Key Research Areas in Territorial Marketing from 2020 to 2025

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Abstract

Aim: The paper aims to present the identified key research areas in territorial marketing in 2020-2025.

Methodology: To identify relevant research materials, a literature analysis was conducted using the licensed database, the Web of Science. The keywords used for the search included *territorial marketing* and *place marketing*, as inserted by the authors. The analysis focused on articles published between 2020 and 2025 and only included materials written in English. Keywords that appeared at least three times were selected for the mapping process. Ultimately, 66 distinct keywords were identified, which formed five clusters representing different research areas.

Results: Based on the conducted mapping, key research areas in territorial marketing were identified and named, focusing on image communication and building the city's brand in recent years. The research indicates that this process should be based to a greater extent on distinguishing features referring to the identity of the place. Another important and current research trend is the analysis of marketing activities aimed at migrants, including digital nomads – temporary workers who often change location.

Implications and recommendations: This paper presents recommendations for three directions of future empirical research, the results of which can provide important data supporting the development of current research areas in territorial marketing.

Originality/value: Developing a synthetic review of contemporary issues related to place marketing enables scientists to identify key research problems. The systematic analysis of evolving issues facilitates the consolidation of knowledge and supports the dynamic development of this field, contributing to the improvement of place marketing strategies.

Keywords: territorial marketing, place marketing, VOSviewer, city image, digital nomads

1. Introduction

Regardless of size and competitive position in the global economy, all locations should use tools and activities in territorial marketing, which enables their development and ensures the inhabitants' well--being (Kotler et al., 1999). Interest in territorial marketing is growing, as evidenced by the number of studies and publications in various scientific databases and periodically conducted systematic reviews of literature analysis in this field (e.g. Vuignier, 2017; Acharya & Rahman, 2016; Gertner, 2011). Moreover, in recent years, researchers have examined various problems in territorial marketing, drawing attention to insufficiently empirically researched issues and the need to focus research on several topics (e.g. Kavaratzis & Florek, 2021).

However, due to the interdisciplinary nature of place marketing and the different contexts of the research, the literature in this area does not create a uniform body of work (Olsson & Berglund, 2010). Consequently, this study aimed to address the following research question: What are the key research areas in territorial marketing in recent years? The focus is on the period from 2020 to 2025. Using the Web of Science licensed database, research areas were identified in which the authors utilised the keywords *territorial marketing* or *place marketing*. Combining the studies into individual clusters enabled the use of VOSviewer software. Based on the analysis, the author proposed names for the individual clusters and sought to indicate future research directions by synthesising the research findings from the identified materials.

2. Literature Review

Territorial marketing, or place marketing, is an area of interest for researchers from various scientific fields (Kobylińska, 2011). Kotler et al. (1993, p. 37) developed the first and most popular definition of place marketing and understand it as a managerial process that involves designing a place in such a way that it meets the expectations of recipients. A place can be defined as any space, but empirical research on territorial marketing typically focuses on cities and less frequently explored regions or countries. Using marketing activities allows for a competitive advantage among other territorial units (Kornak & Rapacz, 2001). This occurs because various recipient groups have access to numerous alternatives offered by other locations with comparable resources. Effectively promoting these resources helps enhance their appeal to potential city customers (Kamiński, 2011). The city's customers are most often distinguished by their location, i.e. internal and external, and include residents, tourists, and local entrepreneurs and investors. However, such a division allows for defining mega-segments and is only a prelude to defining target customer groups (Florek, 2006). In a more detailed segmentation, the city selects specific subgroups, e.g. foreign tourists or students, and adapts its product offer and marketing communication to them. However, it should be remembered that each of these groups is interested in different elements of the city's attractions, requires the use of separate channels and marketing communication instruments, and perceives the city diversely, depending on the possibility of satisfying its own goals within a given territorial unit (Wiśniewska, 2011). This creates one of the fundamental problems in place marketing, namely how to manage integrated communication of the image and brand of a place, regarding different groups of buyers who often perceive in a divergent way (Zenker & Beckmann, 2013).

