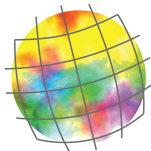


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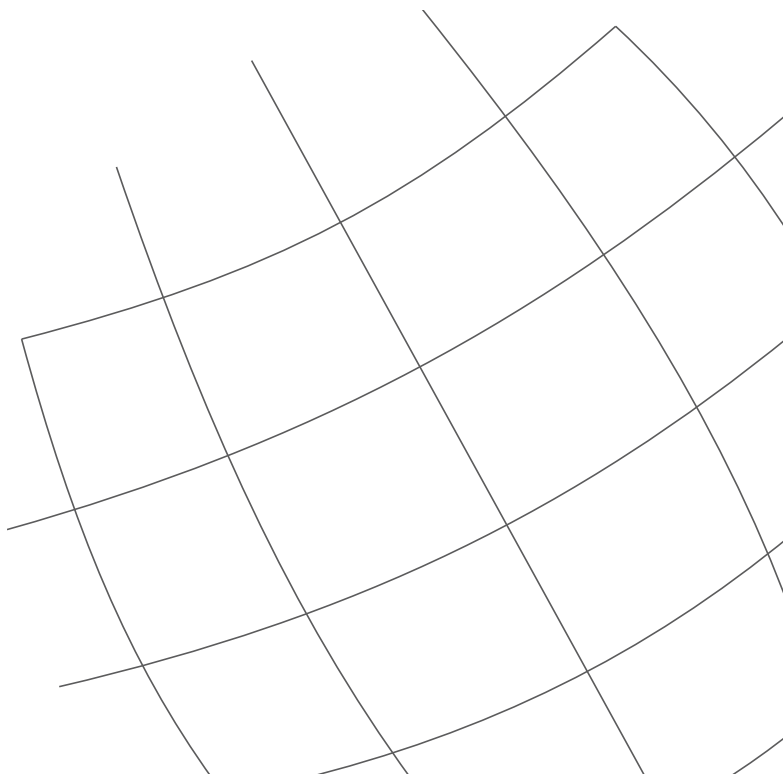
INTERNATIONAL SCIENTIFIC JOURNAL

ISSN 1336-6157 (hard copy), ISSN 2454-1001 (online)



FOLIA GEOGRAPHICA

Volume 61, 2019, No. 1





CITY BRAND IMAGE: SEMIOTIC PERSPECTIVE A CASE STUDY OF PRAGUE

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Received: March 30, 2019 | Revised: April 27, 2019 | Accepted: May 16, 2019
Paper No. 19-61/1-531

Abstract

The article focuses on the analysis of the Prague brand image from the point of signs (symbols) that make it up and also of their links in relation to the recipients, as well as to the creators of their meaning. By means of the particular example of Prague we point at the fact that the “language” of symbols communicated by the city with its real and potential users is read and deciphered differently. The study shows the existing semantic differentiation between the three monitored groups of experts on tourism and branding: domestic (Czech) experts and two groups of foreign experts: from Slovakia (as a country with the strong mutual links based on the common history and persistent intensive contacts until now) and other countries of the world. Three groups of signs are analyzed in particular: (1) iconic signs – representing the territory as a whole, respectively reflecting the real form of the territory or its elements; they are its identical reflection, (2) indexical signs – in comparison to the previous ones they only indicate a causal relationship with the territory or its elements that refer to it (it is so called the derived relation) and (3) symbolic signs – a decryption of their meanings is the result of the convention because these signs usually do not indicate any direct causal link between the city and the symbol that represents it.

Key words

Iconic signs, Indexical signs, Symbolic signs, Semiotics, Brand Image, Prague

INTRODUCTION

A rapid increase of the product diversity not only in the retail but also in the previously non-commercial fields have led to the greater attention paid to the image and the brand of the products. Their undeniable importance in the sale has been demonstrated in many studies (for example Kotler, Keller 2007; Keller 2007; Smith 2005; Kotler, Armstrong 2004). In the 60's of the last century, the idea that the product image is even more important than the product itself appeared in the debates about the concept of branding and image. As for example Gardner and Levy claimed in their study from 1955, the higher attention should be paid to the

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product brand image than to the improvement of the product technical qualities, because the feelings about the products have in many cases the determining impact on the process of decision in the product choice process. Therefore, Hankinson (2015) assumes that the brands strategies should focus more on the emotional than the functional associations. These should be considered as the main competitive attributes of the differentiation.

The indicated shift of the marketing managers' attention from the product to its image and the brand building has also the impact on the territorial planning practice (Matlovičová 2015). The territory brand building and the attempts to influence its brand are the common part of the local government activities practically all around the world. Their work is supported by the number of expert studies that examine the process of the territory image creation and their brands in the target population. We had mentioned about it in the previous works (e.g. Matlovičová 2011; Matlovičová, Sovičová 2010; Matlovičová, Matlovič 2017; Matlovičová, Husárová 2017; Matlovičová, Matlovičová 2016; Matlovičová, Kolesárová, Matlovič 2016; Matlovičová, Kormaníková 2014; Matesičová, Kolesárová 2012b; Matlovičová 2011a; Matlovičová 2011b; Matlovičová, Sovičová 2010; Matlovičová 2009; Matlovičová 2008). The less attention of academics is devoted to the marketing communication research from the point of the signs (symbols) and their interconnection in relation to the recipients as the creators of their meaning. The indicated semiotic perspective is the main focus of this study. On the particular example of the Prague city, we point out that the "language" of the signs by means of which the city communicates with its real and potential users is deciphered differently.

DATA AND METHODS

In the case study, we relied on the results of the international expert interview performed on the sample of 59 experts from the Czech Republic, Slovakia, the Netherlands, the United Kingdom, the USA, New Zealand, Germany, Belgium, Finland, Greece, Poland, Austria, Russia, Sweden, Australia and Turkey in 2015. We interviewed 19 domestic (Czech experts), 17 Slovak, 16 from the other EU countries and 7 from the non-European countries. The reasons for the special definition of the Slovak experts were the strong mutual relations based on the common history and the persistent intense contacts until now. The assumption based on the above mentioned facts is that the Slovaks have the higher level of the interest in Prague and the Czech Republic as such, so their way of the city perception will differ from the other addressed experts.

In the interview, we used the open questions in which more than one sign could be mentioned by the respondents. For this reason, the mentioned percentages were converted to the appropriate number of the responses (not respondents).



THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The French philosopher Roland Barthes (1915-1980) contributed to the development of the semiotics as the scientific discipline, although the roots of some of its concepts date back to the ancient philosophy of Hippocrates, Plato and Aristotle (Matlovič, Matlovičová 2015). However, the most frequently cited author whose work is considered to be the basis of the structuralism is the Swiss linguist Ferdinand de Saussure (1857-1913), who pointed in the canonical work *“Cours de linguistique générale”* (1916) at the possibility to analyze the language as the formal system (Giddens 1999; Matlovič, Matlovičová 2015). He claimed that the meaning of the words is derived from the structures of its own language and not from the things to which the words relate. According to him, the language consists of the grammatical rules and meanings that are hidden behind the words (Matlovič, Matlovičová 2015). Saussure therefore supported the analysis of the language structures, i.e. the rules regulating them. Most of these rules are known implicitly and we cannot name them (Giddens 1999; Gallo 2004, Matlovičová 2015).

Semiotics is the theoretical scientific discipline that formed in the field of the linguistics. The subject of its interest is the variety of signs, symbols, signals, etc., i.e. everything that serves to the information exchange, understanding, communication (symbols, icons, indexes, symptoms, language signs, etc.). The main focus is put on the exploration of the origin, the significance and the way of the the sign systems application (Gallo 2004). The sign as the basic element of the system is not only the material object, but also its attributes (properties) or the material event (Gallo 2004). At the same time, it distinguishes the natural signs understood by everyone without the previous convention, and the artificial signs whose unified understanding of the meaning is the result of the consensus (Gallo 2004).

The main of the semiotic approach application in the city branding is the perception of the target groups of the city's customers as the active creators of the meaning. In other words, the “consumers” of the territory are perceived as the active recipients of the important information messages (Matlovičová 2015). The emphasis is shifted to the content, the context as well as to the way by means of which the symbol is “read” (Fiske 1990 in Smith 2005). The content of the information consciously or unconsciously transmitted or the messages of the significance of the city brand are projected by means of the set of the cultural codes and then transmitted via the various channels and transformed into the image of the territory brand image (Matlovičová 2015). The recipient acquires them on the base of the process of decoding, selection, respectively addition (e.g. prejudices) of the originally transmitted message content (Matlovičová 2015). According to Ashworth and Voogd (1990), the stages of the coding and decoding are related to the semiological systems by means of which the more important attributes of the brand are associated with the specific feelings or states of mind.



Burgess and Wood (1988), for example, has deciphered the advertising messages promoting the territory of the London Docklands by the identification of the three types of signs (symbols) contained in the ads:

- Iconic Signs that can be considered as the representative, respectively the reference or the reference to the territory as a whole (Ashworth, Voogd 1990; Bignell 2002). In other words, there is a real similarity between the symbol and the reality because they represent exactly what we see (e.g. the photo of the city or the silhouette of Bratislava Castle as the reference to the capital of Slovakia, the Eiffel Tower as the symbol of Paris);
- Indexical Signs that indicate the causal relationship or the context to the recipient. The sender is not arbitrarily designated but he is directly (physically or causally) associated with the recipient. By means of this connection, the causal relationship or association is either observed or implied (Ashworth, Voogd 1990; Bignell 2002). The city's registration signs are not the identical image of the city, but their display preserves in some way the connection to the territory they refer to (the derived context). For example, the silhouette of the crown as the reference to the Buckingham Palace, respectively to London as the seat of the sovereign;
- Symbolic Signs - by means of which the objects can indicate the association of a wide range of activities, mind states or lifestyles. (Ashworth, Voogd 1990; Bignell 2002) There is no similarity or hint between the city and the symbol that represents it. The fact that we associate some sign with the particular territory is the result of the convention. We cannot decipher the symbolic sign intuitively but we must learn them. For example, we have learned that a red square divided by the white cross into four parts refers to Switzerland.

The socio-psychological mechanisms by means of which they occur are in this case outside the scope of interest. From the point of view of the city promotion, it is essential that senders and recipients have the same semiotic responses to the given sign or signs (Ashworth, Voogd 1990). The symbolic signs depend primarily on their successful transfer to the set of the shared cultural values. Therefore, when designing the brand of the territorial subproducts, the caution by the sign selection is necessary. There is the danger of a decryption process blocking, of a possible misunderstanding of the message caused by the improperly chosen codes (Ashworth, Voogd 1990). The misunderstanding may stem from the difference between the recipient culture and the sender, where the message sender implicitly assumes that the recipient uses his cultural reference framework to decrypt the message (Ashworth, Voogd 1990). For example in China, the number 8 is the symbol of happiness, wealth and success, while for example most of the Czechs and Slovaks consider the number 7 to be happy. Conversely, while the Chinese will consider the number 4 as the symbol of the misfortune, in the Czech Republic and Slovakia



the number 13 is considered to be such a numeric symbol. In the theory of the marketing, the risk of the communication message misunderstanding by means of the advertising symbols is described in the definition of the so-called external marketing macroenvironment. It is more conceptualized in the factors of the cultural environment whose differences are considered to be relatively hidden affecting traps influencing the business activities in the different environment (Matlovičová 2015). Besides the cultural differences at the global level, the differences present also in the areas of the lower hierarchical levels are mentioned. For example, there are so-called subcultures in one culture for which the different semiotic responses can be expected in relation to the chosen signs (Matlovičová 2015).

The above-mentioned classification can be also applied in relation to the logo used as the visual abbreviation referring to the relevant territory. In this case we think about the logo in the narrower sense, referring to the territories of different scales and we abstract it from the text that in many cases complements the graphic and it is not the basis of it. Each logo is the specific semiological system by means of which its creators (the representatives of the territory) communicate the chosen message of the meaning in relation to the target audience. The character of the encoding and decoding process depends on the type of used signs:

- Iconic Logos consist of the signs (of a graphics sometimes completed by the textual part) that somehow reflect the existing elements of the territory or eventually its real form. For example, the logos of Paris depicting the Eiffel Tower or the French logos using the landscape map as the basis.
- Indexical Logos are graphically processed by the system of signs that indicate the causal relationships and connections. They do not contain any graphic elements that represent the real form of the existing elements of the territory, but the recipient decodes them on the base of the derived connection. To this group, we can also include the logos in which the text referring to the territory is graphically processed. For example, the Prague logo (Figure 1)
- Symbolic Logos are based on the semiotic systems, the features of which have no visual or causal link to the territories they refer to. The decoding of their content is the result of the convention. The message they represent cannot be deciphered intuitively. For example country logos based on their flags (e.g. Switzerland, Czech Republic, etc.).



