time to ’convey’ them to the target audience.

In this sense, the case of Spain is a positive example – not only did they choose a central logo, but they have also stuck to it for decades. The unique figure was designed back in 1983 by famous artist Joan Miró. At the time, the logo was regarded as revolutionary, because it did not use the Spanish flag or coat of arms, but still included the national colours of Spain, and even symbolized the sun. What is even more important is that the logo is still used in the communications materials of the country. (See for example Papp-Váry 2009) However, the long-term use of the logo may also be attributed to the fact that it was designed by a famous person, a real celebrity, and not some unknown graphic designer – in the latter case, they would have presumably replaced the logo with a new one.

All in all, the Spanish logo has become an example to follow: several countries and cities tell their graphic designers and city identity experts to create something like the one Miro designed for Spain.

Another emblematic example is the ”I heart NY” logo designed in 1977, which is also interesting because it was originally created for the State of New York, and not New York City. It is also associated with a legend: it was designed by Milton Glaser of Push Pin Studios. The name of the famous designer played a significant role in the first years of the visual symbol, therefore it was not replaced.

Illustration 4: A cavalcade of logos does not facilitate uniform communication even if it is a well-known metropolis, e.g. London.



Illustration 5: The Spain logo by Miró, used consistently since 1983 – many countries and cities try to imitate this visual approach



It should also be noted that there is no logo or design that would be immediately loved by the public or the profession. For example, the Spain logo mentioned above was criticized for looking like fried eggs. Therefore it is extremely important that the logo survives its first years, months, weeks, or days, in spite of the criticism likely to follow its introduction.

Illustration 6: The famous "I heart NY" logo was designed by Milton Glaser of Push Pin Studios. The name of the famous designer played a significant role in the first years of the visual symbol, therefore it was not replaced.



Let us have a further look at cities and villages, this time with examples from Hungary.

In a research by Gábor Kozma in 2005, the ratio of Hungarian city/village logos featuring certain characteristic elements was also examined.

Table 1: The appearance of typical elements in city logos

Element in logo	Percentage of cities using it
Water	55.5
Building	48.1
Sun	40.7
Relief	18.5
Vegetation	14.8
Heart	3.7

Source: Kozma, Gábor: Terület- és településmarketing – Geográfus és földrajz tanár szakos hallgatók számára (”Regional and city marketing – for students of geography and geography education”), Debrecen, p. 134.

According to its findings (see Table 1) the most popular symbol was water, included in more than half of the logos (55.5 per cent). This can be explained by the fact that the majority of examined settlements is located near a river or by Lake Balaton.

The second most common element appearing in 48.1 percent of logos was a typical building associated with the specific place.

The third most common symbol was the Sun with a result of 40.7 per cent. The use of this image can be explained by the Hungarian climate characterized by sunshine and good weather, and the positive implications of sunny weather.

The three most prominent elements were followed by symbols such as relief (18.5%), vegetation (14.8%) and heart (3.7%).

Illustration 7: It may also be useful to display a characteristic building from the city in the logo as seen in the examples below: Széchenyi Castle in the case of Fertőd, the Votive Church or the Dome in the case of Szeged, and the Reformed Great Church and the Nine Hole Bridge in the case of Debrecen and Hortobágy



Illustration 8: The Great Church of Debrecen also appears in another logo in a stylized form – it is also interesting that the logo is also based on the domain name as the .hu extension suggests



Illustration 9: The same solution is used by the city of Tokaj, but their logo but refers to a wine region, not a building



In the case of Hungarian cities it is exciting to see that there are examples of logos featuring the city name only, and others also including the slogan.

Illustration 10: A few examples from Hungary with logos including the name without a slogan



It is important to point out that the inclusion of the slogan in the logo is not always compulsory. On the one hand, if a city can not find a unique slogan characterizing the place, it is not worth pushing the issue. On the other hand, it is possible that a specific logo should be used alongside with a slogan (or slogans) in certain cases, while it should be used with no slogan for other purposes.

Illustration 11: A few examples from Hungary with logos (or at least some applications of them) including the slogan:

Hatvan: "The heritage of our future (Jövők öröksége)", Hajdúszoboszló: "Hajdúszoboszló, the recreation resort (A felüdülőlhely)", Gyál: "The innovative garden city (Az innovatív kertváros)", Hévíz: "The source of life (Az élet forrása)", Eger: "Your story (A Te történeted)", Nyírbátor: "In the land of dragons (A sárkányok földjén)", Makó: "Not only onions (Nem csak hagyma!)", Balatonfüzfő: "Sea of opportunities (Tengernyi lehetőség)", Szentes: "Freedom, Szentes, I love it (Szabadság Szentes Szeretem)", Tiszakécske: "The city of sunshine and waters (A napfény és a vizek városa)", Szekszárd: "... where you recreate (... ahol feltöltödsz!)"