When considering the intricate aspects of territorial marketing, it is important to focus on how recipients perceive different territorial units. The image of a place can be defined as "the sum of beliefs, ideas, and feelings that a given person has about this place" (Kotler & Barich, 1991, p. 95). Simply put, this means that the image is a variable and subjective category and is shaped based on knowledge about a given city and its offered attractions, as well as the feelings accompanying a person when using them. The literature on territorial marketing emphasises that a city's image is an intangible resource that plays a significant role in its competitiveness (Gosik & Żelazna-Jochim, 2018). Research on the image of a place has been conducted from the perspective of tourism development from its beginning (Hunt, 1975), and in later years was mainly devoted to the perspective of tourists. Currently, some authors explore a broader perspective of co-creation and reception of the image. In this context, it is

argued that it is necessary to involve various groups in creating the city's image strategy (Glińska, 2017), in particular the local community (Ghafar et al., 2022), which would better reflect the actual character of the city, and thus its uniqueness.

3. Methodology

The Web of Science was utilised to identify sources in scientific literature. The search employed the following keywords: *place marketing* or *territorial marketing* as the papers often use these terms interchangeably. The analysis focused on documents published in English between 2020 and 2025. As a result, 240 papers were gathered.

The VOSviewer program was employed to achieve the research objective of identifying the main areas in territorial marketing. This program enables the creation of a map that illustrates the connections between keywords and clusters, highlighting the most common relationships among words. The authors of 240 papers used a total of 891 keywords. The mapping procedure focused on words that appeared at least three times, and followed the steps outlined by Huang et al. (2022, p. 3), which include:

1. Data collection – selecting the Web of Science as the data source and using the author keywords.
2. Filtration – applying a publication period criterion, the years 2020 to 2025 in English language only.
3. Mapping – creating a map that illustrates the connections among words that appear at least three times.
4. Summary – naming the individual clusters and describing the research focus within each cluster.

4. Results

A total of 66 frequently appearing keywords from the extracted publications were selected, resulting in the formation of five distinct clusters (Figure 1). The affiliation of a specific term used as a keyword in a publication to a particular cluster indicates its most frequent occurrences and connections with other terms within that cluster, but still accounting for its associations with terms in other clusters.
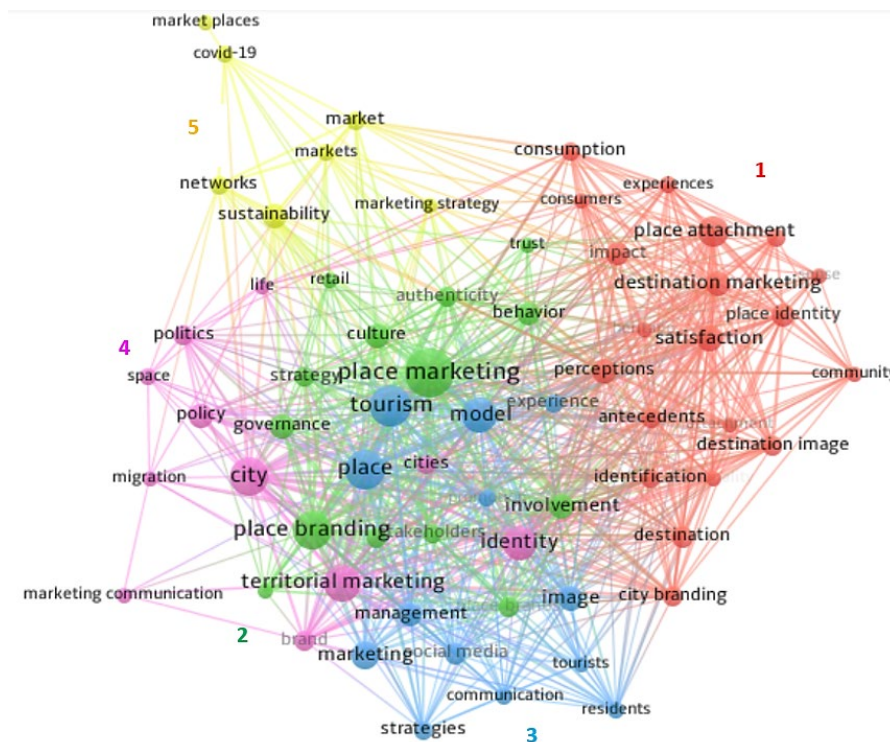