Figure 1

Prague logo

Source: Praha (2017)



If we approach the brand from the semiotic perspective, then its perception can also be seen from the point of view of the function and meaning as

- a differentiation tool enabling to distinguish the product from the other generic products;
- a sign of the specific function (e.g. control, notification);
- a symbolic designation (e.g. for some values, like the Swiss flag as the quality symbol or heart as the symbol of love);
- a sign of area control where the symbols can coordinate the activity (e.g. to guide the movement in the area by means of the prohibiting and commanding traffic, tourist and other traffic signs; Siwek 2011, p. 87) or define a certain area (e.g. the minority language, bilingual signs and other; Matlovičová 2015);
- a risk reduction sign where the brand can symbolize the less extent of the uncertainty by selection (e.g. if the experience is linked to it, i.e. it refers to the product whose purchase reduces the risk and uncertainty of the reduced efficiency, financial, timing, social or psychological risk (de Chernatony 2009);
- a means that shortens the writing and used because of the time savings in the communication (e.g. various abbreviations, characters, stenographic symbols, etc.; Matlovičová 2015);
- a juristic abbreviation, respectively a trademark referring to the protected designation[®] registered at the appropriate industrial or intellectual property office;
- finally as a strategic tool understood in the context of the consciously created and formed complex entity that is the subject of the planning (de Chernatony, McDonald 2003).

The semiotic view on the image of the territory's brand interprets its formation on the basis of its so-called iconic elements that carry the associative properties. The icon as the general reference can be related to the person or to the thing that we perceive as the symbol of something, but in the semiotic perspective its meaning in the sense of the diminished and simplified form of what it represents, imitates or copies, is emphasized (Kotler et al. 1999). In the marketing of territories, the icons are received as the certain visual symbols of the territory and they refer to the well known locations or significant landmarks in the country (Kotler et al. 1999). In many cases, however, the symbol is similar to what it represents only in some significant features. Therefore, it is not the perfect copy of the displayed object, but merely the symbolic expression of its most important features on which the strategy of creating the associations with the territory is based.

Perhaps the most important symbol used in the branding is the logo. This is the distinctive visual feature that works in the context of the environment to evoke the brand's vision in the mind of the observer, to stimulate the observer's personal experience, and to enhance this experience in the preparation for the next meeting (Healey 2008). However, the logo is not the brand, but only the abbreviation of the



brand (Matlovičová 2015). First of all, the essence of the brand is created before the logo - although in practice, it is, unfortunately, often vice versa. The logo itself is only the sign that gets its meaning only during its existence, thanks to the stories and experiences that are created in connection with it (Healey 2008). The logo as the very simplified visual symbol of the selected territorial identity attributes can fulfill three functions: it can create the territory awareness, it can initiate the recognition and it can activate the already stored image in the mind. (Dowling 2002) Its design can therefore be approached from the semiotic perspective as the communication symbol representing the meaning (e.g. it can be formed by the word(s), by the symbol or by their combination in the different color combinations). Its graphic design has usually the character of the very simplified abstraction, drawing or graphic (Warnaby, Medway 2010) that may have the form of the iconic, the registration or even the symbolic sign. Whatever the logo is, it is always important that the result effect has an intended influence on the customers (Matlovičová 2015).

The city image in relation to the objectively existing reality in the cities can be generally described as its partially simplified, distinctive and distorted image (Matlovičová 2015; Matlovičová, Husárová 2017; Matlovičová, Mihál' 2017). As reported by Ashworth and Voogd (1990), the consensus of the image with the objective reality can be on the spectrum from the over-simplification in the form of stereotypes, through the systemized images reproduced as the myths, and to the changes in the insensitive and the relatively stable notions - prejudices. In the process of the building of the city brand image, it is important to pay attention to the process of the generalization and the distribution of such specific ideas in the target audiences of the territory and, if possible, to influence the extent of this distortion (Ashworth, Voogd 1990; Walmesley 1988; Allport 1979).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The iconic signs perception of the Prague brand

The most commonly perceived iconic signs of the city brand are in some way the specific and significant elements of the region, such as buildings, bridges, buildings, rivers, lakes etc. These so-called flagship regional brands gain the widespread attention and they help to differentiate the city from the other similar places. Regardless of the fact whether they are viewed in the isolation or as the part of the others, they are the important differentiation elements for the region and they are the holders of the associative characteristic (Warnaby, Medway 2010). In our expert survey, we focused on their identification and we submit them to the further exploration on the example of the Prague brand.

For the dominant iconic signs of the Prague brand, two signs were identified by the mentioned group of the experts: Charles Bridge, which was considered by 37% of experts as the flagship and the Prague Castle, together with the Castle

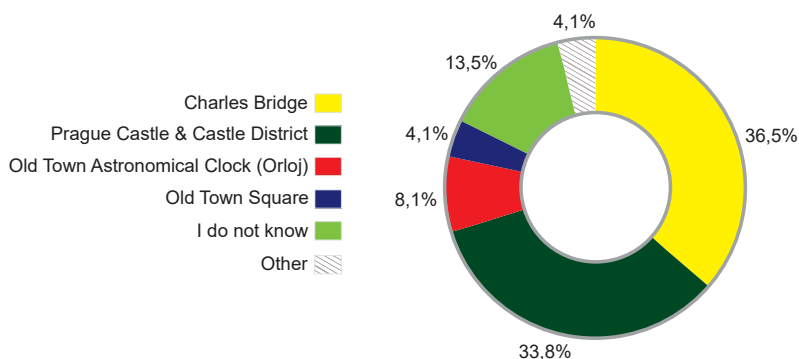


Figure 2a

Iconic signs perception of the Prague brand

Source: author's own research results (expert interview)

