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IDENTITY BUILDING IN CREATIVE CLUSTERS

Abstract. The goal of this study is to show the importance of conscious and purposeful identity building in creative clusters. The author has made a research assumption that the method of identity building in creative clusters may become a standard method of conduct for other clusters. In order to verify the research assumption, the author has used critical data analysis on secondary sources (with the desk research method), the Polish and foreign subject literature studies as well as author's own observations and carried out personal interviews.

Keywords: identity, image, creative clusters.

1. Introduction

The goal of this study is to show the importance of conscious and purposeful identity building in creative clusters. The author has made a research assumption that the method of identity building by creative clusters may become a standard method of conduct for other clusters. In order to verify the research assumption, the author has used critical data analysis on secondary sources (with the desk research method), the Polish and foreign subject literature studies as well as author's own observations and carried out personal interviews. The material contains a cross-sectional analysis of the concept of identity.

The research indicates that the dynamics of corporate identity is similar to the dynamics of the cluster identity. In the light of the research it is necessary to point out that creative clusters can emulate other clusters that achieved success¹. The benchmarking technique may lead to that². Paradoxically, the imitation causes the elimination of one of the most important elements of the identity concept, i.e. uniqueness or "the differentiating factor". Therefore, the element of identity definition: "differentiating cluster feature" should be changed to "differentiating cluster features that ensure its success". If the unique creative cluster features

¹ Gioia D., Thomas J.: Identity, Image and Issue of Interpretation: Sensemaking during strategic change in Academia. "Administrative Science Quarterly", Vol. 41, No. 2, 1995, p. 375.

² Skowron S.: Klient w sieci organizacyjnej. Difin, Warszawa 2013, s. 45.

do not ensure its success, the cluster may imitate other clusters in order to make up for the losses resulting from maintaining an ineffective identity. The interesting research result indicates that the strong identity of creative clusters affects the interpretation of problematic issues in clusters as strategic, not political matters. Therefore, it is not weak, but strong identity that has a positive impact on strategic changes and proactive activities in a cluster³. Moreover, a strong identity positively correlates with richer structures of information exchange where there is less formalization and more participation and interaction. All of this can affect the innovative approach to planning and designing the future of the creative cluster⁴.

2. The essence of the identity concept in the light of literature studies

The concept of identity was defined in subject literature at the end of the twentieth century. According to H. Stuart and D.A. Whetten, J.E. Dutton and J.M. Dukerisch, this concept encompasses main attributes of the subject (e.g. the creative cluster), such as cluster values, corporate culture, production methods and products⁵. On the other hand, K. Konecki, K. Elsbach and R. Kramer perceive the identity of the creative cluster from the point of view of cluster members, for whom it can mean the cognitive process⁶ or the perception of the main cluster features⁷.

Initially, the identity was perceived indirectly to the process of image building⁸. It was a next step in the process of identity analysis in terms of competitiveness of the creative cluster. As a result, the models of identity, image and reputation management were created⁹.

³ Kotler Ph., Keller K.L.: *Marketing*. Dom Wydawniczy Rebis, Warszawa 2012, s. 119.

⁴ Nowicka-Skowron M., Pachura P., Grabara I., Nowak-Marcincin J.: *The Informatization of the Logistics Activity in a Firm*, [in] CECOL 2011. Proceedings of the II Central European Conference on Logistics 2011. (eds.) by Maria Nowicka-Skowron. October 20 - 21, 2011. Częstochowa., Sekcja Wyd.. WZ Politechniki Częst., Częstochowa 2011, pp. 227-237.

⁵ Stuart H.: *Exploiting the Corporate Identity/Corporate Image Interface, an Empirical Study of Accounting Firms*. "Journal of Communication Management", Vol. 2, No 4, 1999, p. 357.

⁶ Konecki K.: *The social construction of enterprise strategies. Consequences of privatization*. "Journal for East European Management Studies", Vol. 2, No 2, 1997, p. 121.

⁷ Elsbach K.: *Managing organisational legitimacy in the California cattle industry: The effectiveness of verbal accounts*. "Administrative Science Quarterly", No. 39, 1994, p. 442; Kramer R., Elsbach K.: *Members responses to organizational identity threats: encountering and countering Business Week ranking*, "Administrative Science Quarterly", No. 41, 1996, p. 57.

⁸ Abratt R.: *A new Approach to the Corporate Image Management*. "Journal of Marketing Management", Vol. 5, No. 1, 1989, p. 63.