Fig. 1. Map of connections among keywords

Source: own elaboration.

To facilitate a precise analysis of the mapping results, the data was organized in a table format, and names were proposed for individual clusters to reflect the most commonly conducted research by authors utilising the selected keywords in their publications (Table 1).

Table 1. Keywords associated with specific clusters

Cluster	Keywords	Cluster's name
Cluster 1	Antecedents, attachment, attitudes, city branding, community, consumers, consumption, destination, destination image, destination marketing, experiences, heritage, identification, impact, perceptions, personality, place attachment, place identity, satisfaction, sense	Shaping the image of the city based on local heritage
Cluster 2	Authenticity, behaviour, city marketing, culture, governance, innovation, involvement, place branding, place brands, place marketing, retail, stakeholders, strategy, trust	Place brand management
Cluster 3	Communication, experience, image, management, marketing, model, place, promotion, residents, social media, strategies, tourism, tourists	Destination image communication
Cluster 4	Brand, cities, city, identity, life, marketing communication, migration, policy, politics, space, territorial marketing	The impact of migration on the city's identity from a marketing perspective
Cluster 5	Covid-19, market, market places, marketing strategy, markets, networks, sustainability	Sustainable development of places in the marketing context

Source: own elaboration.

The first cluster was named *Shaping the image of the city based on local heritage*, which refers to creating an image of the city based on the city's identity, and is the most extensive cluster in terms of keywords. In the set of examined publications, one can find threads related to the local community, heritage, the character of the city, and the identification of identity-distinguishing features, which are directly related to creating an authentic, unique image of the place. Cities that build a branding and image creation strategy based on unique historical and cultural features, characteristic only for a given territorial unit, show higher competitiveness (Sokołowicz et al., 2022). The image of a city that deviates from authenticity negatively affects its attractiveness (Ghafar et al., 2022). Therefore, local authorities are increasingly aware of supporting the local identity of residents, which is an inseparable element creating the uniqueness of the city (Van Hoose et al., 2021).

The second cluster, namely *Place brand management*, refers to the involvement of multiple stakeholder groups in shaping the city brand. There is a shared awareness that the city brand is not solely the result of local authorities' actions, but is shaped by various entities that often pursue different goals. Therefore, the coherence of marketing communication requires the effective management of relations between groups that influence the perception of the city (Moilanen & Rainisto, 2009). In recent years the role of residents in the branding process has become a vital research trend in territorial marketing. The importance of their attachment to place (Wang et al., 2021; Casais & Poço, 2023), the level of satisfaction with living in the city (Yu & Kim, 2020), and other factors influencing their role as ambassadors of the city brand have been emphasised. Residents, as informal ambassadors, contribute to promoting the city by providing positive opinions about the attractions it offers through oral and online communication (Wassler et al., 2021). At the same time, it is pointed out that city image campaigns do not always bring the expected results, often due to the omission of residents' opinions and ideas when planning the branding strategy (Gilboa & Jaffe, 2021).

The third cluster, based on the keywords found in it, was *Destination image communication,* and although somewhat related to each cluster, it is most closely related to the tourism sector. The influence of social media on the choice of tourist destinations is an important area of research as in some cases decisions to visit a given place are a direct result of their influence. In this regard, the importance of personalising content published on social media is highlighted, which not only strengthens the image of the destination but also increases its attractiveness in the eyes of potential tourists (Asnawi, 2021). It is expected that future research on the development of the destination

brand will take into account digital strategies and promotional tools used in the process of communicating the image of the destination (Tran & Rudolf, 2022).