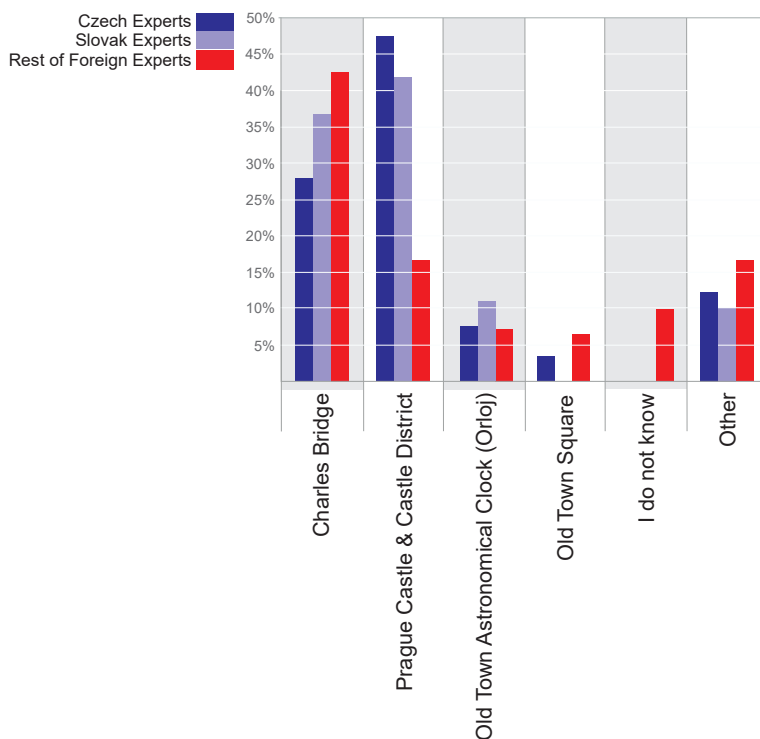


Figure 2b

Iconic signs perception of the Prague brand
according to the country of the origin of the expert interviewee

Source: author's own research results (expert interview)



District (Czech: Hradčany), which was marked by 34% of them (Figure 2a). Among the other icons of the city mentioned by the respondents, we can mention the Old Town Astronomical Clock (Czech: Orloj) (8%) and the Old Town Square (4%). (Tirpakova 2015)

However, the more detailed view on the semiotic response of the respondents reveals some differences (Figure 2b). While the domestic experts perceive the Prague Castle and the Castle District as the most intense (48%), Charles Bridge resonates as the dominant icon of the city (43.3% makes the connection with the city) for foreign experts. Slovak experts' answers were more balanced, with the slight predominance for the Castle District. It is also worth mentioning that the foreign experts perceived the Prague Castle as the separate visual element, while the Slovak and the domestic Czech experts perceived it primarily in the context of the wider region, as the whole complex of the historical town the Castle District. (Tirpakova 2015)

Other significant image-forming elements have been also mentioned, e.g. The Vysehrad, The Wenceslas Square, The Josefov Jewish Quarter, the historical city center, The National Theater, The Church of Saint Nicholas. (Tirpáková 2015)

The indexical signs perception of the Prague brand

Indexical signs in comparison to the previous group of signs make reference to the city indirectly, i.e. they preserve a certain derived correlation to the region. It is not the identical city image, but the link - the causal association to the city - is preserved.

In our survey we examined the intensity of the associations to the Prague brand by means of the set of the characters contained in the films. Beside the photography or other static forms of the graphic visuals, the full-length movie creates the set of frames and the most diverse images which are artistically designed into the form shifting out of the reality (sometimes to the larger extent). However, some movies represent the indexical signs to the higher extent. These are mainly the films that refer to the city only indirectly - they were filmed there. In some movies filmed in the artificially created interiors or exteriors located in the particular area, there can be only the symbolic connection with the city - by means of the place of the filming (otherwise it does not refer to the city). In this case, the viewer cannot intuitively decipher the connection with the city. The mentioned reflection shows that it is sometimes difficult to categorize the filmmaking from the point of view of the above mentioned typology because the individual works offer several interpretative perspectives and often also the overlaps between the above-mentioned categories of the signs.

However, the mentioned difficulties do not have the influence on the potential impact of the film production on the recipient. The film industry is one of the most



effective forms of the marketing communication what has led to the establishment of the entire film industry and consequently the numerous film production centers in the world.

Prague is considered to be the favorite place for the filmmakers. Several internationally famous personalities have worked here since the beginning of the film industry (e.g. actress Heda Lamarr). In the 1930s, Barrandov studios that belong to the oldest and the largest one in Europe were opened there (Tirpáková 2015). There also several famous directors have worked (e.g. Miloš Forman, Jiří Menzel). The film producers from Europe, Asia and America often use the Prague architecture for the movies making, but often also the cheaper compensations for the portrayal of the other cities, for example London, Paris, Rome, Vienna, Venice, Zürich or Miami (Tirpáková 2015). The most famous films of the last 40 years filmed or played in Prague include: *Amadeus* (1984), *Kolya* (1996), *Mission: Impossible* (1996), *Les Misérables* (1998), *From Hell* (2001), *The Bourne Identity* (2002), *The League of Extraordinary Gentlemen* (2003), *Shanghai Knights* (2003), *The Prince & Me* (2004), *Lovers in Prague* (2005), *The Illusionist* (2006), *Casino Royale* (2006), *Hannibal Rising* (2007), *The Chronicles of Narnia: Prince Caspian* (2008), *Mission: Impossible - Ghost Protocol* (2011), *Somewhere Only We Know* (2015) or serial like *The Musketeers* (2013) and *Crossing Lines* (2013). The organization PCT (Prague City Tourism) and the Czech Film Commission edited the Prague Film Locations Map in 2015 where the most famous films were shot (Prague Film Location Map 2015; Tirpáková 2015).

Besides the positive impact on the city brand image, it is also necessary to mention the opposite - the negative impact in relation to the film industry. Specifically, it is the documentary film *Prague Scam City* by the National Geographic based on the pre-set situation which depicts the Czech capital city in the negative light. Despite the police findings that there were pre-paid figurants, enterprises and taxis, the document can be considered as the communication tool that used them as the certain registration signs in relation to the relationship viewer - Prague (Pravda 2013 in Tirpáková 2015).