⁹ Abratt R.: *A new Approach to the Corporate Image Management*. "Journal of Marketing Management", 1989, Vol. 5, No 1, p. 63-76; Dowling G.R.: *Managing Your Corporate Images*. "Industrial Marketing Management", 1986, Vol. 15, No 2; Stuart H.: *Exploiting the Corporate Identity/Corporate Image Interface, an Empirical Study of Accounting Firms*. "Journal of Communication Management", 1999, Vol. 2, No 4, 1999, p. 357-371; Balmer J.M.T., Gray E.R.: *Corporate Identity and Corporate Communication: Creating and Strategic Advantage*. "Corporate Communication an International Journal", Vol. 4, No. 4, 1999, p. 171-176.

However, the perspective of identity has become interdisciplinary¹⁰. Therefore, it is a starting point for numerous concepts in the field of management and marketing, particularly of communication, corporate behaviour¹¹, brand management¹² and brand image¹³.

According to G. Davis, the identity of creative cluster is its internal image that concerns only its internal stakeholders – cluster members. G. Davies described the image perceived by external stakeholders as reputation¹⁴.

On the other hand, according to L. Barnett, J. Jarmier and B. Lafferty¹⁵, it is the identity of the creative cluster that is the basis for the cluster reputation, as it eventually builds the reputation capital.

The foundations for the definition of identity were created by S. Albert and D.A. Whetton in the late 1980s, when they created the definition of this concept¹⁶. C.J. Fombrun has expanded the previous approach to the set of values and rules shared by the cluster members and defined the following identity elements¹⁷:

- features perceived by the cluster members as core,
- features differentiating from other creative clusters,
- permanent features combining the present and the past with the future

In conclusion, ambiguity and imprecision of terminology hinders the understanding of the essence of the concepts of identity, image and reputation. In a wider take, the identity of creative cluster is treated as its systematically separate and uniform image that is constantly transferred to stakeholders in a form of symbols, planned communication and behaviour.

¹⁰ Balmer J.M.T., Greyser S.A.: Corporate Marketing integrating Corporate Identity, Corporate Branding, Corporate Communication, Corporate Image and Corporate Reputation. "European Journal of Marketing", Vol. 40, No. 7-8, 2006, p. 730; Brown T.J., Dacin P.A., Pratt M.G., Whetten D.: Identity, Intended Image Construed Image and Reputation: an Interdisciplinary Framework and Suggested Terminology. "Journal of The Academy of Marketing Sciences", Vol. 34, No. 2, 2006, p. 99; Cornelissen P., Haslam A., Balmer J.M.T.: Social Identity, Organisational Identity and Corporate Identity: Towards and Integrated Understanding of Process, Patterning and Products. "British Journal of Management", Vol. 18, No. 1, 2007, p. 37.

¹¹ Hatch M.J., Schulz M.: Relations beet Organisational Culture, Identity and Image, "European Journal of Marketing", Vol. 31, No. 5-6, 1997, p. 361.

¹² Kapferer J.N.: Strategic Brand Management. Kogan Pade, London 1992, [in.] Berniak-Woźny J. Tożsamość, organizacji - modele zarządzania tożsamością organizacji, „Zarządzanie zmianami”, Nr 2, 2011, p. 2; Kennedy S.H.: Nurturing Corporate Images: Total Communication or Ergo Trip?, "European Journal of Marketing", Vol. 11, 1977, p. 2.

¹³ Baker M.J., Balmer J.M.T.: Visual Identity: Trappings and Substance, special edition on Corporate Identity, "European Journal of Marketing", Vol. 5-6, No. 3, 1999, p. 370.

¹⁴ Davies G., Chun R., da Silva R.V., Roper S.: The Personification the Metaphor as a Measurement Approach for Corporat eReputation. "Corporate Reputation Review", No. 4(2), 2001, p. 113.

¹⁵ Barnett L.M., Jarmier J.M., Lafferty B.A.: Corporate Reputation: The Definitiotal Landscape. "Corporate Reputation Review", Vol. 9, No. 1, 2006, p. 26-38.

¹⁶ Albert S., Whetton D.A.: Organisational Identity in: Cumming L.L., 1985, [in.] Berniak-Woźny J.: Tożsamość organizacji i modele zarządzania tożsamością organizacji. „Zarządzanie zmianami”, No. 2, 2011, p. 4.

¹⁷ Fombrun Cj., Van Riel C.: The Reputation Landscape. "Corporate Reputation Review", Vol. 1, No. 1-2, 1997, p. 8.

On the other hand, the image of creative cluster is commonly identified with its reputation, despite the fact that there are two separate approaches to these concepts in literature¹⁸.

