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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.36059/978-966-397-593-1-43>

THE TERRITORIAL BRAND AS A MECHANISM FOR STABILISING STAKEHOLDER EXPECTATIONS

The stability of the expectations of external and internal stakeholders is a precondition for investment decisions, cooperation, and long-term commitments in an environment of uncertainty; therefore, the territorial brand should be analysed as a mechanism for reducing risk assessments through the formation of trust and predictability. Within the logic of place branding, reputation serves as a generalised signal of quality, competence, and integrity that substitutes for full verification of the environment where such verification is costly or impossible [3, p. 4]. For Ukraine, the relevance of this approach is heightened under martial law and an orientation towards recovery and sustainability, when market actors become more sensitive to signs of governability, regulatory consistency, and institutional capacity [4]. Against this background, the purpose of the study is to clarify how exactly the territorial brand operates as an instrument for stabilising expectations and how it reduces risk assessments through a combination of performance and communication practice.

The notion that particular territories may have brands in a logic comparable to the corporate one is grounded in the thesis that “nations may have brands – in the sense that they have reputations”, and that the significance of these reputations for development is comparable to the role of brand images in the corporate sphere [3, p. 2]. Under this interpretation, territorial reputation functions as intangible capital that “goes before” the actor, opening opportunities for interaction and raising expectations of quality, competence, and integrity. [3, p. 4]. Accordingly, a positive reputation lowers initial distrust and mitigates risk assessments, whereas a negative reputation creates additional barriers because actors are compelled to spend resources on refuting stereotypes and proving reliability [3, p. 4].

Thus, the territorial brand can also be described as a mechanism for stabilising expectations, because it forms the frame of what external audiences consider probable, acceptable, and predictable in the conduct of institutions and key actors [3, p. 12]. At the same time, as S. Anholt aptly notes, it is important to understand the limits of purely communicative influence: deeply rooted stakeholder perceptions do not change solely through an instrument such as marketing communications. Hence, reducing risk assessments through the territorial brand is possible when communications reflect real governance practices and development outcomes, rather than substituting for them with declarations.

In the territorial marketing of Ukraine, this formula means that the desired positioning of communities, cities, and regions should be grounded in reproducible governance practice and in the fulfilment of declared priorities, because the stability of expectations is formed from the regular consistency of decisions and public messages. In practice, this shifts brand communications from the sphere of short promotional campaigns to the sphere of a long-term public accountability policy, where the content of communications is confirmed by governance results and transparent rules of interaction [3, p. 12]. For Ukrainian territories competing for investment, human capital, and partnerships, this logic corresponds to the conclusion that the image of a territorial community is linked to its competitiveness, and that the set of marketing communications functions as an instrument of image formation, provided that messages are ordered and manageable [2, p. 73]. At the city level, this is specified by the fact that a positive image is considered an instrument for attracting investment into territorial development; therefore, communications must be supported by evidence of effectiveness and predictability [1, p. 164]. In the context of martial law and recovery, stakeholder sensitivity to regulatory consistency and institutional capacity increases; therefore, the reputational work of territories depends on the ability to demonstrate stable rules, fulfilment of commitments, and risk governability in key sectors [4].

Accordingly, for Ukraine it is appropriate to interpret the management of territorial reputation as an investment in trust, which must be supported by measurable policy outcomes and by a systematic brand-communication practice aligned with real changes [3, p. 12]. The mechanism for stabilising expectations is related to the fact that reputation is an external phenomenon that is not under the direct control of the brand owner, including the brand of territories, but is a critical factor in economic transactions; therefore, risk assessments are formed predominantly in the field of perception rather than in the field of self-presentation [3]. This implies a requirement for such communication practices that increase verifiability, reduce contradictions, and

make the rules of interaction visible, that is, that transmit predictability as an institutional characteristic. Ukrainian applied studies in the field of territorial marketing support the thesis about the connection between image, communication, and competition for resources, emphasising that the image of a territory is viewed as a competitive advantage and as a factor of its attractiveness for different audience groups [2, p. 73]. In this context, the set of marketing communications of territorial marketing appears as the main instrument for image formation, which makes it possible to order messages and make addressees' expectations more definite [2, p. 73]. A strong and positive image is a mechanism of competition for limited resources and can fulfil the role of an instrument for attracting investment into territorial development [1, p. 162]. Thus, the territorial brand reduces risk assessments not through rhetoric, but through an ordered presentation of signs of governability, consistency, and effectiveness that make stakeholder decisions less dependent on assumptions and more dependent on repeated confirmations [3].

Conclusions. The territorial brand can be regarded as a mechanism for stabilising stakeholder expectations under conditions of uncertainty when it rests on an earned reputation and communications perform the function of public confirmation of the predictability of institutional actions and the verifiability of claims. Brand communications reduce risk assessments through the ordering of signals about rules, priorities, and development outcomes, which reduces information asymmetry in investment and partnership decisions. The stabilising effect arises when there is sustained consistency between governance practices and public justification; therefore, the brand should be treated as an instrument of long-term policy rather than as a one-off communication campaign. Image and the set of marketing communications are instruments of competition for territorial resources and of shaping attractiveness for key audiences, which creates a practical framework for managing expectations. At the same time, important elements include a unified territorial brandbook, an agreed narrative about development priorities, a content strategy for official digital channels, a media plan for key audiences, and communication protocols for crisis situations that reduce contradictions and strengthen the sense of governability, etc. In the Ukrainian context of full-scale war, recovery, and an orientation towards sustainability, the significance of the brand as a mechanism for reducing risk assessments increases, because attention to regulatory consistency and sector governability in shock-sensitive domains grows. Hence, an effective territorial brand policy should focus on evidence, coherence, and institutional discipline, because these characteristics form predictable expectations and reduce barriers to stakeholders' investment and cooperative activity.

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