In our group of experts, three films have reached the highest level of the association with the Prague: *Mission: Impossible* (20%), *Amadeus* (16.9%) and *Casino Royale* (15.4%). In addition to the above films, we identified the link to the city also with these films: *The Illusionist* (6.2%), *The Sinful People of Prague* (4.6%), *Lovers in Prague* (4.6%), *The Unbearable Lightness of Being* (4.6%), *Les Misérables* (3.1%) and particularly also with the films such as: *Kolya*, *The Prince & Me*, *Pan Tau*, *DodgeBall: A True Underdog Story*, *Wanted*, *Casablanca*, that we included into the category Other (13.8%). 10.8% of the respondents were unable to mention any films associated with Prague (Figure 3a). (Tirpakova 2015)

The analysis of the expert opinions according to the country of their origin showed the following differences (Figure 4b). The domestic Czech experts pre-



sented most often the association connected to the biographical film by the Czech director Milos Forman *Amadeus* (26.3%), the Slovak experts *Mission: Impossible* (27.2%) starring Tom Cruise and foreign *Casino Royale*; Figure 3b). (Tirpakova 2015)

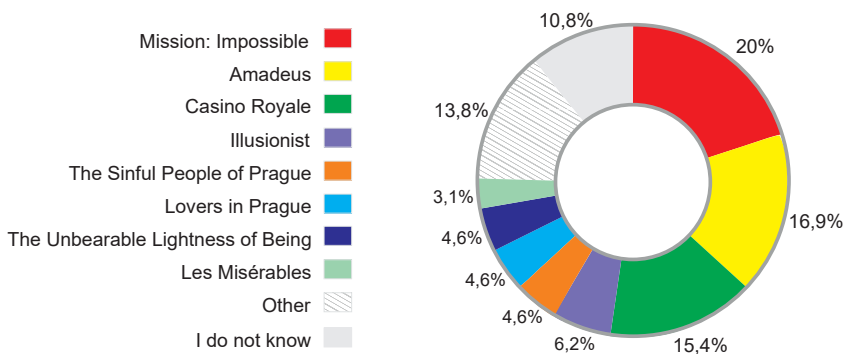


Figure 3a

Film production associated with the Prague brand

Source: author's own research results (expert interview)

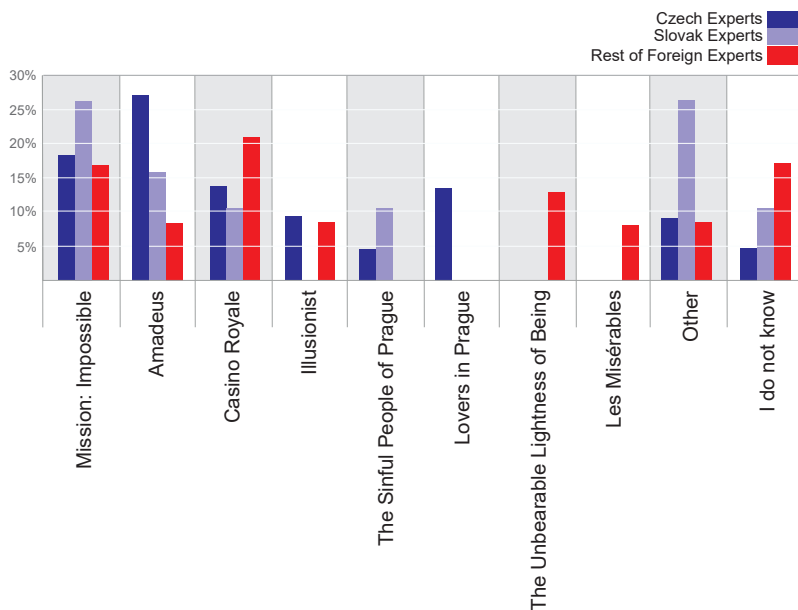


Figure 3a

Film production associated with the Prague brand according to the country of the origin of the expert interviewee

Source: author's own research results (expert interview)



The symbolic signs perception of the Prague brand

The symbolic signs indicate the connection with the city only indirectly. The identification with the region is possible on the basis of the derived coherence. The intuitive decoding of the signs system is usually not possible. In our survey, we interviewed the experts on the personal associations with the Prague city. We divided the survey into two parts: the associations with the historical personalities and the associations with the famous personalities who are still alive.

In the first case, the most dominant association with the Prague city brand was absolutely the figure of the Czech King and Roman Emperor *Charles IV.*, for almost 40% of the respondents (Figure 4a). Among the most frequently mentioned personalities associated with Prague belong also the president *Václav Havel* (21.1%) and the writer *Franz Kafka* (15.8%). The other personalities we identified as much less significant symbolic signs of the city brand are: *Rudolf II.* (7.9%), the theologian *Ján Hus* (3.9%) and some other that we included into the category Other (9.2%). For example, there were mentioned: *Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk*, *St. Wenceslaus*, *St. Libuše*, *Albert Einstein*. (Tirpáková 2015)

We noted the less significant differences in the city associations to the historical personalities among the experts according to the country of their origin at *Franz Kafka* who was identified particularly by the foreign experts as the symbol of the city (29.7%) and *Rudolf II.* who was identified only by the Czech experts (Figure 4b). On the contrary, in the person of *Václav Havel*, the ratio of the responses was the most balanced. For the Slovak respondents, the top personal association with Prague was the person of the Czech King and Roman Emperor *Charles IV.* (Tirpáková 2015)

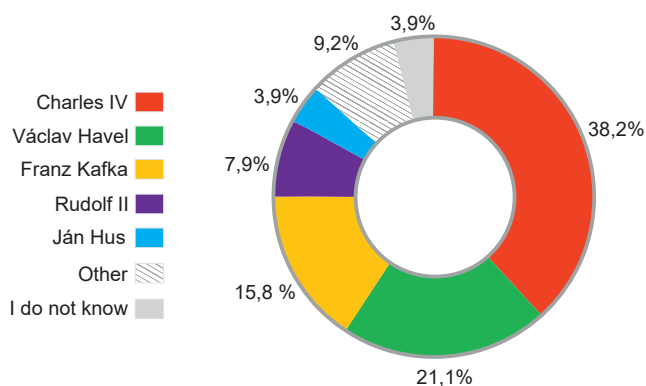


Figure 4a

Historical personalities associated with the Prague brand

Source: author's own research results (expert interview)

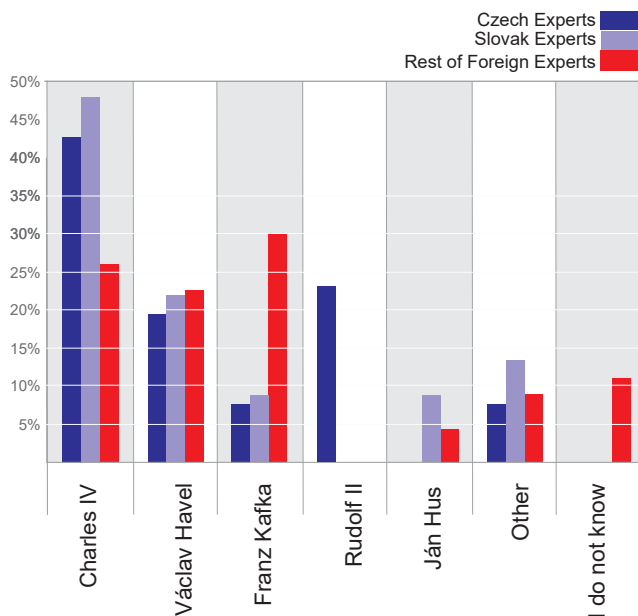


Figure 4b

Historical personalities associated with the Prague brand according to the country of the origin of the expert interviewee