3. Uniform and diverse

This title may seem contradictory, but it makes an important point. The mantra of using logos used to be the consistent use of a single logo without any modifications, but the situation is different today.

For example, Coca-Cola has been using the very same logo on the packaging of its products and in its advertisements almost since the founding of the company in 1886. Counterexamples include MTV (Music Television), which has used variations of its logo, for example, according to various music genres. We could also mention Google, which uses different logos every day, sometimes even varying by country, e.g. with special logos designed for national holidays.

Illustration 12: The city of Melbourne is a good example of using a central logo in a way that it can be flexibly shaped with colours and forms inside another form



We may also find examples for the diversification of city logos. Similarly to MTV, the city of Melbourne (Australia) choose a letter M. The city uses the logo flexibly: it has a uniform basic shape, but there is a variety of shapes and a wide range of colours within the basic shape.

Copenhagen follows a similar concept: there is a basic format with a wordplay involving the city name – cOPENhagen, suggesting openness. This is complemented by slogans such as 'open for connections', 'open for change', 'open for tolerance', and 'open for development'.

Illustration 13: In the case of Copenhagen the term 'open' appears in various forms, always adapted to the intellectual content of the specific slogan, for example: 'open for connections', 'open for change', 'open for tolerance', and 'open for development'.



Some cities go even further in flexibility. According to Neumeier (2006, p. 91.) logos used to be important tools in the era of print press, but in the online age they are replaced by avatars that can be 3D, and may even move or jump. He claims that variations in the visual identity – and, in general, branding – may function similarly to people, who can be serious or funny at different times, but others always recognize them.

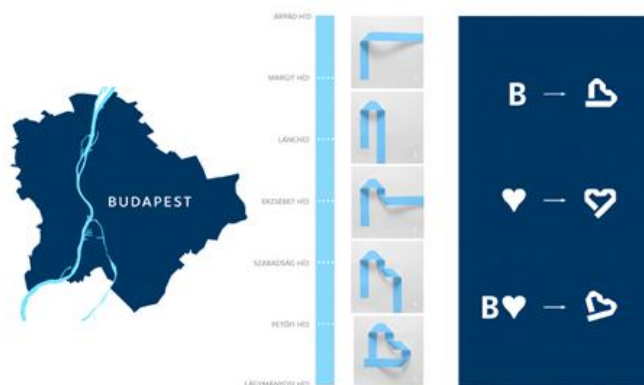
However, he is only partly right: MTV or Google are large companies who can afford to employ graphic designers assigned to design logos for them. In addition, both companies appear on the screen, where logo modifications are easily implemented. It is no wonder that even MTV and Google have their own basic logo that they use for more official communication, for example, press releases.

This is also exemplified by a former logo of Budapest with a blue ribbon. This element could (and, actually, did) move in films and digital materials, but a basic version of the logo was still necessary.

Illustration 14: The former logo of Budapest with a blue ribbon is a good example of a basic version that can be animated in films and digital materials.



Illustration 15: You would not think how much input is behind a logo or its creation. In the blue ribbon logo of Budapest there is a reference to Danube and the bridges (each fold in the ribbon is a bridge). The logo also embodies a rotated letter B, and a rotated heart. The blue ribbon carries a positive message in itself as it usually symbolizes the first place in watersports/sailing races.



4. From logo to identity

If there is a good logo and an associated visual identity, it is practical to explain them in a so-called identity manual specifying the most important elements and the rules of using them, such as (see logoterv.hu, 2013):

- Basic expectations: logo, font, colours, the use of colours, examples for the use of colours, an explanation of the terms used in the handbook, the use of the logo of the predecessor, the figure impersonating the city
- Basic regulations: the basic versions of the logo, their use, examples, mascot
- Legal consequences: general rules, trademark
- Office stationary: writing papers, business cards, notes, memos, reports, accompanying cards, mailing card, invitation card, envelope, labels, press releases, press dossier, folder, dossier holder
- Business forms: stamps, forms, computer forms, technical and editorial forms
- Publications: front page, desktop publishing, advertising brochures, catalogues, publications for internal use, phone directories for internal use, information boards
- Advertising and promotional activities: international, domestic, recruitment publications, outdoor advertising, illuminated advertisements, billboards, advertising columns, other print advertisements, frame graphics, advertising films, advertising spots, sponsorship, musical identification, signal, etc.
- Exhibitions: stand visuals, editing the information surface, graphical plans of the panel, typography, goods carriers
- PR activity: creating the front page of reports, PR films, reference films, B-roll films, image films, newsletters, presentations, presentation and sales materials, press photo database, creating the crisis communications handbook, etc.
- Packaging: general rules, principles, identifiers
- The identification of the city: general expectations, labels, inscriptions, alternative options