The fourth cluster relates to migrants, including their impact on the city's identity from a marketing perspective. In recent years, marketing researchers have been interested in one of the newest, rapidly growing groups of city recipients, namely digital nomads defined as temporary residents who work remotely using mobile devices and constantly change their place of residence every 2-3 months, exploring new locations and learning about the local culture (Fibingier, 2021; Tagliaferri, 2022). In recent years, researchers have tried to determine the preferences of digital nomads toward the place of destination (Lhakard, 2022; Sztuk, 2023). The need to use marketing messages addressed to digital nomads, promoting elements of the city's product offer that are attractive from their perspective, was also discussed (Silvanto & Ryan, 2023), which is related to the previous cluster. Another important issue was the use of digital media in territorial marketing to attract and integrate migrants, especially in the labour market context (Widera, 2021).

The fifth thematic cluster concerns the COVID-19 pandemic and the post-pandemic period in the context of a sustainable approach to territorial marketing. The analyses focus on how city brands coped with the pandemic crisis, maintaining contact with recipients and adapting branding strategies to dynamic conditions (Pasquinelli et al., 2022). The research also pointed to changes in the product offer of cities and redefinition of target groups, including an increase in residents' interest in local attractions, i.e. the general demand for local tourism (Sztuk, 2022). In addition, the issue of the role of residents in the process of rebuilding the image of cities after the pandemic was addressed, stressing the importance of social ties, attachment to place, and urban identity in shaping post-crisis strategies (Han et al., 2023).

The analysis conducted, based on identified articles from the Web of Science database, was also supplemented by an analysis of data on the area of science to which individual publications were assigned and their country of origin. Table 2 presents the names of thematic categories taken from the database called *Web of Science Categories*; due to the issues' complexity, individual articles could be assigned to more than one thematic category. The analysis of publications from 2020-2025 showed that the most significant number of articles on territorial marketing were classified in the business category, which indicates a growing interest in this topic outside the tourism sector. This suggests a change in the research approach, which previously focused mainly on tourism, reducing the multi-dimensional brand of the city to the perspective of visitors.

Table 2. Web of Science categories of articles related to territorial marketing

WoS Category	Amount	Percentage
Business	50	20.8%
Hospitality Leisure Sport Tourism	44	18.3%
Economics	33	13.8%
Environmental Studies	29	12.1%
Geography	29	8.8%
Management	21	7.5%
Urban Studies	18	5.8%
Environmental Sciences	14	5.8%

Source: own elaboration.

The analysis also took into account the country of origin of the identified articles, which was determined based on the affiliation of the author or authors of a given publication (Table 3). The most significant number of studies come from the United States, followed by the United Kingdom and Italy. This information may be important in conducting or continuing research, allowing verification of previous conclusions in different locations and cities of different sizes and characters.

Table 3. Articles related to territorial marketing by country of origin

Country	Amount	Percentage
USA	30	12.5%
UK	25	10.4%
Italy	19	7.9%
Spain	16	6.7%
Poland	14	5.8%
China	13	5.4%
Sweden	13	5.4%
Russia	10	4.2%

Source: own elaboration.

5. Discussion and Conclusions

When examining the key research areas in territorial marketing during the period 2005-2025, a common theme emerges: the creation and communication of a city's brand. A significant focus is placed on incorporating elements of local identity into the city's image and actively involving residents in shaping its branding strategy. This approach not only enhances the authenticity and originality of the city's image but also because residents are a credible and effective source of information about the city (Casais & Monteiro, 2019); moreover, residents can serve as ambassadors for their city. However, this vital role of residents is not well recognized in empirical research, especially regarding how local authorities can foster these attitudes. Valuable from the perspective of building the competitiveness of cities would be research aimed at how local authorities could encourage residents to become city ambassadors. Therefore, the author poses the following research question as a direction for future research: What influences residents' willingness to recommend the city's offer of attractions to other potential recipients? In this context, however, it is worth noting the need to conduct research that takes into account the type of territorial unit because the scope and manner of residents' activities are closely related to the prevailing culture, beliefs, and institutions in the city (Hesari et al., 2020).