Source: author's own research results (expert interview)

We have identified the lower degree of the the association explicitness within the contemporary personalities associated for the respondents with Prague (Figure 5a). Among the most frequently mentioned personalities with the high media publicity were the former president *Václav Klaus* (11.5%), the hockey player *Jaromír Jágr* (9.8%), the singer *Karel Gott* (9.8%), the mayor of Prague in 2014–2018 *Adriana Krnáčová* (8.2%), the current president *Miloš Zeman* (8.2%), the football goalkeeper *Petr Čech* (4.9%), the actor and moderator *Marek Eben* (4.9%), the photographer *Jan Saudek* (4.9%), the director *Zdeněk Svěrák*, the rector of the Charles University *Tomáš Zima*, the former mayor of Prague *Pavel Bém*, the tennis players *Petra Kvitová* and *Martina Navrátilová*, the writer *Milan Kundera* and others. 13% of the respondents did not mention any current personality associated with Prague, while all of these experts were from abroad (Figure 5b). The Slovak experts mentioned mainly politicians, specifically *Václav Klaus* (31.6%) and *Miloš Zeman* (21.1%). The mayor of Prague in 2014–2018 (when we realized the survey) *Adriána Krnáčová* was the most frequent response of the Czech experts (26.3%). If ever the other experts from abroad mentioned some personalities, the most of them were the athletes as *Jaromir Jagr* (26.1%), *Petr Cech* (13%) and *Petra Kvitova* (8.7%). (Tirpakova 2015)

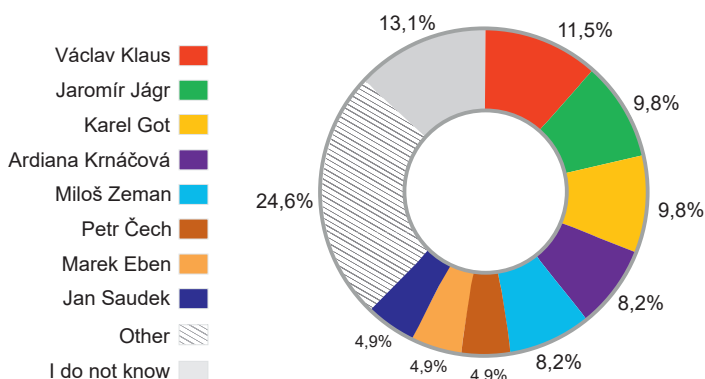


Figure 5a

Living well-known personalities associated with the Prague brand

Source: author's own research results (expert interview)

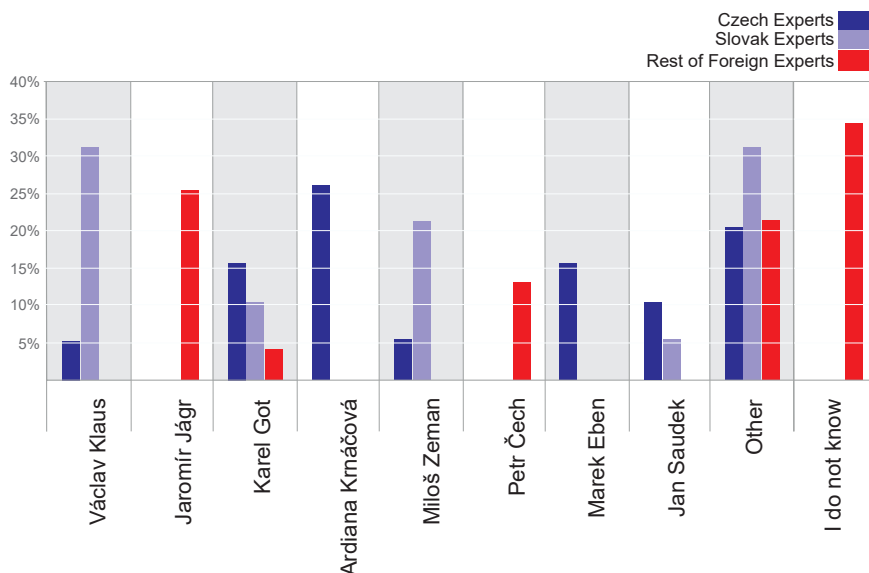


Figure 5b

Living well-known personalities associated with the Prague brand according to the country of the origin of the expert interviewee

Source: author's own research results (expert interview)

The other symbolic signs of the Prague brand that we identified in our survey included the set of the products that the interviewed experts associate with Prague. It were the so-called product associations belonging to the Prague brand. Some of the mentioned products (e.g. *Prague Ham*, *Bohemia Crystal*) indicated the higher degree of connection, respectively the causal relationship to the city area



by means of their branding explicitly referring to Prague or the Czech Republic and therefore their inclusion among the symbolic signs is to certain extent disputable. However, we mention them there because of their logical interaction to the product association category with the Prague brand.

On the base of the numerous studies devoting to the research of the impact of the declared place of the product origin on the customers, it is accepted currently that the brands of the country of the origin are affecting the image of the product labeled by means of the the "Made in" label. The intensity as well as the direction of the impact of the activity are different, but most often it is bilateral (more in Matlovičová 2016).