According to Abratt and Alvensson, reputation and image are synonymous and interchangeable concepts¹⁹. Bron, Grunig and Barich classify image and reputation as two separate concepts. However – according to this approach – there are three approaches, depending on the way of perceiving the relation between them (reputation affects image, image affects reputation or the relation between these concepts is not defined). Reputation is more long-lasting than image and may present a relatively consistent margin of good will and support in favorable cases (positive reputations) or the lack of trust and avoidance in unfavorable cases (negative reputations). The image is neither static nor permanent, because it changes together with the cluster itself and its stakeholders. It develops in a longer period of time and is a result of, among others, communication activities taken by the cluster. It is difficult to build reputation and this process requires both persistence and time²⁰.

3. Identity of creative clusters

Authors A. Gioia, M. Schulz and K.G. Corley have expanded the concept of cluster identity by all the stakeholders and defined it as “everything that is core, characteristic and long-lasting for the creative cluster”²¹. N. Markwick and C. Fill have divided stakeholders into two types: internal and external and highlighted the method of identity building²².

According to E.R. Gray and J.M.T. Balmer, identity means its uniqueness and reality and it's integrated with image, reputation and communication of creative cluster. On the other hand, communication is a process that allows the stakeholders to perceive the cluster identity²³. According to them, image is “what comes to mind when we hear a name or see the

¹⁸ Gotsi M., Wilson A.M.: Corporate reputation: seeking a definition, „Corporate Communications”, No. 1, Vol. 6, 2001, p. 24.

¹⁹ Abratt R.: A new Approach to the Corporate Image Management. „Journal of Marketing Management”, Vol. 5, No 1, 1989, pp. 63-76; Alvensson M.: The business concept as a symbol. „International Studies of Management and Organisation”, No. 3, Vol. 28. 1998, pp. 86 – 108.

²⁰ Brown T.J., Cox E. L.: Corporate associations in marketing and consumer research: a review. „Corporate Reputation Review”, No. 1, 2, Vol. 1., 1997, pp. 34-38; Grunig J.M.: Image and substance: from symbolic to behavioral relationships. „Public Relations Review”, No. 2, Vol. 19, 1993, pp. 121-139; Barich A., Kotler Ph.: A Framework of Marketing Image Management. Vol. 32, No. 2, 1991, pp. 94-104; Predicting the unpredictable: Protecting retail & consumer companies against reputation risk. PricewaterhouseCoopers, pp. 10-16.

²¹ Gioia D.A., Schulz M., Corley K.G.: Organisational Identity, Image, and Adaptive Instability. “The Academy of Management Review”, Vol. 25, No. 1, 2000, pp. 63-83.

²² Marwick N., Fill C.: What Image Do You Project. “Management Review”, Vol. 82, No. November, 1993, p. 16.

²³ Gray E.R., Balmer J.M.T.: Managing Corporate Image and Corporate Reputation. “Long Range Planning”, Vol. 31, No. 5, 1998, pp. 695-702.

brand mark”²⁴. It is also an internal state of mind resulting from communicational activities aimed at presenting oneself to the stakeholders of the creative cluster²⁵.

Despite the fact the image can be, or even should be, planned and shaped, it is also susceptible to the impact of micro and macro environment, which can be the cause for various opinions (from positive to negative).

On the other hand, J. Dutton, J. Dukerich and C. Harquail²⁶ have proposed the distinction between the two types of identity perception or, in other words, two types of images of creative cluster, i.e. members perceived network identity that concerns the features of creative cluster as main, distinguishing and long-lasting and the construed external image that concerns the creative cluster features perceived by the members of the environment of a given cluster as main, distinguishing and long lasting. It needs to be emphasised that the construed external image of the cluster is a reflection of the external public opinion or opinion of stakeholders of a given cluster²⁷.

The concept of construed external identity of the creative cluster has to be separated from the concept of network image which is usually defined as a set of impressions that the creative cluster makes on the cluster members and the participants of the external environment of the cluster²⁸.

From the sociological point of view, creative clusters are perceived as a collective activity of people. In every cluster in which there is a decision-making process and activities there are also coalitions, corporate games, conflicts, but also compromise between the main cluster actors.²⁹ Some authors claim that the concept of identity is related to the awareness of people, therefore it is possible to control the identity, just like it is possible to control the awareness of people (and, thus, the network).

The reputation of the creative cluster is the ability to provide valuable results to its stakeholders. It reflects the cluster’s successes in various areas³⁰. There is a connection between the reputation of the creative cluster and the image. The reputation is a sum of images that emerged in every stakeholder group, both internal and external³¹.