- External and internal guidance systems: building identifiers, illuminated direction boards, in-house signs, boards, name boards, internal portal, flags, etc.
- Branding of vehicles associated with the city or the municipality: cars, trucks and other vehicles
- Uniforms: badges, helmets, coats, management clothing, formal wear, appearance at various events
- Gifts and promotional items: occasions and criteria of providing gifts, thresholds, promotional items, wall calendars, greeting cards
- Network communications: Communication within the city, publications, professional meetings, research cooperation, city newspaper, city news programmes, database access, communication between the city and the persons specified, contact requirements, confidentiality codes, websites
- Other – electronic - communications, CD, USB, video, internal communication materials
- The identity of web-based communication tools: website, intranet, banner designs, Word and PowerPoint (possibly: Prezi) templates, etc.

What is even more important is that these items should not only be included in the identity manual, but also enforced and adhered to. This is also valid for electronic materials and everyday documents prepared by the municipality. It is shocking to see when some municipalities send Word or Powerpoint files with random fonts, awful layout, and a disintegrated logo. It is true that visual consistency in itself does not create a brand – but it is also true that it is a useful tool in brand building.

However good the logo of a city is, we cannot expect that it will please everyone – it would be a hopeless venture. We also have to prepare for the waves caused by the introduction of a new city logo. In certain cases some people think that the logo is 'lame'. In other situations it becomes a matter of political debate and the whole issue becomes politicized. We should also note that such situations may also result in more local publicity for the new logo.

Another important question to consider before the introduction of a new logo: are we sure that the new one is so good? Wouldn't it be better to go on using the old one? People seeing the logo every day, that is, professionals involved in city identity might be bored with the old logo, but it does not necessarily mean that locals or tourists are bored with it as well.

Illustration 16: The new logo of Miskolc was introduced in 2012, and sparked a heated debate – the logo includes local sights such as the Diósgyőri Castle, Lillafüred and the Cave Bath of Miskolctapolca.



Illustration 17: The figure below suggests that Miskolc has used a wide range of logos so far – luckily they used one for 10 years, and have been using the current one for 5 years.



5. Summary and suggestions for the selection of city logos

Robert Govers, a prominent expert of the topic, published an article in *Place Branding and Public Diplomacy* (2013) titled *Why place branding is not about logos and slogans*. As he explains with great exaggeration, "As places have (more often than not meaningful) names and landmarks, the amount of time and investment generally spent on designing logos and slogans as opposed to actual reputation management for places, seems to be a waste."

Jeremy Hildreth, the other prominent expert of the field uses more gentle words in his article *The joys and sorrows of logos and slogans in place branding* published in the same journal (2013, p. 222.): "In an ideal situation, no more than 10 per cent of a place's identity budget would go toward developing logos and slogans and other signifiers, whereas 90 per cent or more of the budget would be used to find identity-enhancing actions and identity-centric substance, both of which speak louder than words, or logos."

The opinion of the author of this study is closer to Hildreth's ideas than Govers' words. Indeed, it is important to emphasize that the significance of logos (and slogans) in city branding must not be overrated. However, they should not be underrated, either. They may have a serious role in the communication and promotion of the city and the city brand, resulting in a more positive image, more customers of local products and services, and more loyalty to the place.

Therefore it is very important to consider the aspects presented in the article.

When choosing/creating a logo, we must keep in mind the following aspects:

- The original meaning of the term logo is 'word'. That is, the role of a logo is no different than displaying the name visually.
- It should function in a way that communicates the brand, its positioning and values well.
- It is important to make it simple, enabling it to function properly in coloured and black-and-white versions, on small and big surfaces.
- In the case of most (but not all) logos the ideal choice is a width that is twice as big as the height of the logo.
- A logo is only the basis of visual identity. A good logo can be communicated in offline and online materials, building the brand consistently.
- It should be different than that of competitors (other cities), and, if possible, should be distinguished from anything else, because it has to attract attention.
- A simple, but effective logo test: "Would we take on a T-shirt like that?"
- This is also important because in the case of place marketing the logo must be placed on T-shirts, pens, keyrings, bottle openers, baseball caps, and a wide range of other objects that can be sold to tourists and may be included in packages presented to possible investors. In addition, such materials may also strengthen the identity of locals. Let us think of the great success of 'I love NY' T-shirts with the heart symbol – but we should not copy it entirely. We must be different!

Illustration 18: Testing a (city) logo: "Would we take on a T-shirt like that?" - It is no accident that the city of Vásárosnamény included this plan in its city identity manual, winning the National City Marketing Prize (Országos Városmarketing Díj) contest organized by the Hungarian Marketing Association



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