

City's Soft Power: Developing Urban Soft Power Index as a tool for smart and culture-led development

Abstract

Concept of soft power was initially applied at the international level, referring to the methods of non-military influence between states. Nowadays, because of decentralization and deconcentration, city becomes a significant actor at international level, possessing almost all the soft power tools as well as the state. It's quite important to mention the distinction between the soft power of a city and urban attractiveness. Soft power represents 'something special' that does not refer to economic criteria, but makes a city exceptional among others. Development of the concept of soft power by a number of the researchers allows us to take a new approach at soft power as an instrument of influence, at the city level.

Present study understands soft power as spreading the influence of the city and attracting certain groups of the population with the help of various socio-cultural characteristics that distinguish the city from others, despite relatively equal level of economic development. This allows to assert that consolidation of the city's soft power is possible only through smart and culture-led development. Local city culture defines the path of city's further development: values and branding, educational and cultural offers, public administration accessibility among others forms the habitat city residents want to live in.

During the research, there were identified five main clusters of the city's soft power: city diplomacy, city government, cultural sector, educational sector, business and innovation sector, as well as number of indicators allowing to measure city's soft power potential. One of the tools to qualitatively and quantitatively measure soft power potential is Soft Power Index. Present study aims to explore the main indicators of city's soft power that allows to adapt and develop Soft Power Index for a city level, with using open access existing information, so the local authorities had all the necessary information already, without additional expenses for calculating the Index. The accuracy of the resulting tool is tested by interviewing urban population with the help of a structured questionnaire and ulterior comparing interviews and City Soft Power Index outcome. At the present stage of research, for testing developed tool were chosen three Romanian cities: Baia Mare, Targu Mures and Timisoara due to their different and cultural, economic and social background.

The research results will be used for creation of the practical guide with recommendations for consolidating the city's soft power on the next research phase.