In our survey we found out that the spontaneous knowledge of at least one product that is associated with Prague by the respondents was successful in the two thirds of the respondents. Both of the mentioned by them - the beer and the *Prague ham* - had 17%. *The Bohemia crystal* was in the third place. A surprising finding was the connection of Prague with the Russian dolls - *Matrioška* - the set of the wooden dolls of the decreasing size placed one inside another, depicting a girl in the Russian national dress most often. It is the traditional symbol of Russia. Their considerable presence in the souvenir shops has created their unintended (and probably also undesirable from the point of view of the marketing managers of the Prague brand) link on Prague and the Czech Republic as such. Besides the stated products there were also mentioned: *Infant Jesus of Prague*, *trams*, *dolls*, *a large number of the tourist guides* that were - because of their low frequency - included into the graphical presentation into the category Other (6.8%). For the completeness, it is necessary to say that up to 34% of the asked experts did not know to name any product that would symbolize Prague (Figure 6a). (Tirpakova 2015)

The analysis according to the country of the origin of the respondents showed a significant difference. While the foreign experts mostly associate Prague with the

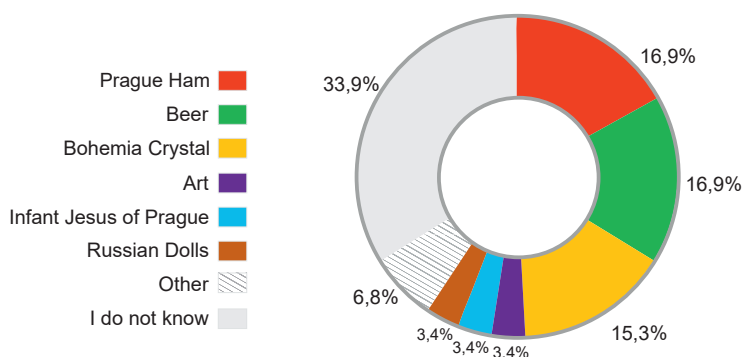


Figure 6a

Symbolical signs perception of the Prague brand

Source: author's own research results (expert interview)

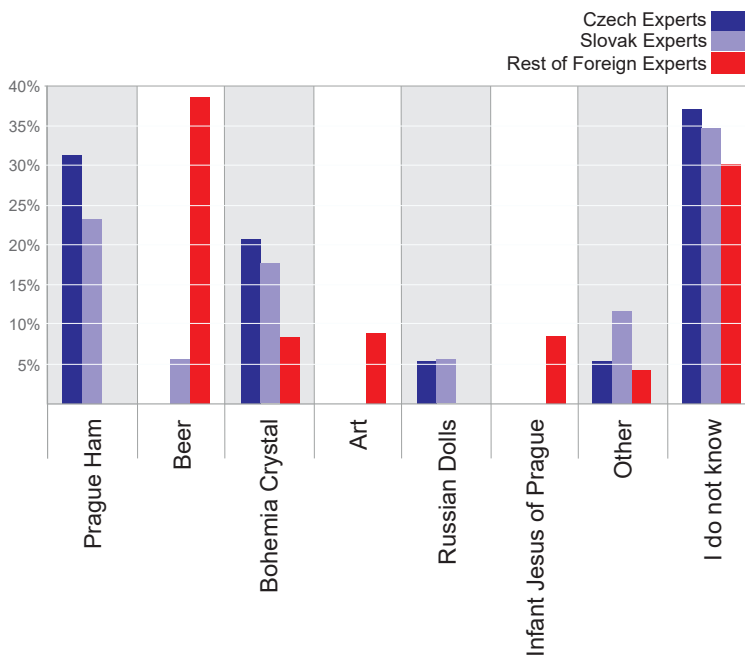


Figure 6b

Symbolical signs perception of the Prague brand
according to the country of the origin of the expert interviewee

Source: author's own research results (expert interview)

beer (39.1%), the domestic Czech experts mentioned especially the *Prague ham* (31.6%). The Slovak experts most frequently mentioned these answers - the *Prague ham* and the historical monuments (23.5%; Figure 6b). (Tirpakova 2015)

We paid the specific attention to the ability verification of the Prague logo - as the specific symbolic set of the signs created for the needs of the marketing communication - to communicate its openness intended by the creators towards the foreigners. The authors attempted to achieve this goal by the graphically processed visual with four language mutations of the Prague city brand using the Latin characters (Figure 1). In this context, it should be noted that 20.3% of the experts met the brand at the time of our interview for the first time (specifically only the foreign experts). The results of the survey showed that the graphic design of the logo achieved the stated aim - it is according to more than the two thirds of our experts (Figure 7a). In this case, the domestic (Czech) experts evaluate the chosen features of the semiotic system as the most favourable. Only 15% of them evaluate the logo in relation to the goals as unsuitable or rather unsuitably chosen. The foreign experts had the least favourable attitude, with the negative response rate of 48% (Figure 7b). (Tirpakova 2015)

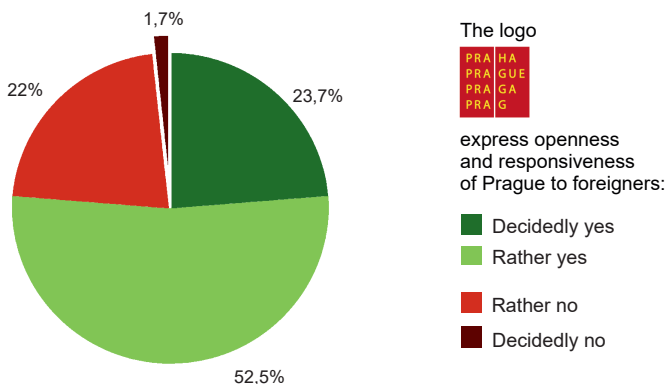


Figure 7a

Prague brand ability to communicate openness and the responsiveness towards foreigners

Source: author's own research results (expert interview)

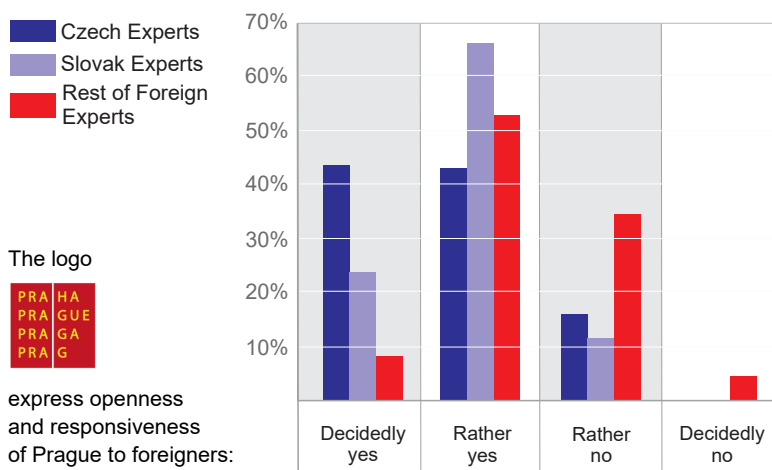


Figure 7b

Prague brand ability to communicate openness and responsiveness towards foreigners according to the country of the origin of the expert interviewee

Source: author's own research results (expert interview)

CONCLUSIONS

The main aim of our survey was to identify the main elements of the semiotic system of the Prague brand. The realized survey has shown that there are differences in the perception of the city brand among the domestic and foreign experts. One of the ways how to identify them is to reveal the primary associations linked to the examined territory, the so-called top-of-mind associations that represent the



initiators of the spontaneous association with the city. In other words, these are the components of the city brand image that come to the mind in the confrontation with the Prague notion as the first.