Another key concept is the reputation capital of the creative cluster defined by J.A. Petrick as a “part of the surplus of the market value that can be assigned to the perception of the

²⁴ Gray E.R., Balmer J.M.T.: *Managing Corporate Image and Corporate Reputation*. “Long Range Planning”, Vol. 31, No. 5, 1998, p. 693.

²⁵ Bromley D.D.: *Reputation, Image and Impression a Management*. John Willey&Sons, Chichester 1993.

²⁶ Dutton J., Dukerich J., Harquail C.: *Organisational images and member identification*. “Administrative Science Quarterly”, Vol. 39, 1994, p. 240.

²⁷ Rzemieniak M.: *Zarządzanie niematerialnymi wartościami przedsiębiorstw*. Wyd. Dom Organizatora, Toruń 2013, s. 78.

²⁸ Bojar E., Bojar M., Bojar W.: *Cluster Initiatives in Eastern Poland: Good Practices in Agriculture and Food-Processing Industry*, [in:] L. Kiminami, T. Nakamura (eds.): *Food Security and Industrial Clustering in Northeast Asia*. Springer Japan, 2016.

²⁹ *Strategor: Zarządzanie firmą. Strategie, struktury, decyzje, tożsamość*. PWE, Warszawa 1996.

³⁰ Fombrun Cj., Van Riel C.: *The Reputation Landscape*. “Corporate Reputation Review”, Vol. 1, No. 1-2, 1997, p. 7.

³¹ Bromley D.D.: *Reputation, Image and Impression a Management*. John Willey&Sons, Chichester 1993.

subject as a responsible domestic and global corporate citizen”³². The reputation capital of the creative cluster is one of the more important assets that should be managed purposefully.

A very interesting, five-element concept was proposed by B.H. Schmitt. According to him, the identity of the creative clusters consists of cluster’s corporate culture, corporate behaviors, market environment and chosen strategies, products or services offered by a cluster and communications and visualization of the cluster³³.

Inspired by the above-mentioned concept, J.M.T. Balmer has expanded his initial idea to the identity mix³⁴, i.e. the creative cluster’s strategy, structure, communications, culture, reputation, environment and stakeholders³⁵.

On the other hand, J.M.T. Balmer and G.B. Soenen presented a very interested division of elements that create the identity of the creative cluster³⁶. The first of the described elements is the soul. According to J. Balmer and G.B. Soenen, “the networking soul” consists of all the values that are shared by the employees and members of a given cluster that are reflected in the way of experiencing certain things, their emotions and impressions. The second element is the mind. This identity element consists of purposeful decisions and activities of the cluster that are consistent with its philosophy, vision, mission, strategy and goals. Another element of the identity is the voice, i.e. the integrated system of creative cluster communications by means of which the cluster is making contacts and creates ties with the internal environment, which is invariably an important participant of identity building, as well as with the equally important and valuable external environment³⁷. Every creative cluster is recognized and remember by the recipients by numerous visible attributes. Their features are usually evaluated by the “crowd”, which creates the subjective image and reception of a given cluster. Therefore, these features should be well thought-out. The identity of the creative cluster can be examined in three main areas: corporate design, corporate communications and corporate behaviour³⁸.

Creative cluster communications means the ways in which the cluster communicates with the environment. These methods include, among others, public relations or information policy of the cluster. Behaviours in creative clusters are norms, values, tradition and ways of human

³² Petrick J.A., Scherer R.F., Brodzinski J.D., Quin J.F., Ainina M.F.: Global Leadership Skills and Reputation Capital Intangible Resources for Sustainable Competitive Advantage. “The Academy of Management Executive”, Vol. 13, No. 1, 1999, p. 55.

³³ Schmitt B.H., Simonson A., Marcus J.: Managing Corporate Image and Identity. “Long Range Planning”, Vol. 28, No. 5, 1995, p. 84.

³⁴ Balmer J.M.T., Greyser S.A.: Corporate Marketing integrating Corporate Identity. Corporate Branding, Corporate Communication, Corporate Image and Corporate Reputation, “European Journal of Marketing”, Vol. 40, No. 7-8, 2006, p. 250.

³⁵ Op.cit., p. 73.

³⁶ Op.cit., p. 73.

³⁷ Op.cit., p. 77.

³⁸ Balmer J.M.T.: Corporate Identity, Corporate Branding and Corporate Marketing Seeing through the Fog. “European Journal of Marketing”, Vol. 35, No. 3-4, 2001, p. 258.

behaviour and conduct. Image identity of the creative clusters is everything that is visible to the customers, co-workers and the whole environment of the creative clusters³⁹.