Further research would be valuable in expanding knowledge regarding the issues included in cluster four, i.e. *the impact of migration*. Due to the constantly and rapidly growing group of digital nomads, it is worth focusing on this group of recipients of the city's product offer. Digital nomads are an extremely valuable segment, because they not only use the gastronomic, cultural, coworking, and entertainment attractions, but also because they are active on social media (Bonneau & Aroles, 2021), sharing their experiences, impressions and recommendations with other nomads, which in turn affects the city's reputation (Mladenović, 2016). Other studies address the necessary factors influencing the choice of nomads' location, such as access to a fast network, an interesting tourist and cultural product offer of the city, and safety (Orel, 2021). In this context, the author formulated two further research questions as to what factors influence the negative experiences of digital nomads at a destination, and what locations meet the expectations of this group, who visited them multiple times. Empirical verification of these issues will allow for a better adjustment of the offered attractions in cities where digital nomads are a key target group. In particular, this research will enable identifying not only the features of destinations that attract such migrants, but also those that may contribute to shortening their stay and generating negative opinions. Additionally, considering the specificity of digital nomads' mobile lifestyle, examining whether they decide to return to previously visited places is essential. This analysis will determine what features of cities promote repeat visits and loyalty of this group of travelers to specific destinations.

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Kluczowe obszary badawcze w marketingu terytorialnym w latach 2020-2025

Streszczenie

Cel: Artykuł ma na celu przedstawić zidentyfikowane kluczowe obszary badawcze w marketingu terytorialnym w latach 2020-2025.

Metodyka: W celu identyfikacji materiałów badawczych przeprowadzono analizę literatury, wykorzystując bazę licencjonowaną Web of Science oraz stosując użyte przez autorów słowa kluczowe „marketing terytorialny" lub „marketing miejsc". Zastosowano kryteria inkluzji obejmujące lata publikacji 2020-2025 oraz materiały w języku angielskim. Do stworzenia mapy wybrano słowa, które powtórzyły się co najmniej 3 razy w zidentyfikowanych artykułach. W rezultacie 66 słów kluczowych utworzyło 5 klastrów reprezentujących różne obszary badawcze.

Wyniki: Na podstawie przeprowadzonego mapowania zidentyfikowano i nazwano kluczowe obszary badawcze w zakresie marketingu terytorialnego, koncentrujące się w ostatnich latach na komunikacji wizerunkowej i budowaniu marki miasta. Badania wskazują, że proces ten powinien w wyższym stopniu opierać się na wyróżnikach odwołujących się do tożsamości miejsca. Istotnym i aktualnym nurtem badawczym jest także analiza działań marketingowych skierowanych do migrantów, w tym cyfrowych nomadów – tymczasowych pracowników często zmieniających lokalizację.

Implikacje i rekomendacje: Niniejszy artykuł przedstawia rekomendacje dotyczące trzech kierunków przyszłych badań empirycznych, których wyniki mogą dostarczyć istotnych danych wspierających rozwój aktualnych obszarów badawczych w marketingu terytorialnym.

Oryginalność/wartość: Opracowanie syntetycznego przeglądu współczesnych zagadnień związanych z marketingiem terytorialnym umożliwia identyfikację kluczowych problemów badawczych podejmowanych przez naukowców. Systematyczna analiza ewoluujących w czasie kwestii ułatwia konsolidację wiedzy oraz wspiera dynamiczny rozwój tej dziedziny, przyczyniając się do doskonalenia strategii marketingu miejsc.

Słowa kluczowe: marketing terytorialny, marketing miejsc, VOSviewer, wizerunek miasta, cyfrowi nomadzi