In our survey, almost the quarter (23.2%) of the 59 asked experts on the tourism and the branding identified as the first association coming to their mind when confronting the Prague notion some of the iconic signs and they mentioned particularly the *historical monuments* (the Charles Bridge and the Prague Castle). Under certain circumstances, we could also add the dominant *elements of the architecture* to this group that were identified by 5.8% of the respondents. The most numerous primary associations included the symbolic designation - *The Capital City* (23.2%), referring to the city as such (Figure 8a). In the category Other (14.5%) associations like *Vltava, the city tourism, a city similar to Vienna, a royal city, an affordable destination, a city near Dresden* are included. (Tirpakova 2015)

We found out some differences when looking at the experts' opinions according to their country of origin (Figure 8b). The Slovak and the Czech experts stated the most frequently these answers - *The Capital City of the Czech Republic* (36% -37%) and the specific *historical monuments* (29.4% of all Slovak respondents' answers, 36.8% of the Czech respondents' answers). Some specificity was reported only by the Slovak and Czech respondents and it was the association on the attribute the *City of One Hundred Spires* (23.5% of the Slovak respondents' answers, 15.8% of the Czech respondents' answers). This three associations had dominant role for the domestic and the Slovak experts. We can not speak about the significantly dominating association at the foreign experts. Their responses showed the greater rate of the variance. For the top-of-mind associations of the foreign experts in our survey, we can indicate the following answers: *the history* in general (15.1%), the historical monuments, a beautiful city, the architecture in general and the beer (approximately 12.1% for each of them). (Tirpakova 2015)

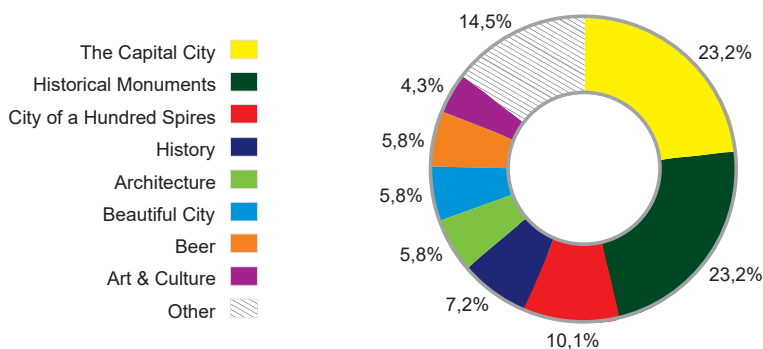


Figure 8a

Top-of-mind associations connected to Prague brand

Source: author's own research results (expert interview)

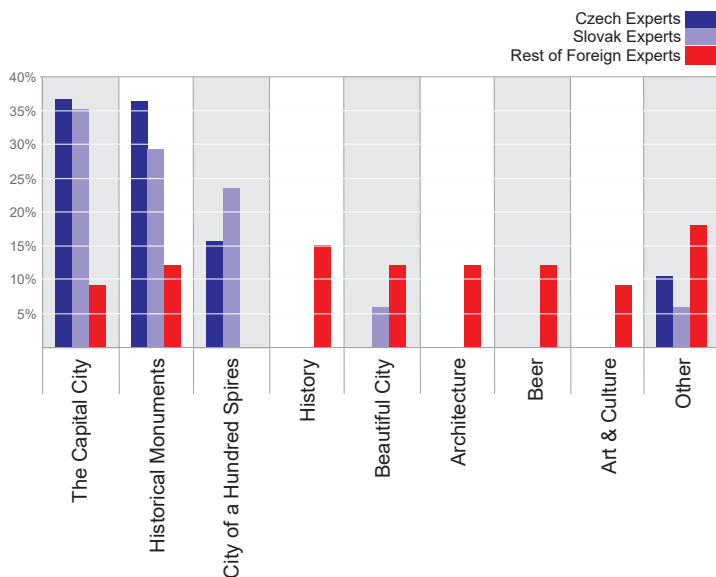


Figure 8b

Top-of-mind associations connected to Prague brand according to the country of the origin of the expert interviewee

Source: author's own research results (expert interview)

In our survey, the iconic top-of-mind associations with Prague were already in the majority (39.1%; Figure 9). The asked experts mentioned specifically the historical monuments and the elements of architecture. Somewhat smaller group was represented by the group of the symbolic signs (34,8%) within which the Prague branding as *The Capital City* and also *the beer* strongly dominated. The least numerous group was the group of the indexical signs (11.5%) where the responses were significantly various. (Tirpakova 2015)

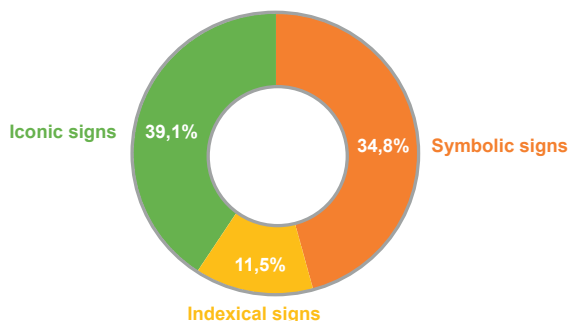


Figure 9

Top-of-mind associations connected to Prague brand

Source: author's own research results (expert interview)



Finally, we can state that the Prague brand has the significantly expressive iconic and symbolic whose potential for the use within the marketing activities is definitely not exhausted. Their subsequent semiotic analysis showed that there are the existing significant differences in the process of their decryptio among the asked domestic and foreign tourism and branding experts.

Acknowledgement

This paper was supported by the Slovak Research&Development Agency under the contract No. APVV-15-0306 (*Kooperatívne aktivity miestnych samospráv a meranie ich účinnosti a efektívnosti*). It was supported also by the Scientific Grant Agency VEGA under the contract No č. 1/0049/18 (*Diskontinuity vo vývoji slovenského geografického myslenia v 20. a 21. storočí: objektívna a subjektívna dimenzia*).

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