There is a threat connected with the identity of the creative cluster, and that threat is inconsistency in designing and later on in implementing its respective elements. The elements of the creative cluster identity should be perfectly matched – a deficiency or mismatch of one of the elements can ruin the whole final effect.

Behaviours in a cluster are a very important element of the creative cluster identity. They contribute to strengthening a cohesive image and when the cluster members associate with it, they form interpersonal relations and maintain the positive image of the whole cluster in internal and external environment⁴⁰. Behaviours in a creative cluster are also personal contacts, behaviour, appearance, manners, preparation for meeting, ways of negotiating etc. The cohesion of behaviours results primarily from the cohesive value system and purposeful management of creative cluster with these values in mind. This means that the declared values and actual values in the corporate network are coherent, regardless of the employee level⁴¹.

All of these activities lead to comprehensive identification and, thus, uniform interpretation of the creative cluster in an environment⁴². There are two main functions that can be distinguished when it comes to comprehensive identification of the creative cluster. One of them is the integrative function - aimed at internal environment - that develops the awareness of “my own self” both among leaders and internal and external stakeholders. It also ties the established models and standards of people’s conduct and the internalized roles and assumptions. On the other hand, the differentiating function of the creative cluster is aimed at external environment and accentuates its personality and distinctness in the form of a “clear image”⁴³.

The identity of the creative cluster is “a certain kind of auto presentation and the way of acting in the internal and external environment”⁴⁴. The creative cluster has its own instruments such as: behaviour of employees and stakeholders, internal and external communications and visual aspect of identity. Creative clusters have certain features that distinguish them from the competition and constitute the identity characteristic. These consist of factors that allow the creative cluster to dominate among other competitors with similar profile. A very important characteristic of the cluster identity is also trust. Every creative cluster carefully selects these characteristics and takes care of them so that the target consumers may notice and value the undertaken activities⁴⁵.

³⁹ Op.cit., p. 259.

⁴⁰ Rzemieniak M.: Public relations wewnętrzne w kontekście rozwoju pracowników i organizacji, [w:] Wawer M. (red.): Rozwój potencjału społecznego w organizacji. Wyd. WSPA, Lublin 2012, s. 179.

⁴¹ Rzemieniak M.: Zarządzanie..., op.cit.

⁴² Wójcik K.: Public Relation od A do Z. Agencja Wyd. Placet, Warszawa 2001, s. 124-125.

⁴³ Carried out personal interviews.

⁴⁴ Szocki J.: Wizerunek firmy w mediach. Wyd. Forum Naukowe, Poznań-Wrocław 2008, s. 11.

⁴⁵ Op.cit., s. 12-18.

The building of creative cluster can be based on and, to a certain degree, dependant on the attitude of the cluster leaders: should the identity be built on the basis of clients and their expectations or should it be focused on stakeholders' expectations?⁴⁶. Both of these approaches include actions from the first and the second concept, but one of them is always a determining factor. In the former approach, by building its identity, the creative cluster compares itself to the model creative cluster and tries to optimally present and describe the offered benefits to the cluster stakeholders. The second concept is based on a fierce competition⁴⁷.

4. Summary

The aforementioned selected examples of interpreting the identity show that the category of creative cluster identity is a relatively wide concept that is difficult to define in a uniform, specific manner. What is important is the way in which the creative cluster identity is analyzed, the resources it possesses and to what end is the creative identity built. Various attempts to define the creative cluster identity share a common goal: to distinguish a given cluster from the environment and give it a meaning.

The possessed knowledge and experiences in the process of building one's own identity are used in creative clusters that have been operating on the market for some time now. The newly created creative clusters are based on searching, identifying and accentuating special features in order to stand out above other entities. As time goes by the creative clusters begin to implement various techniques and use both knowledge and innovative solutions, because there are no permanent boundaries between the abovementioned approaches to building the identity of creative clusters.

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⁴⁶ Pabian A.: Ecological Aspects of Sustainability in Building Industry, [in.] Proceedings of the 3rd International Conference on Contemporary Problems in Architecture and Construction. November 20 - 24, 2011, Beijing, China, 2011; Bojar M.: Innovative regional development: instruments supporting development of regional institutional links, Wyd. Politechniki Lubelskiej, Lublin 2011.

⁴⁷ Zarębska A.: Identyfikacja tożsamości organizacyjnej, Difin, Warszawa 2002, s. 84-85.

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